

# LIFE GROUPS

## Genesis 45

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**ICE BREAKER QUESTION:** Do you come from a family who has family reunions? If so, what do your reunions look like?

A family reunion can be a wonderful event. The anticipation of a family reunion also may arouse fear and anxiety when lengthy separations have resulted from past familial disagreements. Joseph and his brothers had experienced a long separation resulting from wrong actions and attitudes: favoritism, self-centeredness, jealousy, and hatred. Even so, God orchestrated a reunion that would bring about healing and harmony for their family.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **What is your biggest takeaway? How was your experience with the Life Tool's this past week?**
2. **READ GENESIS 45:1-8. What words would you use to describe Joseph's emotion in this scene? What is surprising about the way Joseph revealed himself to the brothers?**

During this time, Joseph could not control himself. Instead, he displayed his genuine emotions. He realized how much his brothers had changed. Joseph declared that God worked through even his brothers' hate-filled act of selling him to accomplish a good purpose. This assertion expresses the doctrine of God's providence. Paul focused on this significant truth in Romans 8:28 when he emphasized that God is at work in all things, both the joys and sorrows, for the good of those who love Him.

With the transformation of their lives now proven before him, Joseph can no longer contain himself. His tender heart, previously hidden behind the facade of a distrustful Egyptian leader, is now revealed to his brothers as he weeps with such passion that the entire nation can hear him (45:1-2). He dismisses his attendants so that he can meet privately with his

brothers and not embarrass them with a public revelation of their past sins (v. 1), and he is eager to hear about his father (v. 3). Judah's description of Jacob's emotional state (44:22) has evidently made Joseph suspect that his father is near death.

Joseph's weeping aloud (v. 2) and his immediate inquiry about his father (v. 3) show that he strongly desired to be reconciled with his brothers and united with his family. He now knew that his brothers were different and so made himself known to them.<sup>1</sup>

"But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence" (v. 3b). Of this, Chrysostom wrote, "I am surprised at the way they could stand there and gape without their soul parting company with their body, without their going out of their mind or hiding themselves in the ground."<sup>2</sup>

"Instead of confronting his would-be murderers, he comforted them. Instead of punishing the men who sold him into slavery, he promised to provide for them and their children. He laid aside the awful weight of resentment and bitterness, and cast his crushing, nightmarish cares upon God ([1 Peter 5:7](#)). When his brothers deserved a curse, he chose instead to bless them — taking up his cross for the joy God had set before him." – Marshall Segal

### **3. What does Joseph's response in Genesis 45:8 indicate about what he believed about God and what God had done in his own heart?**

Joseph's speech forms a classic expression of providence; it was his conviction that God's will, not the will of human beings, was the controlling reality in the events of his life. His explanation that the brothers had not sent him to Egypt meant that they had not acted independently of God's will—they were part of God's greater plan to bring Joseph to Egypt to deliver them. They had attempted to be rid of their brother by selling him into Egypt, but as Calvin asserts, God from heaven overruled their counsels and attempts and, in short, did by their hands what he had himself decreed (*First Book of Moses*, p. 378). The act of sending Joseph to Egypt was thus attributed both to men and to God, but for very different purposes—they acted because they hated him, but God planned to use Joseph as their deliverer.<sup>3</sup>

Notice that there was not a hint of reproach, but only encouragement. It was apparent that Joseph had already forgiven his brothers. His repeated soothing statement, "God sent me before you" qualifies and softens "you sold me," indicating that he had forgiven them and that he was attempting to ease their guilt.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Allen P. Ross, [Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 672.

<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 518.

<sup>3</sup> Allen P. Ross, [Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 673.

<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 519.

These lines are a magisterial, theological declaration of divine providence—that God works his will in and through the actions of all people, whether good or bad<sup>5</sup>

It was God who informed Joseph's heart as to the ultimate good that would triumph over his brothers' evil deeds.

And it was God who gave him the grace to forgive. Without forgiveness there never would have been reconciliation, regardless of his brothers' repentance.<sup>6</sup>

**4. How does understanding God's providence give you freedom to let God deal with the offenses against you and move towards forgiveness and reconciliation? What situation do you need to trust God in so you can move towards forgiveness and reconciliation?**

Ultimately, Joseph did not blame his brothers for the hardship and persecution he endured. Instead, He recognized God as sovereign through his circumstances (45:8), orchestrating each situation and change to achieve His ultimate purposes—through slavery, prisons, famine, and all.

