

September 27
Lesson 4 (NIV)

REVEALED LOVE

DEVOTIONAL READING: John 14:1-14
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Genesis 43; 45:1-15

GENESIS 45:1-8, 10-15

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 be no 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.”

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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.

KEY VERSE

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.—Genesis 45:5

LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

Unit 1: Struggles with Love

LESSONS 1–4

LESSON OUTLINE

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- A. “Don’t Be Angry with Yourselves”
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Canaan *Kay-nun*.

Egyptians *Ee-jip-shuns*.

Goshen *Go-shen*.

Ishmaelites *Ish-may-el-ites*.

Pentecost *Pent-ih-kost*.

Pharaoh *Fair-o* or *Fay-roe*.

Introduction

- A. “[Luke,] I am your ...”

How does that sentence end? In the Western world, even people who haven't seen any of the *Star Wars* movies probably know to fill in "father." Yet Darth Vader shows Luke Skywalker no love; he shows his son no mercy. They are mortal enemies, and it becomes clear that one of them must die. This fact becomes all the more tragic because Luke didn't know the truth about his parentage until Episode V (the second movie of the original trilogy). Darth Vader's also being Dad did nothing to weaken the enmity with Luke. It only complicated it, made it all the sadder because of the truth it reveals: our families are sometimes the origin of our greatest enemies.

Joseph had experienced just that. At the root of all his struggles in Egypt were those who had sent him to that place to begin with: his brothers. So like Darth Vader (in this one respect), Joseph hid his identity. Yet the revelation of Joseph's true identity had quite a different outcome from that of Darth Vader's revelation.

B. Lesson Context

Lesson 3 covered the first trip that Joseph's brothers made to Egypt without Benjamin (Genesis 42:6–25). Though they returned with food, it inevitably ran out, and the brothers were faced with traveling to Egypt again. But they knew they could not return without Benjamin. Jacob, however, was still very reluctant to allow Benjamin to go. Finally, after Judah guaranteed Benjamin's safety and offered to bear the blame should Benjamin not return, Jacob relented (43:1–14).

When the brothers arrived in Egypt, they first spoke to Joseph's steward about the silver they had found in their sacks. He assured them all was well (Genesis 43:19–23a). Later, after Joseph released Simeon (43:23b) and fed the brothers a meal (43:31–34), he sent them back to Canaan with more supplies. But he also instructed his steward to place each man's silver in his sack and, in addition, to put Joseph's special silver cup in Benjamin's sack (44:1–2).

Following the brothers' departure, Joseph sent his steward to catch up with the men and accuse them of taking Joseph's cup. When the cup was discovered in Benjamin's sack of grain, the brothers tore their clothing in despair and returned to Egypt to face Joseph (Genesis 44:3–13).

After Joseph told his brothers that Benjamin would have to remain in Egypt, Judah stepped forward and voiced an impassioned plea not to keep Benjamin in Egypt. Such an action would break his father Jacob's heart to the point of hastening his death. Judah offered himself in place of Benjamin (Genesis 44:17–34). This act represented a drastic departure from the way Judah had treated Joseph those many years before (37:26–27).

I. Revealing Identity

(GENESIS 45:1–8)

A. Privacy Demanded (vv. 1–2)

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.

At this point, it appears that *Joseph* had finally gathered enough evidence to be confident his brothers were not the scoundrels they once were (see lesson 3). Listening to Judah's heartfelt plea not to keep Benjamin in Egypt and his offer to take Benjamin's place was more than Joseph could take (see Lesson Context).

Joseph demanded that *all his attendants* leave the room. Perhaps this was because the reunion was so emotional for Joseph that he didn't want anyone other than his brothers to witness his

breakdown. Or maybe he wanted to be able to speak openly without letting his Egyptian household know immediately everything that would be told.

2. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

Joseph had been moved to tears on two occasions prior to this one (Genesis 42:24; 43:30), but at this moment his emotions were fully released. *Pharaoh's household* must have wondered why they *heard* such intense weeping.

B. Truth Acknowledged (v. 3)

3a. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph!"

We easily imagine the emotional shock wave that rippled through the room as the brothers heard this high Egyptian official claim, in their native tongue, to be their long-absent brother. Up to this point, Joseph had been conversing through an interpreter (Genesis 42:23). The brothers must have found the statement incredible, even unbelievable. Yet who other than *Joseph* himself would say such a thing to them—and in Hebrew no less?

3b. "Is my father still living?"

