

MAKING LEMONADE "IN THE SCHOOL OF GRACE" GENESIS 45:1-28

This Week's Core Competency

Trinity – I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 2 Corinthians 13:14, *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

There is a clear correlation between the Beliefs, Practices, and Virtues of a Christ follower. Put differently, what a Christian believes influences how that person behaves, and together, his belief and behavior, affect his spiritual formation and character development. The close link between belief and behavior is evident in a critical incident in the life of Moses, which occurs forty years after the exodus, in the Desert of Zin near Kadesh, where Miriam died and was buried (Nu 20:1). There is no water for the people and their livestock, so they complain to Moses, saying: "If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! Why did you bring the LORD's community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!" (vv. 2-5). When he takes their complaint to the LORD, the LORD replies: "Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink" (v. 8). But Moses does not do what the LORD commanded; frustrated with his

The final proof of greatness lies in being able to endure contemptuous treatment without resentment.

– Elbert Hubbard

rebellious community, its leader strikes the rock twice. Water comes out, but Moses' rash act costs him dearly. The LORD denies him the privilege of leading the Israelites into the land—not, however, because he did not obey, as such, but because he did not believe. In verse 12, the LORD declares, "Because you did not believe in me to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them" (ESV). The LORD links Moses' disobedience to its root, unbelief, and disciplines him accordingly. The bottom line: obedience and disobedience are rooted in belief and unbelief, respectively.

Here's a simple example of the link between belief in God, the practice of prayer, and the virtue of peace. Clearly whether or not one believes in God, and what one who believes in God, believes about God affects whether that person engages in prayer, solitude and silence. A person who believes in the God of the Bible and who believes that God the Father is a loving personal God both willing and able to answer prayer, will pray. This belief coupled with the practice of prayer will produce peace (Php 4:6-7). The practice of prayer can also be linked to a belief in the sovereignty of God and divine providence. One commentator writes: "It is belief in God's power to control affairs that underlies all intercessory prayer, for if God does not order our affairs, why pray for daily bread, healing, or world peace?" (Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 2, *Genesis 16-50*, 432).

Implications of belief for behavior can be seen in the life of Joseph. God is sovereign, that is, he rules as sovereign or king over his creation; he exercises that rule through divine providence. One theologian puts it this way: "God causes all things that happen, but he does so in such a way that he somehow upholds our ability to make willing, responsible choices, choices that have real and eternal results, and for which we are held accountable. Exactly how God combines his

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providential control with our willing and significant choices, Scripture does not explain to us" (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 321-22).

But Scripture does give us examples of it, one of which involves the treachery of Joseph's brothers. Commenting on it, one commentator writes: "The depths of God's sovereignty are not demonstrated by his repression of our choices that inevitably reveal our sinfulness and fallen self-will, but the by the fact that there is no choice that we can make, however sinful or fallen, that can interfere with his plan. In fact, often enough, as in the case of Joseph, those choices end up furthering his plan. God did not approve of the treachery of Joseph's brothers. They were fully responsible for their crime. He did not make them do it. He did not need their treachery to accomplish his plan. But some way or other, Joseph was going to get to Egypt and come to the place where God's blessing and deliverance could come through him. If God cannot use the sinful choices that we make his sovereignty is limited and there is no hope for any of us" (John H. Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, 696-97).

Joseph believes in divine providence and it enables him to forgive and to be reconciled to his brothers. Another commentator links Joseph's belief to his behavior this way: "This theology is the basis of reconciliation; without it there would be only bitterness and blame, rancor and revenge . . . No one 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" (Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 674).

day **1** ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Read Genesis 45:1-28

1 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! 5 And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. 6 For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. 7 But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

8 "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. 9 Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. 10 You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. 11 I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.'

12 "You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. 13 Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down

here quickly."

14 Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

16 When the news reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had come, Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased. 17 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers, 'Do this: Load your animals and return to the land of Canaan, 18 and bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land.'

19 "You are also directed to tell them, 'Do this: Take some carts from Egypt for your children and your wives, and get your father and come. 20 Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.'"