Understand that Joseph was not giving his brothers a theological lesson to set them straight but rather sought to comfort their transformed yet trembling hearts. How comforting to know that their sins, though they had caused immense hurt to Joseph and their father and themselves and many others, had not thwarted the plan of God but actually had been used to bring it about “to preserve life” (v. 5) and “to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors” (v. 7).<sup>7</sup>

Believers who see and embrace who God is and what he is doing in life forgive! Hatred and unwillingness to forgive comprise the province of hearts that are ignorant of God and his Word.<sup>8</sup>

This theology is the basis of reconciliation; without it there would be only bitterness and blame, rancor and revenge. The principle is that whoever is spiritual will perceive the hand of God in the course of events and therefore be able to forgive what others have done. No one

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<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 519.

<sup>6</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 523.

<sup>7</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 519.

<sup>8</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 520.

who believes in the sovereignty of God in the affairs of life can bear a grudge or take revenge. Joseph magnanimously comforted his brothers with this sound doctrine.<sup>9</sup>

Scripture uniformly teaches that we must forgive repentant sinners, even for heinous offenses. Harsh words or church discipline may be necessary if the offender is obstinate, yet as John Calvin comments on [Genesis 45:3](#): “As soon as the offender lies prostrate, and trembles under the sense of his sin, let that moderation immediately follow which may raise him who is cast down, by hope of pardon.”

Forgiveness is not optional for the Christian. In fact, one of the assumptions of the Lord’s Prayer is that we must be forgiving people if we would dare to ask our Father in heaven to forgive us ([Luke 11:4](#)). And we cannot legitimately expect to be forgiven by God if we do not forgive others, for those who do not forgive have not received the Lord’s grace ([Mark 11:25](#); [1 John 4:7–8](#)). Forgive today that person against whom you have been holding a grudge.

“True healing will never come from assigning guilt, but from trusting God.” – Marshall Segal

**5. Is there a situation in your life that you can look back on and say, “God sent me here”? How can the truth of God’s providence impact the way you live your life, however good or bad it may feel in the moment?**

When Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, he also revealed certain things about his beliefs. These beliefs had been forged in the fires of loss and grief, of great disappointment and anger. This was a moment of redemption. The prideful young man was gone, and what remained was a humble leader who recognized God’s good purposes in even the worst of times.

This truth about God gives us courage and hope as God’s people. We believe that even when the worst things happen to us, even when we unwisely make the worst decisions or take the worst actions, God still works through those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. We believe that God is at work in the entirety of human affairs to accomplish His purpose.

Romans 8:28–30 (NIV)

<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined

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<sup>9</sup> Allen P. Ross, [Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 674.

to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.<sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

*Reconciliation comes through forgiveness, and forgiveness through the recognition of God's sovereignty.* When the one who has been wronged can see things as God sees them, can perceive them as God planned them, and can communicate that understanding as the basis for compassion and forgiveness, then reconciliation is possible. But anyone who bears a grudge or hopes to retaliate has not come to appreciate the meaning of the sovereignty of God. And without the forgiveness that comes with such an appreciation, there can be no reconciliation.<sup>10</sup>

“Maybe the greatest earthly good God will do through the things you have suffered will be in someone else’s life, and not your own. As Paul writes, “Blessed be the . . . God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, *so that* we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4).

None of us asks for that kind of ministry, but it is a beautiful and necessary ministry, to which God calls many. Joseph counted all of his suffering worth it compared with all God did through it for others — every malicious intent in his brothers, every act of mistreatment in slavery, every unjust day in jail. Do you treasure the good God does for others through you that much?” – Marshall Segal

“You are who you are, what you are, where you are, because of the all-pervasive providence of God.” – Scott Hubbard

- a. **Might God be “sending you before” others in your hardship for the purpose of being used to preserve others’ lives (45:5), acting as a vessel of God’s deliverance (45:7)?**

**6. How have you wrestled with God’s providence in your own life? As we look at God’s providence, how do we view our responsibility of our own sin?**

“Have you largely ignored his providence? Many people in the world blindly assume either that there is no God or that he cannot or would not interfere with human life. They cannot yet conceive of a world in which God meticulously orchestrates history, including the twists and turns, highs and lows of their own stories.