The brothers had no time to digest the shocking news before Joseph inquired as to the welfare of his *father*. Not long before this, the brothers had reported that Jacob was "alive and well" (Genesis 43:28). Perhaps Joseph thought the brothers were simply being polite, not wanting to tell a powerful governor the truth of any family difficulties.

3c. But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

The brothers had been stunned into silence. They seem to have assumed Joseph to be dead, given their statements in Genesis 42:13, 32. When we do the math from the time references in Genesis 37:2; 41:29–30, 46, 53–54; and 45:6 (below), we conclude that what Joseph revealed had been some 22 years in the making. That's how long it had been since the brothers sold him into slavery at age 17. So Joseph was about age 39.

Furthermore, the brother they had mistreated was now in a position of enormous power. He could throw them all into prison (which he seemed quite willing to do; Genesis 42:16). Or he could starve them by withholding aid. Would Joseph take revenge for mistreating him?

C. Brothers Assured (vv. 4–8)

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!"

The *brothers* were probably standing at a respectful distance from the governor of Egypt before *Joseph* called them forward. They may have even stepped backward in fear on hearing this man's incredible claim. Joseph's reference to their cruel deed bolstered his claim further.

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."

Joseph had heard his brothers' remorse over what they did to him (Genesis 42:21–22; 44:18–34). But they didn't need to harbor negative feelings or bear a burden of guilt any longer. What had happened to Joseph was being used of God *to save* the lives of untold numbers of people via

Joseph's preparation for the famine that was underway. Like Esther in Persia hundreds of years later, Joseph had come to his position in Egypt "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14).

The verse before us offers the first of three declarations by Joseph that God's sovereign hand had been carefully guiding all that had happened to him (see Genesis 45:7–8 and commentary below). God's work redeemed Joseph's sale into slavery and his experiences in Egypt. The brothers were indeed culpable for Joseph's servitude in Egypt, and the Ishmaelites really had brought him there. But Joseph had come to understand that *God* had used these circumstances for his own good purposes. In that way, it was as though God himself, not the jealous brothers, *sent* Joseph.

Joseph's conclusions were undergirded by his experience with divinely given dreams and the ability to interpret them (lessons 1–3). In one sense, Joseph is simply stating Romans 8:28 in his own way: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Joseph's words to his brothers can be applied to our understanding and acceptance of the forgiveness Jesus offers. So often the issue with which we wrestle is not that of accepting Jesus' forgiveness; rather, it's in accepting that we have been forgiven. We continue to beat ourselves up over the sins we've committed and the mistakes we've made. Such an attitude smothers any sense of joy or peace in having been forgiven—blessings that are among the many promised to followers of Jesus.

6. "For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping."

Joseph continued by placing events on a time line of sorts. The bottom line was that things would get worse before they got better. Over the coming *five years*, agricultural activity would remain at a standstill. The desperation of famine would continue to be the case in many places, including Canaan, with *no plowing* or *reaping* taking place.

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."

For the second time, Joseph stated his conviction that *God sent* him to Egypt (see commentary on Genesis 45:5, above). Despite the brothers' intent to do away with Joseph and his dreams, God's sovereign plan was being fulfilled. God's purpose in protecting Jacob's family is in keeping with his promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3; 17:1–8). Joseph's declaration indicated that there would be difficult times ahead but not total destruction.

The manner in which Joseph treated his brothers is similar to how Jesus treats us by way of his death on the cross for our sins. We need not be terrified at his presence (see commentary on Genesis 45:3c, above) even though he has every right to condemn us. He is willing to forgive. This was the attitude of Joseph, both at this occasion and later following the death of Jacob (50:15–21).

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."

For a third time Joseph emphasized that the brothers were not the ones who ultimately put him in Egypt (see Genesis 45:5, 7, above). *God* had *sent* him there. Joseph had entered the land as a slave to end up in a position of great authority within Pharaoh's household and throughout *all* the land of *Egypt*. God is able to work through wrong attitudes and actions, and this is one example of that fact.

That Joseph referred to himself as a *father to Pharaoh* is in keeping with usage of the word *father* in ancient times to describe someone who served as an adviser to another (perhaps in giving

what would be considered “fatherly advice”; compare Job 29:16). The image may also reflect Joseph’s role as a fatherly provider for Egypt during a time of great need.

II. Relaying Instructions

(GENESIS 45:10–13)

A. To Come to Egypt (vv. 10–11)

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.

Verse 9, not in our printed text, records Joseph’s plea to the brothers to return quickly to Canaan and convey a message to his father, Jacob. Joseph’s message began with the statement that God had made him “lord of all Egypt” (Genesis 45:9) to urge Jacob to come at once to Egypt. In this way, Joseph provided an enduring example by giving credit to God for the things that have happened. Joseph might have been good-looking (39:6), intelligent, capable, and powerful, but he knew that it is God who deserved the glory.

