

I Am Joseph

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Date: 01 December 2021

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[0 : 0 0] In chapter 44, Joseph gave his older brothers one last test, and that was the final exam! to see whether their character had changed since they sold him into slavery 22 years ago.

Joseph, you remember, had his steward hide his silver cup in Benjamin's sack. Benjamin, of course, was Jacob's new favorite son. The brothers left for home with no thought of anything being wrong.

After all, the previously harsh Egyptian ruler had treated them to a lunch feast the day before. Joseph set up the test because he wanted to see whether the brothers would abandon Benjamin in Egypt.

The brothers had more than one opportunity to abandon Benjamin. When the steward first caught up with the brothers on their trip home, the brothers were so certain that nobody had the silver cup that they made an outlandish pledge.

We saw that in Genesis 44, 7-9. That's where the brothers said, Why does my Lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing.

[1 : 1 0] Behold, the money that we found in the mouths of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your Lord's house? Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we also will be my Lord's servants.

The steward changed the terms and simply said that the person found with the cup would be the one who became a servant, and the others could go free. If you remember, the steward then searched the brothers' sacks from the oldest until the youngest.

Of course, he found the cup in Benjamin's sack precisely where he had hidden it himself. And this gave the brothers their first opportunity to abandon Benjamin.

Verse 44, 13 records what the brothers did. That verse says, Then they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

Instead of abandoning Benjamin, every brother went back to the city with Benjamin to face the Egyptian ruler. The ruler that they have yet to realize is Joseph.

[2 : 1 1] When the brothers arrived at Joseph's house, Joseph again gave them an opportunity to leave Benjamin. The brothers also declined that opportunity.

Judah, the same brother who had advocated selling Joseph for money, stepped forward and made an impassioned plea. Judah's plea was based upon what would happen to his father if the other brothers returned without Benjamin.

Before we read the last few verses of Judah's plea, remember that Judah has a family of his own to support. That makes the change in Judah even more noticeable.

Previously, Judah had given no thought to how Jacob would feel when Judah proposed selling Joseph into slavery. This time, Judah was willing to give up his own freedom and leave his own family to spare his father from losing another favorite son.

Let's read Genesis 44, 30 through 34, and that's where we see the end of Judah's plea. Starting with Genesis 44, 30, it says, Now, therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us, then as his life is bound up in the boy's life, as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol.

[3 : 3 2] For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.

Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me?

I fear to see the evil that would find my father. As Joseph listens to Judah's appeal, he hears a heart that was transformed from that day in the fields of Dothan some 22 years earlier.

He's also convinced from the unified response of the brothers and Judah's offer to take Benjamin's place as a slave in Egypt that the hearts of the brothers have changed for all of them as well.

They never will again abandon a younger brother or even be jealous of the doting of an old father on the youngest son. All that remains is for Joseph to reveal himself to them and convince him of his own forgiveness of them.

[4 : 38] Let's continue with the narrative and read the verses that we're going to cover tonight. And those verses are Genesis 45, verses 1 through 15. Genesis 45, verses 1 through 15.

And they say, So Joseph said to his brothers, Come near to me, please.

And they came near. And he said, I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here.

For God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will neither be plowing nor harvest.

And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.

[5 : 59] He has made me a father to Pharaoh and the lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord over all Egypt.

Come down to me. Do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have.

I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine yet to come, so that you and your household and all that you have do not come to poverty.

And now your eyes see and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt and of all that you have seen.

Hurry and bring my father down here. Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck, and he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them.

[7 : 02] After that, his brothers talked with him. These verses give us a real-life example of how God overrules sin and draws sinners to himself, saving those sinners from death.

That's the main idea of this passage. These verses give us a real-life example of how God overrules sin and draws those sinners to himself, saving those sinners from death.

Before we look at the verses in detail, let's consider the bigger picture here. Joseph reveals his theology in verses 4 through 8. On one hand, Joseph attributes his brother's actions to God's sovereign hand.

