

The Parable of the Brothers  
Genesis 45:1–11, 15  
Sunday, February 23, 2025

Let us pray: May your word take root in us and grow. May it *live* in us, so that *we* can live in Christ.  
Amen.

There was once two brothers. One lived in the east, and the other lived in the west. One day they each received a message that their father had died, so they both began the long journey home to settle his estate. It had been years since they had seen each other, and when they arrived, they were both overjoyed. They ran to each other and embraced and cried over their father, who they had both loved very much.

Eventually, they started going through their father's belongings. Somethings were very special to the brother from the east, so they became his. Other things were very special to the brother from the west, so they became his. Some things had no value at all, so they just got rid of them. They did this for days, until only one thing remained – the beautiful, hand-written Bible that had been passed down in their family for generations. It was large and heavy with ornate, colorful drawings all throughout it. They flipped through its pages and reminisced about how their father had read them these stories that had shaped their lives and their faith.

The brother from the east said, "I would very much like to have this book, so that I can read these stories to my own children." The brother from the west said, "But I am the firstborn. By right it should be mine." They began to argue over who should keep this beautiful holy book. Then they began to wrestle and fight over it. Eventually, the older brother grabbed the book and ran off with it, heading back to his home in the west. The younger brother chased after him. They ran for days, not stopping to eat or sleep. The older brother said, "If I stop to eat or sleep, he will catch up and take it from me." The younger brother said, "If I stop to eat or sleep, he will get away, and the book will be his forever."

So they ran through the day and through the night. The older brother, exhausted from carrying that heavy book for so long, stumbled and fell into a deep hole. When his younger brother came up to the edge of the hole, he looked in and saw his brother, bloody and bruised. And he felt sorry for what had happened, because he loved his brother. He said to him, "Give me your hand, and I will help you climb out." The older brother, still holding the book in one arm, stretched out his other arm, but the hole was just deep enough that he was out of reach. Then the younger brother said, "Hand me the book, and then you can jump, and I'll grab your hands." But the older brother thought it was a trick; that he would pass his brother the book, and he would run off with it, leaving him in the hole. So they stood there, looking at each other, not knowing what to do.

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At some point, we have all carried something around with us that we just can't let go of. Anger. A grudge. Something that someone else has done to hurt us. Something that *we* have done to hurt someone else, and we can't let go of the guilt, but we also can't admit that we were wrong. And the longer we carry it around with us, the heavier it gets, the harder it is to bear. And we can end up feeling *stuck*.

We heard another story about some brothers earlier. Joseph and his brothers. For those unfamiliar with this story, this is *not* Joseph the father of Jesus. This is centuries before Jesus. Joseph was one of 12 sons, and their father Jacob favored *him* over all the others. So Joseph's brothers were jealous of him, and they hated him. One day they had had enough. They attacked him and were going to kill him, until one of the brothers said, "No, don't kill him. Let's throw him in a pit until we decide what to do with him." As they're sitting there, trying to figure out what to do.

A group of traders passes by, and they end up selling their brother Joseph into slavery. They tell their father that he was killed by a wild animal. Joseph is taken to Egypt, where he eventually becomes a

servant in the house of Pharaoh. Through a series of events, Pharaoh comes to trust him, and he rises in power in Pharaoh's household until he is the second most powerful man in all of Egypt. He interprets Pharaoh's dreams to predict that a seven-year-long famine is coming, and he begins stockpiling food so that Egypt will not starve.

The famine *does* come, and it affects not just Egypt but the whole region, including Joseph's family back in Israel. His brothers hear that there is food in Egypt, but they don't know that Joseph is the one doing it, because it has been so long that they figure he's dead by now. They have come to believe the lie that they told their father. They go to Egypt in search of food, and they come face to face with their brother Joseph, but they don't recognize him because he looks like an Egyptian now. But Joseph recognizes *them* and decides to have a little fun with them, really putting them through it and paying them back for what they did to him.

Where we pick up the story in our reading this morning is when Joseph finally reveals himself to his brothers. Through tears, he tells his brothers, "I am Joseph." But, it says, "his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence." They remembered what they had done to him. And they were probably terrified that he was going to take revenge on them, maybe even *kill* them.