21 So the sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them carts, as Pharaoh had commanded, and he also gave them provisions for their journey. 22 To each of them he gave new clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five sets of clothes. 23 And this is what he sent to his father: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other provisions for his journey. 24 Then he sent his brothers away, and as they were leaving he said to them, "Don't quarrel on the way!"

25 So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. 26 They told him, "Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt." Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them. 27 But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. 28 And Israel said, "I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle "then" in v. 1.
- * Underline Joseph's question in v. 3.
- * Highlight vv. 5b, 7, 8a.
- * Box "to" indicating *purpose* in v. 7.
- * Bracket "father to Pharaoh" in v. 8.
- * Circle "Goshen" in v. 10.
- * Circle "brother Benjamin" in v. 12.
- * Bracket "fat of the land" in v. 18.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 22.
- * Underline what Joseph said to his brothers in v. 24.
- * Circle "Israel" in v. 28.

day **2** EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. "Then" (v. 1). When?
 2. Joseph is told his father is *alive* (43:28; cf., 44:30-31, 34); explain why he asks, "Is my father still *living*?"
 3. Joseph tells his brothers to "not be distressed" and "not be angry with yourselves." Why not?
 4. Identity the *two purposes* for which God sent Joseph to Egypt.
 5. Comment on the relationship of the *two purposes* to Joseph's *two dreams*.
 6. Joseph again has a plan, this time for his family. Describe it.
 7. Why would he make special reference to Benjamin in verse 12?
 8. What does Pharaoh do to facilitate the execution of Joseph's plan?
 9. Explain why Joseph leaves his brothers with the warning, "Don't quarrel on the way!"
 10. **Discussion:** Talk about Jacob's reaction to the news that Joseph is still alive.
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day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of its message to clarify your understanding of the passage.

Genesis 45:1-28 contains the climax to the Joseph story—not the conclusion but the climax. There's more to the story, but the rest of the story is more or less to be expected at this point in the narrative. The fulfillment of Joseph's dreams to this point implies that Jacob and his sons will go to Egypt to be with Joseph where he will rule over them and God will save them from starvation since the famine is going to rage on for another five years. After they arrive, they settle in Goshen where they prosper until the passing of Jacob and then Joseph. One commentator puts this episode in its broader context. He writes: "This unit presents the favorable resolution to the tension of the story that began in chapter 37. It is also the turning point of the story, for now Joseph could bring the family down to Egypt and settle them in the best of the land so that they could survive as the people of God. Now that his brothers had reconciled themselves to the fact of his leadership, Joseph could indeed rule over them" (Ross, 669).

The chapter can be divided into three parts. In the first part (vv. 1-15), Joseph reveals his filial identity, as well as his plan for them, to his brothers. Moved by Judah's poignant appeal (44:18-34), his formerly cold-hearted brother's warm-hearted closing reference to Jacob triggers an emotional outburst from Joseph, which causes him to clear the room. When alone with his brothers, he weeps so loudly that the Egyptians who cleared out hear him (v. 2). "I am Joseph" he says to them. "Is my father still living?" They are dumbfounded! They are speechless! They are terrified! So he asks them to come close and look close, and says again, "I am your brother Joseph," adding for clarity, "the one you sold into Egypt!" Then immediately, knowing they need it, he reassures them, saying, "do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here" (v. 5).

What follows is a classic statement of the doctrine of divine providence, belief in which enabled Joseph to forgive his brothers and be reconciled to them. He gives them two reasons to be neither distressed nor angry; He tells them: 1) "It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you" (v. 5), and 2) "God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (v. 7). Another commentator explains Joseph's theologizing. He writes: "From a worm's-eye view, his narrative reads like a nightmare, a cacophony of outrageous excesses unjustly inflicted upon him. A rational

conclusion that it is all absurd from this perspective could have made him an existentialist, a cynic, or a nihilist. But he chooses the heavenly perspective that God is working through him to bring about what is good (Rom. 8:28 [NIV note]; cf. Prov. 16:1-4; 19:21; 20:24; 27:1). This enables him to forgive and encourage his brothers to do the same. Sin must be seen within the context of God's set and eternal purpose. The believer can count on God to bring to pass his good pleasure regardless of what people intend" (Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis*, 565).