Three times, Joseph refers to God's sovereign work in sending him to Egypt. Joseph tells his brothers, God sent me before you to preserve life. He then expands on his statement by adding, God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors.

And finally, he says, So it was not you who sent me here, but God. Obviously, Joseph believes in a sovereign God. On the other hand, Joseph attributes his brother's actions to their own wills.

[8 : 20] In introducing himself, he says, I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. In other words, his brothers don't get a pass on their actions simply because the sovereign God used those actions for his own purposes.

God didn't force Joseph's brothers to take the actions that they did. They did exactly what they intended to do without the least bit of coercion. This is actually one of the most comprehensive examples of the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's freedom.

Joseph doesn't even attempt to alleviate the tension between these two truths. He just states both of them as the fact. Joseph seems to understand that although ultimately the hand behind it all was God's, his brothers still were responsible for what they had done.

Otherwise, all the testing that we saw Joseph do the last few chapters wouldn't have been genuine. It would have been a charade. If the brothers simply were puppets being manipulated by God, Joseph could no more think of their guilt than he would the guilt of a robot.

But he knew they were still guilty of that sin. With that backdrop, let's dive deeper into the passage itself. We're going to break tonight's passage into five sections, starting with verses 1 through 3.

[9 : 41] And in those verses, we see the revelation. The revelation is your first blank. Let's look at verses 1 through 3 again.

They say, Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, Make everyone go out from me. So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

And he wept aloud so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. And Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?

But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. Picture the scene there. Joseph ordered all his retainers and servants to leave, including the interpreter through which Joseph had previously spoken to his brothers.

Joseph's tears were pouring down his face to the amazement of the men who watched in astonished fascination and concern. We've seen Joseph weep twice before, but here the brothers saw it for the first time.

[10 : 47] The earlier times that Joseph wept, he excused himself before that happened. He wept aloud this time with such exceptional intensity and lack of restraint that the sound carried far beyond the room.

The Egyptians heard it. But by thinking about what Joseph has been through, his tears become even more understandable to us. For over 20 years, he's been a slave in a foreign society, forced to learn a new language and adopt a strange culture.

He hasn't been allowed to come home. And the two visits of Joseph's brothers have given him brief glimpses of the life he left behind. He's longed to speak with them brother to brother, but he's controlled himself until all the questions about their integrity have been answered.

Now that those questions have been answered, his pent-up emotions come out and they come out with a lot of force. Joseph likely ordered all his attendants out of the room for two reasons.

One, he wanted privacy to avoid having the Egyptians see such a private emotional moment. Two, he probably wanted to protect his brothers. We've talked about how Joseph is still a slave, but he's now a much-loved slave who has saved Egypt from famine.

[12 : 05] Joseph's attendants would have been very upset to hear what Joseph's brothers had done to him. Those terrible details would have made their way back to Pharaoh, and knowing the full story may have prevented those attendants and Pharaoh from being willing to help the brothers.

Joseph knew he needed Pharaoh's help to really save his family. Meanwhile, as Joseph started sobbing, the brothers probably thought nothing could be more confusing than having the ruler who previously talked harshly to them break down before their eyes.

They were wrong about that, though, and they were about to find out why they were wrong. All of a sudden, Joseph spoke, and he spoke to the brothers' total surprise in their own language.

Then he said the totally unexpected words, I am Joseph. Is my father still alive? Joseph's first concern there is the welfare of his father.

You notice before, every time he was talking to his brothers, he would say, Is your father alive? And ask questions about your father. All of a sudden, now that your father, of all his previous conversations, becomes my father.

[13 : 13] And that gives us a clue about all of the pain that Joseph had endured in his captivity in Egypt. He's been separated from the father he loved so much, and for a long time he buried that pain.

He lost all hope that he would ever see his father again, but now he can no longer hide that pain. Joseph's brothers are unable to process what he says the first time.

Look at the last part of verse 3. It says, The brothers were dismayed at Joseph's presence. Our English today actually has watered down the original meaning of the word dismay.

