

The method of forgiveness

Joseph reveals his true identity to his brothers in private (v1) – why do you think that was? What do you think might have happened if Joseph had told others about his brother's cruelty towards him? Are there times in our own lives when family matters need to stay private between family members and why?

From Joseph's life who took the initiative to reconcile? Does this surprise you? Why, why not? Discuss.

How does the Bible say that we are to deal with those who have sinned against us? (See Matt 18v15-17)

Is forgiveness conditional?

If we read this passage in Genesis 45 in isolation it would appear that Joseph had let his brothers "off the hook" without any need for repentance on their part, however when we read chapter 45 in light of chapter 44 we see that the brothers had displayed Godly sorrow in that they weren't willing to abandon their brother Benjamin like they had Joseph many years earlier. They had also admitted their guilt to Joseph previously (Gen 42v21-23).

What responses have you experienced when someone has wronged you and you've gone to them about it? Do you think we are under any obligation to forgive those who haven't repented of their sin towards us? Is forgiveness conditional or unconditional? Must we forgive someone no matter what the other person's response is?

What does the Bible say? In forgiving someone we promise never to bring the matter up again (Isa 43v25, Jer 31v34), however in Matthew 18v15-20 (an example of church discipline) it's clear that until a matter is resolved and repentance and reconciliation have been seen, the matter will necessarily need to be kept being "brought up" again, with various people becoming increasingly involved in the matter.

We are told that we should forgive as God does (Eph 4:32). Does God forgive even if people don't repent? (Luke 24v47, Acts 17v30) What did Jesus mean then when he prayed on the cross "Father forgive them for they know not what they do"? (Luke 23v34)

What then is our obligation in the process of forgiving others? (See Matthew 5v23-24; 18v15-17)

Why should we seek to reconcile with others? (See Romans 3v23, Eph 4v32, 2 Cor 5v17-21)

God's providence

v5 – How did Joseph's understanding of God help in enabling him to forgive his brothers?

In retrospect as Joseph looked back on his life, Joseph was able to forgive his brothers, is it harder to forgive others when the wounds are raw and it's harder to see God's hand in it all? How does knowing that God has a plan for our lives help us at these moments? Does God always use every difficult situation in our lives for his glory? Do we sometimes prevent God from doing this when we allow bitterness and revenge to control our actions?

v8 – Joseph saw God's hand in his life ... Joseph understood that it was God who had ultimately caused Pharaoh to favour him ... how will this right view of God help us in good and difficult times in our own lives?

The extent of Forgiveness

How did Joseph display his forgiveness to his brothers? (See Gen 45v4, 21, 22, 24)

Joseph overcame evil with good. This is what Christians are called to do (Read Rom 12v20-21; Matt 5v44-48). Archbishop Temple once said, "To return evil for good is devilish. To return good for good is human. To return good for evil is divine." As Christians our unique response in the area of forgiveness is what makes us different from the world around us.

How do you think Joseph's brothers felt when Joseph forgave them? Do you think people "praise our Father in heaven" (Matthew 5v16) as they see the way that we treat others who have wronged us?

Prayer Points

- Active8 & Momentum joint event: *Historical Finishing School for Ladies and Gentlemen [21 March] - Visit of FIEC's Andrew Patterson, considering ways of reaching out into the community as a local church (incl. CAP) [24/25 March]*