Not waiting for his brothers' reaction, Joseph unfolds his plan for them, saying: "Now hurry back to my father and say to him. 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute" (vv. 9-11). Detecting their incredulity, he appeals to Benjamin, his full brother, who must certainly recognize him and whose testimony Jacob would find credible. Their reunion and reconciliation is then marked by authentic gestures of emotion.

In the second part (vv. 16-24), Pharaoh lends his support. When Pharaoh hears the news about Joseph's brothers, he's pleased, and demonstrates his good pleasure by making the brothers an offer they can't refuse. He encourages them to bring their father and families back to him from Canaan by promising to give them the best land in Egypt. "Never mind about your belongings," he adds, "because the best of all Egypt will be yours" (v. 20). What's more, Joseph gives them carts and donkeys full of provisions for their journey. And as they ride out of sight, lest they have second thoughts about returning, he tells them, "Don't quarrel on the way!" (v. 24).

In the third part (vv. 25-28), the brothers persuade Jacob that Joseph is alive. He doesn't believe it at first. How could he? It's been twenty-two years since he last saw him, and for all those years he's believed him torn to pieces by a wild animal. Moreover, apart from Benjamin, his sons lack credibility. Nevertheless, donkeys don't lie, and when he sees the carts, all those carts that Joseph sent, his spirits soar, and he exclaims, "I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die" (v. 28).

The *upper story* of this episode is about God fulfilling Joseph's dreams and preparing the way for the sons of Jacob to make their way to Egypt where they will escape becoming destitute and grow into a

great nation. The *lower story* is about Joseph whose belief in the sovereignty and providence of God free him to reveal himself and be reconciled to his estranged brothers.

The Message of the Passage

Belief in the sovereignty and providence of God will give you an outlook on life that will free you to be reconciled to those estranged to you.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on the three "living questions" below to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **Then** I.e., when Judah speaks his father's name in verse 34. "The narrative is clear that Joseph had taken no personal enjoyment in the deception of his brothers. When he could hold back no longer, he revealed his true identity" (John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 222). "The story has previously hinted at Joseph's emotional response to his brothers (43:30); here it became too strong to control any longer, and so with an emotional outburst he made himself known to his brothers. 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" (Ross, 672).

v. 3 **still living** "They have reported on Jacob's involvement up to the very moment of their departure. Why ask such a question? It is likely that the Hebrew word *hay* (NIV 'living') asks not so much whether he is above ground or below ground, heart beating or not. It is the equivalent of our question, 'Is my father well?' or 'Is everything OK?' He wants to know on a personal level how his father is doing" (Walton, 682). "This question, after all that Judah had been saying, illustrates the fact that to live, in the Old Testament, tends to include the idea of enjoying health and well-being (as in verse 27, where 'revived' is lit. 'lived'; cf. also Lev. 18:5; Deut. 8:3; Prov. 14:30; Hab. 2:4; etc.)" (Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, TOTC, 218).

v. 5 **God sent me** Joseph repeats this thought three times (vv. 5b, 7, 8; cf., v. 9). "In his words of explanation and comfort to his brothers, Joseph returns once again to the central theme of the narrative: though the brothers were responsible for Joseph's being sold into Egypt and though they intended 'evil,' God was ultimately behind it all and had worked it out for the 'good.' As he told his brothers, 'God sent me before you to save life' (v. 5), and, 'God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the land and to save your lives' (v. 7)" (Sailhamer, 223). "The statements about God's overruling of human affairs are undoubtedly the key to understanding the whole Joseph story . . . All the episodes in the Joseph story contribute to demonstrating how God's purposes are ultimately fulfilled through and in spite of human deeds, whether or not those deeds are morally right" (Wenham, 432). "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 . . . 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" (Ross, 673).