Dictionary.com gets closest to the meaning of the original Hebrew word here. Dictionary.com defines dismay as to break down the courage of completely, as by sudden danger or trouble, or to dishearten thoroughly.

So again, that's to break down the courage of completely, as by sudden danger or trouble, or to dishearten thoroughly. Probably the words we use today, you would think that terrified would be a better rendering of the Hebrew verb, because the Hebrew word describes the heart when it has been ambushed by something totally unexpected that now spells disaster for the person.

[14:32] It's used later in the Old Testament for the fear of those who are facing certain death on the battlefield. It actually is the word that was used to describe the terror that seized King Saul's heart when he realized that he was going to die in battle.

It includes a gripping fear, a panic, and confusion. And of course, all of those were present with Joseph's older brothers. There's also astonishment, paralysis, defenselessness, desperation, and the sense of disaster that has struck them from which they cannot escape.

You can picture them there standing in stunned silence, being terrified and overwhelmed with a paralyzing fear. They're speechless, and they're probably quaking in that fear.

This one that they had betrayed and sold into Egypt is now the ruler of Egypt. So the brother they sold into slavery should now be festering with so much bitterness and resentment that he was ready to have them executed.

They laughed at his dreams. They treated him like dirt. They'd refused even to speak a decent word to him. Overcome with hatred, they had stripped him and hurled him into the well.

[15:44] And now Joseph had the power to do to them whatever he wanted to do. The ten older brothers had to think that they were in deep trouble. They probably figured they weren't getting out of the room alive.

That takes us, though, to the next piece of the lesson. But before we get to that, let's just think a little bit about what Benjamin must have been feeling. No specific reference is made to Benjamin here, but Benjamin's mind must have been spinning with one thought after another when he started connecting the dots.

Regardless of what Benjamin was thinking, none of the eleven brothers knew what to do next. Joseph does know what to do, and that's what sets the scene for the second section.

In verse 4, we see the invitation. So the invitation is your second blink. Verse 4 says, So Joseph said to his brothers, Come near to me, please.

And they came near, and he said, I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Why did Joseph add the detail about his brothers selling him into Egypt?

[16:56] You think he was just trying to turn the knife a little bit more to them? Actually, he likely added the detail to prove his identity. Aside from the brothers, only the person who was sold could have known that bit of information.

That detail provided undeniable proof that the Egyptian ruler really was Joseph. Then the brothers start to recognize that maybe this really is our brother.

They start to notice some of the family characteristics, but they still are gripped with fear. And in the next section, Joseph will do what he can to make that fear subside.

We'll go right into the next section and that third section comes in verses five through eight. In those verses, Joseph gives the explanation.

So the explanation is the third piece. Listen to what Joseph tells his brothers. These are verses five through eight again.

[17:57] Joseph says, And now, do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here. For God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest.

And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.

He has made me a father to Pharaoh, the lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Joseph washes away the guilt and shame of his brothers by placing their crime against the backdrop of divine sovereignty.

This understanding of sovereignty gives Joseph the ability to extend forgiveness. All the events in the Joseph story contribute to demonstrating how God's purposes are ultimately fulfilled through human deeds, and despite human deeds, whether or not those deeds are morally right.

The trials and challenges that brought them all to that moment are ones that we remember. We remember his brother's jealous actions. We remember Mrs. Potiphar's lustful attempt to entangle him.

[19:18] All of those led to Joseph's position of power which preserved his family through the famine. If Joseph had chosen revenge instead of forgiveness and restoration, the story could have been very different.

God used these apparently unrelated actions to mature Joseph, to solidify his faith, and ultimately to preserve God's people. By preserving his people this way, God upheld his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

We've discussed throughout the Joseph studies that the story is not really about Joseph, meaning that Joseph's life is not the main point. The main point of the book of Genesis, including chapters 37 through 50, is to show the progression of redemptive history, how God is going to redeem his people from the curse of sin.

Throughout Genesis, God shows that he's faithful to preserve the line of the seed who will redeem God's people. Joseph knew that. He talks about the brothers selling him, but God sending him. The reason Joseph gives for God sending him was to preserve life. We mentioned the tension between what humans do and God's sovereignty before we started looking at the verses in detail.