It would not be easy for Jacob to leave the land of Canaan, since his grandfather Abraham migrated there over 200 years prior. Joseph made the new situation more attractive by telling them that they were to settle in *Goshen*. This is the first mention of Goshen in the Bible. It was located in the northeastern section of the Nile River’s delta, which is a series of tributaries resembling a fan as they appear on a map. Goshen was a very fertile region, excellent for grazing and for growing crops. It would be more than adequate for the numbers of *flocks and herds* that Jacob and his family possessed. The entire family would have plenty of room to reside.

Joseph had been separated from his beloved father, Jacob, for more than 20 years (see commentary on verse 3c, above). He eagerly anticipated Jacob’s being *near* him after such a long time. Joseph’s hopes ended up being fulfilled (see Genesis 45:25–46:30).

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.’

Joseph promised to take care of both Jacob and his *household* through the duration of the coming *five years of famine*. This would save them the trips back and forth for the remainder of the famine and deliver Jacob from living his final years in poverty and perhaps dying as a result.

B. To Confirm His Identity (v. 12)

12. “‘You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you.

Joseph resumed addressing his brothers directly. In a manner similar to how the risen Christ would reassure his disciples that he really was standing before them (Luke 24:39), Joseph told his brothers to believe what they were seeing.

If they could not believe their eyes, they should believe their ears. Joseph had spoken to his brothers in their native Hebrew tongue, without need for his interpreter (Genesis 42:23). The specific mention of *Benjamin*—who was Joseph’s only full *brother* of the 11, by Jacob’s wife Rachel (46:19)—reveals the closeness that Joseph still felt toward him (see commentary on 45:14, below).

C. To Convince His Father (v. 13)

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.”

Joseph wanted Jacob to know that, far from being “torn to pieces” (Genesis 37:33), Joseph had risen in *honor*, or to an esteemed position, *in Egypt*. The brothers were to report *everything* they had *seen* in order to verify that what they said of Joseph was true. Joseph again urged them to *bring* Jacob to Egypt as quickly as possible (45:9). There was no time to waste!

The “great deliverance” (Genesis 45:7, above) that was being accomplished by God would foreshadow the greater deliverance that he later brought about under Moses (Exodus 12:31–36). Ironically, the migration of Joseph’s extended family to Egypt was to set the stage for that event (1:1–14; 2:23–25).

III. Reaching Out in Love

(GENESIS 45:14–15)

A. To Benjamin (v. 14)

14. Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping.

Joseph’s emotions once again came to the forefront as he embraced *Benjamin*. The feeling was mutual, for Benjamin *embraced him, weeping*.

B. To His Brothers (v. 15)

15. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

Joseph then showed deep affection for *all his brothers*. This is quite a contrast to the first time he saw *them* in Egypt, when he “spoke harshly” to them (Genesis 42:7; see lesson 3). One can only surmise what was spoken when Joseph’s brothers *talked with him*. Joseph’s forgiveness made reconciliation possible.

These exchanges were followed by extensive preparations for the trip to Canaan and back (Genesis 45:16–23). Joseph’s final directive before the brothers leave is rather humorous: “Don’t quarrel on the way!” (45:24).

Conclusion

A. “Don’t Be Angry with Yourself”

Imagine yourself standing before Jesus, who has asked you to draw near, as Joseph told his brothers to draw near to him (Genesis 45:4). Jesus speaks and says, “I am Jesus, whom you crucified. Your sins are the reason I gave my life as a sacrifice on the cross. But don’t be angry with yourself. I want to forgive you, not condemn you.” Jesus does indeed say this—and he means it.

Joseph's words about God's higher purpose being carried out can also be applied to Jesus. Men killed him because they wanted to reverse his influence, dishearten his followers, and destroy the movement he had begun. But God accomplished a great deliverance through the cross and the empty tomb. As Peter told the crowd gathered on the Day of Pentecost, "[Jesus] was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead" (Acts 2:23–24).

Salvation is truly a gift of God's grace (Ephesians 2:8–9). It must be received as such, without our placing conditions on it that God himself has never placed. Don't be angry with yourself. Like Joseph's brothers, you need to accept forgiveness.

B. Prayer

Father, thank you for revealing your loving forgiveness to us through Jesus' death and resurrection! Help us to forgive others as we have been forgiven. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God has revealed his love to us.
Are we revealing it to others?¹