v. 6 **plowing and reaping** This is a figure of speech called *merism* used to refer to crops (Waltke, 563).
v. 8 **father to Pharaoh** Cf., "advisor to Pharaoh" (NET; NLT); "counselor to Pharaoh" (TLB). "The term is used here figuratively of one who gives advice, as a father would to his children" (The NET Bible, 11^{tn} on Ge 45:8). "The phrase a father to Pharaoh, a recognized title of viziers and high officials, J. Vergote interprets as virtually 'kings' adviser'" (Kidner, 218).

v. 10 **Goshen** "Goshen is a name which remains unattested, so far, in Egyptian remains; but 47:11 gives us the name it bore in later times, 'the land of Rameses'. This name, coupled with the fact that the district was fertile (47:6) and near to Joseph at court, suggests that it was in the eastern part of the Nile delta, near Tanis, the seat of the Hyksos kings of the seventeenth century and of the Ramessides of the thirteenth century, the probable periods of Joseph and Moses respectively" (Kidner, 219). "They required an undeveloped area of land where they could pursue their own way of life, and this Joseph had in mind in the land of Goshen, called in 47:11 the land of Rameses, and designated 'the best of the land'. It sounds as if it was part of the royal estates, unpopulated for that reason, and yet available to Joseph because of his privileged position at court. The name 'Goshen' is not attested outside the Bible" (Joyce G. Baldwin, *The Message of Genesis 12-50*, TBST, 190).

v. 12 **Benjamin** "Joseph's words are so incredible that Jacob will need a credible witness. Benjamin is the only brother whose character is beyond reproach and whose testimony is completely credible" (Waltke, 564).

v. 18 **fat of the land** Another figure of speech called *metonymy* used here to refer to the "best of the land" (NET; cf., v. 20).

v. 24 **quarrel** The Hebrew term (*rgz*) refers to someone "getting 'worked up' or 'agitated' in a wide variety of different ways, such as anger, excitement, fear, anxiety joy, or sadness. It has little to do with arguing" (Walton, 683). "The text literally says, 'Don't get excited.' The brothers are not to make recriminations against one another regarding their crime, especially in explaining it to their father. If Joseph forgives them, how much more should they forgive one another" (Waltke, 572). Or, perhaps as suggested by R. Alter, "Joseph anticipates that his brothers may be fearful that he will have second thoughts and send an army after them—perhaps accusing them of plundering and thievery and slaughter them all" (Walton, 683).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Have you ever received something and it was way more than you expected to receive? One time when we were newlyweds, my husband's boss asked us to drive his elderly mother back to Arkansas after a long visit. He told us he would put us up in a hotel for the weekend. As a young married couple on a limited budget we welcomed the gift of a free getaway weekend. Once we dropped his mom off and made sure she was settled, he headed to the hotel. We pulled up in front of the five-star hotel in the middle of downtown Little Rock. It was an extravagant hotel. Stunned we walked to the front desk only to discover we had been given a suite on the Concierge Floor. We needed a special key to access the floor on the elevator. There were beautiful plush robes laid out in our oversized room. We found a gift certificate for the hotel restaurant waiting on us. The menu had items on it we couldn't even pronounce. That night we returned to our suite to find our covers turned down and milk and cookies waiting on the bedside table. What an amazing unexpected gift! That's what grace feels like. When we are forgiven by the Father, it is extravagant. It's more than we expect. I am blown away by forgiveness and hope I am extending that same gift to those around me. Let's practice it this week.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Genesis 45

1. Why did Joseph ask his attendants to leave?
2. What did he tell his brothers?
3. What was Pharaoh's response to the news?

What Do You Think

1. Put yourself in the brother's shoes. How would you have felt when Joseph revealed who he was?
2. Have you ever been given an unexpected gift? How did it feel?

What R U Going To Do

We will all have an opportunity to practice forgiveness this week. When you are wronged this week, choose forgiveness. What a beautiful gift to give someone who is probably expecting something else. Write your experience down and tell your group.

Core Comp

Trinity - I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Memory Verse

Ro 8:38-39 – *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

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30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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