[20 : 42] Joseph's words emphasize both human responsibility and God's sovereignty. Each time Joseph mentions that his brother sold him into Egypt, Joseph also said that God sent him to Egypt.

In verse 5, Joseph says, You sold me here, for God sent me. In verse 7, Joseph says, And God sent me before you. In verse 8, Joseph says, So it was not you who sent me here, but God.

Joseph was correct to apply God's sovereignty to what had happened to him. However, consider this important point that I stole from Alistair Begg. Only Joseph can rightly appeal to God's sovereignty.

Joseph's brothers cannot rightly use God's sovereignty to explain away their guilt. None of the older ten can say, Joseph, you sure were fortunate that we sold you.

None of this would happen without us doing that. That doesn't ring very true, does it? We have to remember that sin is still sin. Although God sometimes overrules the sin, we should never excuse the sin based upon the good that God develops from it.

[21 : 53] Had the brothers treated Joseph better 22 years ago, God would have used other means to accomplish his redemptive purpose. Look at one other thing in verse 8.

Joseph is careful to give God the credit for his position of leadership. Only God could have orchestrated events so that a slave from a foreign country could rise to such a powerful position. Joseph has provided his brothers with the revelation, the invitation, and the explanation. In the fourth section of the lesson, we see the exhortation.

The exhortation. And that exhortation comes in verses 9 through 13. And we'll look at verses 9 through 11 first.

Joseph says, Hurry, and go up to my father and say to him, Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me, do not tarry.

[22 : 54] You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household and all that you have, do not come to poverty.

Joseph knows time is of the essence. Remember that neither Jacob nor the brothers showed any urgency for them to return to Egypt to rescue Simeon from jail.

They waited until their food was about out, and they realized they had no other choice. So Joseph probably has been watching to see how long it took them to come back, and he realizes that the food supply for his father and other relatives back home must be dwindling by now.

Still in verse 9, we see Joseph again give God the credit for his position. This comment may also have been designed to trigger Jacob's memory when Jacob hears about it from his other sons.

Flip back to Genesis 37, and we'll look at verses 9 through 11. Genesis 37, 9 through 11, summarize what happened after Joseph told the family about his second dream.

[24 : 15] So starting in verse 9 of chapter 37, it says, Then he dreamed another dream, and told it to his brothers, and said, Behold, I have dreamed another dream.

Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me. But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, What is this dream that you have dreamed?

Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you? And his brothers were jealous of him, but this is the part I wanted us to remember.

His father kept the saying in mind. So all along, Jacob has been thinking, What if Joseph was right? He's probably put that in the back of his mind now, but I'm sure those comments that Joseph made

were designed to trigger that memory from Jacob.

Even 22 years later, Jacob still would remember what Joseph had dreamed. That dream was now a reality, and Jacob's memory would help authenticate what his other sons told him about Joseph and would authenticate that what they told him about Joseph really was true.

[25 : 28] Returning to chapter 45, Joseph gives his brothers the plan in verses 10 and 11. Joseph introduces the plan when he tells his brothers what to say to their father.

However, Joseph wanted the brothers to hear the plan too. Joseph was telling the brothers what to say to Jacob, but the brothers got to hear the plan first. Joseph has thought about this for a long time.

He may have been overwhelmed by emotion in the opening scene, but he's not operating out of emotion throughout. He wants to see his father, but he's not driven by that desire.

He's considered his family's need and God's provision in the form of his current position, the resources he has, and the knowledge. Joseph has seen God's hand in all of this, and he knows exactly what to do next.

He's going to relocate the family to Goshen. Goshen is located in the northeastern section of Egypt in the area of the Nile Delta. It's a tremendously lush, rich region.

[26 : 32] Goshen has very fertile land that's excellent for grazing, and of course we know that Joseph's family were shepherds. Joseph chooses the region of Goshen because of its suitability for herdsmen and its proximity to him.