Or have you been exposed to providence and hated what you heard? For some, the sovereignty of God over all things and in all things undoes the world they know and love —

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<sup>10</sup> Allen P. Ross, [\*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 675.

the world they have made, the world they think they rule. For them, providence is an archaic and offensive myth. How could anyone believe that, much less rejoice in it?

And yet we do. In a world in which many ignore the providence of God and some despise the providence of God, some of us build our lives on it. We are learning to see everything through the prism of its wonder, beauty, safety, and majesty. The providence of God has become our sanctuary of worship and awe, our treasury of peace and security, our source of courage and strength, our well of wonder.” – Marshall Segal

Dods correctly cautions that “the discovery that through our evil purposes and injurious deeds God has worked out his beneficent will, is certainly not calculated to make us think more lightly of our sin or more highly of ourselves” (*Book of Genesis*, p. 394).<sup>11</sup>

God is able to bring good out of evil, as the developing message of Genesis has shown. But every sin, every failure, every self-deceiving enterprise that appears to work in one way, although evil, carries its own cost because it is sin.<sup>12</sup>

**7. READ GENESIS 45:9-15. What do we see is the result of the reconciliation between Josephs family? What kinds of results have you seen God bring about through reconciliation in your own life?**

Joseph would enjoy the wonderful reunion with his brothers (vv. 14-15), but he also anticipated the time when he would be reunited with his father. As a result, even before he exchanged customary greetings with them, Joseph commanded his brothers, “Hurry and go up to my father.” He knew that the sooner they returned to Canaan and shared the news with Jacob, the sooner his father would come to Egypt. Joseph wanted no delay in that process.

The reconciliation was with *all* his eleven brothers. He embraced his little brother Benjamin and wept on his neck and Benjamin on his. So many tears, and such joy! And it was the same with the older brothers Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Confessions were whispered or bawled. Forgiveness was reiterated. And whatever the order, it was the same with Judah and Dan and Naphtali and Gad and Asher and Issachar and Zebulun. Kisses and weeping, kisses and weeping.

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<sup>11</sup> Allen P. Ross, [\*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 673.

<sup>12</sup> Allen P. Ross, [\*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 673.

All the guilt was gone. Joyous love enveloped all. And they talked and talked and talked. About twenty years times twelve—some 240 plus years of catching up.<sup>13</sup>

**8. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. How would your life change if you saw yourself as one sent by God on His mission of reconciliation?**

As the church, we are called to obey Jesus' command to go into the world and preach the gospel. But what is the motivation behind our obedience? The apostle Paul dealt with our motivation by taking us back to the reality of Christ's love. The driving force behind God's messengers is Christ's love for the world He came to save.

Today, on this side of the cross, we can be reconciled because Christ forgives all who come to him in faith and repentance<sup>14</sup>

“The gospel being what it is and always will be, “the message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19), our churches should be the most reconciling, peaceable, relaxed, happy places in town. We are so open to enemies, so meek in the face of insults and injuries, so forgiving toward the undeserving — if we do make people angry, let *this* be the reason. We refuse to join in their selfish battles. We're following a higher call. We are the peacemakers, the true sons of God (Matthew 5:9).

May our ministries of reconciliation be so obvious, we cause scandal all over town.”

– Ray Ortlund

## **PRAYER**

Close in prayer, thanking God for His providence over our lives, from the smallest details to the biggest transitions, in the good and the bad. Ask Him to develop in you a Christ-like attitude of love and forgiveness as He works all aspects of your life—conflicts, circumstances, and relationships—for good.

Thank God for His compassion, forgiveness, and grace, which we see through the legacies of godly people like Joseph. Pray He softens our hearts and grants us the ability to see with His eyes, extending that same kindness—even when it is difficult. Pray also for the assurance that no

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<sup>13</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 520–521.

<sup>14</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing\*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 523.

matter our circumstances or how we believe we have been wronged, God continues to reign sovereign and will remain faithful—never ceasing to work for the good of us who love Him. Pray that others are drawn to Christ’s salvation and gospel through the way we display that light in our own words, actions, thoughts, relationships, and life—our very legacy itself.



## **FURTHER STUDY**

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/reconciliation-in-egypt/>

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/joseph-reveals-himself>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/you-can-forgive-your-parents>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/ray-ortlund/the-ministry-of-reconciliation/>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/walk-in-his-providence>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-does-providence-make-you-feel>