But we get this moment where Joseph says, "Come closer to me. 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. God *knew* there was going to be a famine, and God put me in this position to save you. So it was not *you* who sent me here, but *God*. And now I will provide for you and take care of you." And then, it says, "he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him."

After the incredible suffering that Joseph had endured – being attacked and beaten, sold into slavery, years in prison, all because of his brothers – he is able to let go of any anger and hatred and resentment, any desire for revenge, and he is able to *love* them, because he sees God’s presence and power in all of this. Joseph is able to *forgive* his brothers.

Now, it’s important to note that Joseph’s brothers have not apologized. They haven’t owned up to what they did, accepted responsibility for it, or even *asked* for forgiveness. But that doesn’t matter. Because that’s not what forgiveness is about. Forgiveness is not about this other person and what they have done. Our ability to forgive does not depend on *them*. Forgiveness depends only on *you*. Because forgiveness is a choice that you make to let go of what they have done. To not hold on to the words that they said or the hurt they caused you anymore. To stop carrying it around with you. That doesn’t mean that you are *okay* with what they did. It just means that you are not going to invest your time and energy holding on to that thing anymore. That you are choosing to let go of it, set it down, and move on with your life.

Forgiveness is about *you* choosing freedom and peace, even if *they* do not.

So many people say, “I can *forgive*, but I can’t *forget*.” And what I always say to that is, “Then you haven’t really forgiven.” As long as we are still remembering this thing that someone has done to us, then we haven’t let go of it, and we haven’t forgiven. Think about the kind of forgiveness that you want from others, that you want from *God*. Do you want them to keep remembering the things that you have done? Or do you want them to forget it and let go of it completely?

There is a verse in the book of Jeremiah where God says, “The days are surely coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel...I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.” *I will remember their sin no more*. That new covenant has been made in Jesus Christ, in whose death on a

cross our sin has been forgiven. Not *a little* forgiven. Not *kinda* forgiven. *Completely* forgiven. Our sin has been let go of by God. It is remembered no more. It is forgiven *and* forgotten. If that is the kind of forgiveness that we *want*, then it is the kind of forgiveness that we have to *practice*.

That *doesn't* mean that we have to be in relationship with the person who has hurt us and let them hurt us again. There is a difference between *forgiveness* and *reconciliation*. Forgiveness is about *us* choosing to let go of what this person has done. Reconciliation is about the relationship being healed and restored, so that you can keep living life together. And reconciliation requires repentance. It requires the offending person to acknowledge the hurt that they have caused, to accept responsibility for it, to sincerely express remorse and apologize and *ask* for forgiveness. Only then can the two of you move on together.

Reconciliation is the ultimate *goal* of forgiveness. It is what God *wants* for us. But it is not always possible in this life, because it depends in part on that other person, and that other person might never come to that place. But *forgiveness* is *always* possible, because forgiveness depends only on you and the choice that you make. Regardless of what this other person has done, you can always choose to let go of it.

Joseph chose to let go of what his brothers did to him. In Jesus, God chose to let go of our sin. What sin or grudge or guilt do *you* need to let go of, so that *you* can move on?

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The two brothers stood at that hole, looking at each other, not knowing what to do. Until finally, the older brother thought, “If I keep holding on to this book, I’m going to die down here. And even if I found a way to get it out, we would just keep fighting over it.” So he placed the book on the ground and stepped up on top of it, which made him just tall enough to reach his brother’s hands, and his brother pulled him out.

The two of them stood there, at the edge of the hole, looking down at this book that they knew they would never be able to get out. But then they remembered the words that were *in* the book, that their father had read to them so many times. And they embraced before starting the journey home.

Sometimes we need to let go of something before we can move on. Whatever it is that you need to let go of, that you need to forgive, it may be hard, but you can do it. You might have to let go of it over and over again, like Jesus says, seventy-seven times or seventy *times* seven. But your ability to do that depends on no one else but you. And I promise you, it is a much easier way to live. There is freedom and peace on the other side of it. So for your own sake, let it go. Amen.