This location also lessened the likelihood of Jacob's family being absorbed into Egyptian society, and that would enable them to retain their ethnic and religious distinctiveness.

Again, here we see God working to protect the line of the seed who would redeem God's people. We've talked about before where Jacob's family had done a terrible job of keeping themselves away from pagans who failed to follow the true God.

God had to send them to a place where the pagans would keep themselves away from Jacob's family. Just two chapters ago, we saw the Egyptians enact this separation on a smaller scale.

Genesis 43-32 said this about the lunch that Joseph had with his brothers. Genesis 43-32 says, They served him, talking about Joseph, by himself, and them, being Joseph's brothers, by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians.

[27 : 52] The Hebrews may not have a problem eating with the Egyptians, but the Egyptians didn't want to eat with the Hebrews. Back in tonight's text, in Genesis 45-11, Joseph makes a promise.

He says, I will provide for you. Joseph, in essence, is telling his brothers that this is the last trip south that they must make to purchase grain. If they accept his offer, he's going to handle their food supply from now on.

Joseph's brothers and father do have a choice. They could reject Joseph's offer and remain in Canaan. But at the end of verse 11, Joseph clearly states why the family needs to move.

Joseph says, For there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household and all that you have do not come to poverty. The correct choice for Jacob's family is obvious.

Jacob and his other sons could stay in Canaan and fall into poverty, or they could move to Goshen and have everything provided for them. To the brothers, the Goshen option must have sounded too good to be true, but after Joseph had been correct about one day ruling over his family, the brothers were in no position to argue with his prediction of the family poverty that would result if they chose the other option.

[29 : 15] They now had a good idea that five more years of famine were coming. They had been able to sustain their family by themselves through the first two years on their own. They would never make it through five more years without help, and Joseph is now offering them that help.

Despite that, Joseph seems to sense some skepticism from his brothers. After all, who could really blame them, considering what they just found out? Only moments ago the brothers had learned what we've known all along.

Their long-lost brother is the Egyptian ruler. Joseph closes this section by reinforcing that he is who he says he is. He also emphasizes that he has the power to carry out his plan, and he reminds the brothers that they need to act quickly.

Look at verses 12 and 13. Joseph says, And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you.

You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here. If there was any residual doubt in the brothers' minds about Joseph's identity, it disappeared as Joseph used his brother Benjamin's name for the first time.

[30 : 35] They've never referred to Benjamin by name before, and only Joseph would have known his name. Joseph, speaking to all of them, called Benjamin my brother.

Whether consciously or not, he was maintaining a little bit of distance between him and the older brothers. He'd forgiven their wrongdoing, but they were still facing some consequences of that. So we've seen the revelation, the invitation, the explanation, and the exhortation. In the final verses of this section, we see the reconciliation.

The reconciliation. reconciliation. That reconciliation comes in verses 14 and 15. Verses 14 and 15 say, Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept.

And Benjamin wept upon his neck, and he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that, his brothers talked with him. Joseph wept with Benjamin, and Benjamin wept with him as years of pin-up feelings found release.

[31 : 44] Rachel's only two sons had finally found each other again, and they were very joyful because of that. They would have a great deal to catch up on in the days to come. We've studied chapters 43 through 45 over several weeks.

We need to remember though that the lunch in chapter 43 happened on the day before Joseph announced himself here in chapter 45. Think about all that Benjamin has been through.

in a little more than a day's time. First, his eyes had soaked in the unaccustomed grandeur of Egypt, and he was treated with five times the honor of anyone else in his family.

After a good night's sleep for him, though, things changed. He was caught with stolen property and branded a criminal, even though he knew that he was innocent of that theft. He returned to the ruler's home thinking that he was going to be enslaved or executed, and all of that uncertainty evaporated as he met the brother that he had considered dead for a long time.

Only God could have engineered something so wonderful. And when we see Benjamin crying here, his outburst probably contained as many tears of relief as tears of joy.

[32 : 56] After all, until that moment that he found out that Joseph was Joseph, he had no hope of seeing his own family again. And we'll learn next week that Joseph and Benjamin both have several sons of their own.

We know about Joseph's two. In chapter 46, we'll learn about Benjamin's sons. Verse 15 tells us that Joseph also wept over his older brothers, but Moses doesn't say that the older brothers wept with him.

Maybe they did, but we're not given that fact. And so this leaves us with some feeling that the ten older brothers were still wary of Joseph, and they would be for some time to come.

We'll see that wariness resurface occasionally as we go through the remaining chapters of Genesis, especially when we get to the part where Jacob dies. So even though this is a reconciliation, the older brothers have yet to fully believe it.

This emotional reunion closes with the brief note that his brothers talked with him. And this should remind us of the way the story opened. Way back in Genesis 37, 4, Moses told us that Joseph's older brothers could not speak peacefully to him.

[34 : 13] So maybe for the first time in their lives, they actually talk. In Genesis 37, they could not say a kind word to him. Now they're talking with him.

The reconciliation that already has taken place has been made possible because the older brothers truly repented. God overruled their sin, drew them to himself, and made provisions to save them from death.

The passage focused on how God saved Joseph's family from physical starvation and death, but we also saw how God saved them from spiritual death as well. And that brings us back to the main idea.

These verses give us a real-life example of how God overrules sin and draws sinners to himself, saving those sinners from death. Have you seen the parallels between Joseph's interactions with his brothers and how God interacts with sinners today, including us?

Through both creation and his word, God reveals himself to us. We'll look at a few scriptures to show that. Psalm 19.1 says, The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

[35 : 26] In the New Testament, Romans 1, verses 18 through 20 say, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made, so they are without excuse. Then, just as Joseph told his sinful brothers to come near to him, God draws sinners to himself. Jesus said in John 6.44, No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day.

Just three verses later, though, in John 6.47, we see the balance between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Verse 47 of John 6 is where Jesus said, Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

Joseph gave his brothers the privilege of coming near to him. We as believers have the privilege of coming near to God. Think about Hebrews 4.16.

[36 : 50] Hebrews 4.16 says, Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

I'm sure when Joseph's brothers came near to Joseph, they came near with anything but confidence. But we have the privilege of drawing near with confidence. Also in Joseph's life, God used the actions of sinful men to accomplish his purpose.

In his overall plan of redemption, God used the actions of sinful men to provide a way of salvation. Listen to this excerpt from Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost.

And these verses are Acts 2, verses 22 through 24. Peter said then, Men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know, this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it. Joseph, the one who saved his brothers, identified himself with them.

[38 : 12] Jesus, the one who saved us, identifies himself with us. Because of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection, believers then become adopted sons and daughters of God.

Listen to Galatians 3, verses 26 through 28. Galatians 3, 26 through 28 say, For in Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God through faith.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Jesus is a believer's Savior and Lord, but through that adoption by God, Jesus also becomes a believer's brother. Hebrews 2, 11 says, For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.

That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers. John MacArthur explains it this way.

MacArthur says, Jesus has taught that those who do the will of the Father in obedience to his word are his brothers and mother.

[39 : 26] He never directly referred to his disciples by the title of brethren until after his resurrection. Not until he had paid the price for their salvation did they truly become his spiritual brothers and sisters.

The use of the term demonstrates his full identification with mankind to provide complete redemption. That's similar to what we see with Joseph, because not until he had paid the price to do what was necessary to save his brothers physically and they repented did they really become his true brothers.

Before, they were just his brothers by relationship only. At the end of tonight's passage, Joseph commanded his brothers to go tell others what they had learned.

And as believers, we are commanded to tell others what we've learned. And we know that, of course, from the Great Commission. Here are Matthew 28, 18 through 20. They say, And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

[40 : 38] And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. We've seen why these verses give us a real life example of how God overrules sin and draws sinners to himself, saving those

sinner from death.

In addition to that main idea, we can take a few other things from this chapter. The first thing we can take away in addition is that God's sovereignty gives us reason to forgive others.

God's sovereignty gives us reason to forgive others. After Joseph saw evidence of true repentance, he forgave his brothers. He could have held their sin over their heads for the remainder of their lives.

Nobody would have blamed him if he had. However, Joseph focused on God's sovereignty. God's sovereignty is a refuge that will keep us from viewing ourselves as victims of someone else's sin, from stewing in and growing bitter toward those who have mistreated us.

Living and walking in the light of God's sovereign wisdom and direction of our lives is how gentleness, forbearance, kindness, love, and of course forgiveness find expression in our relationship with others.

[41 : 49] No single area of truth is more critical to a walk in life that produces true godliness than learning to trust a sovereign, all-wise, infinitely loving God.

It's a lot harder than it sounds though, isn't it? But listen to that again. No single area of truth is more critical to a walk in life that produces true godliness than learning to trust a sovereign, all-wise, infinitely loving God.

Joseph saw God's sovereign hand in everything that happened. He had no need or desire for revenge. Instead, he was able to acknowledge that what had been done to him was bad while still focusing primarily on the providential plan that unfolded.

All of this is a byproduct of proper theology, which is the doctrine of God. It's also a byproduct of proper anthropology, which is the doctrine of man.

Proper theology will keep us from accusing God of evil as God works his plan of redemption in our lives. We'll be better able to avoid thinking that God's primary job is preventing inconveniences in our lives.

[43 : 00] Instead, we'll acknowledge God's sovereignty, providence, and commitment to what is best for God's people. Proper anthropology or understanding of man will keep us from thinking more of man than we should.

We'll be less likely to attribute power or authority to men that actually belongs to God. We'll also be reminded that man is sinful, fallen, and frail.

We'll be reminded that people will fail us, hurt us, disappoint us, and yes, sometimes even bless us. However, none of this is going to happen outside of God's providential plan, nor will the wicked go unpunished.

The second thing we can take away is that God sometimes uses problem people to make us more like Christ. God sometimes uses problem people to make us more like Christ.

For most of his life, Joseph has had to deal with problem people. First, it was his brothers, then the slave traders, then Potiphar, then Mrs. Potiphar, then Pharaoh's cup bearer.

[44 : 07] So with all of that, think about how easily Joseph could have succumbed to anger and how easily he could have let that anger turn into hatred. He avoids that trap because he possesses the ability to see the problem people as gifts from God designed to mold him into the man that the Lord wants him to be.

So the next time you need to think about a problem person as a gift from God, just don't try to return that person quite yet. Rather than wanting to return those problem gifts from God, the key is to start looking at every individual who comes into your life as a sacred trust established by the Lord to affect you in some way.

And this ties to the forgiveness point that we just considered. When we recognize that things that men do to us have been permitted by a loving father for the ultimate accomplishment of God's purpose, then we're ready to forgive the offenses of others.

For Joseph, the attitude of, you sold me, God sent me, makes it possible for him to honestly love his brothers and to deal compassionately with them.

The third thing we can take away is very similar to the second, and that is that difficult times often develop character in us that ordinary times may not. Difficult times often develop character in us that ordinary times may not.

[45 : 32] Think about what might have happened if God had overruled Joseph's brothers on that day that they sold Joseph into slavery. Had Joseph gone home with his brothers that day, Joseph

probably still would be battling the jealousy of his brothers 22 years later.

Neither Joseph nor any of his older brothers would have seen such strong evidence of God at work. They would have missed out on developing the godly characteristics that we saw in chapter 44 and also in tonight's verses.

Romans 5, 3-5 remind us, Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. So what then should we do when we struggle to remember that God places difficulties in our lives to accomplish a greater purpose in us? Well, the answer is to do what the author of Hebrews told us to do.

Remember what Hebrews 4-16 said, Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

[46 : 52] Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the reminder of how you do work together to accomplish your greater purpose in our lives.

Help us remember that when we go through difficult times. Help us remember that even more when we're dealing with difficult people. Let us see those people as more like you do, as things that you put in our lives to help make us better.

Be with us as we go through the rest of the week and encourage us to share what we know about you with others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.