

“All’s Well that Ends Well” (Genesis 43-45)

Do you like putting together jigsaw puzzles? [Walk up with a jigsaw book puzzle box] I confess, I do not, but my kids do. Whether you like puzzles or not, you must admit that life is like a giant jigsaw puzzle. And we are like children trying to put the puzzle together with only a handful of pieces and someone took the box that has the picture on the cover. So we’re left trying to fit our little handful of pieces together and trying to figure out the big picture at the same time. No wonder we struggle to figure out what life is all about. As the years pass we pick up more pieces to the puzzle and things that once troubled us now seem to fit into place. And we have a new appreciation for the wisdom of God because nothing is ever wasted. Everything “fits” somewhere. The puzzle that I’m holding is a small, 100-piece puzzle. The picture is of a boy, a girl, a dog, and a cat sitting at a soda fountain, eating a bowl of ice cream, and drinking a float. The caption above their heads reads, “Dear God, You thought of everything!”

This statement is true in life and in the story of Joseph. Genesis 43-45 is a unit describing what happens when Joseph’s brothers return to Egypt.¹ In chapter 43 Joseph exhibits tender love; in chapter 44 he exercises tough love, and in chapter 45 he expresses a theological love for God’s sovereignty.²

Scene 1: Driven to Egypt (43:1-14). Moses begins our account with these words: **“Now the famine was severe in the land (cf. 41:57). So it came about when they had finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father [Jacob] said to them, ‘Go back, buy us a little food’”** (43:1-2). Did you catch how Jacob phrased that? Why buy just **“a little”** food? Jacob’s hope was that if they just bought a little bit, the harsh governor in Egypt wouldn’t require Benjamin to go there with his brothers. But Judah confronts his father with reality. He states twice that **“the man”** solemnly warned the brothers they could not see his face unless they brought their younger brother with them. In response to this Jacob said, **“Why did you treat me so badly by telling the man whether you still had another brother?”** (43:3-6). Even after some time has passed, Jacob still isn’t willing to make the hard decision to send Benjamin. So he starts blaming. **“I’m a victim! Why did you share personal information about our family? If you had been more careful this wouldn’t be happening to me!”** Isn’t this true to human nature? When we’re boxed in by circumstances, it is easy to blame others instead of accepting responsibility for our own failures. Yet, God calls us to sense His sovereign hand in the circumstances of our lives.

All of a sudden the brothers speak up together: **“The man [Joseph] questioned particularly about us and our relatives, saying, ‘Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?’ So we answered his questions. Could we possibly know that he would say, ‘Bring your brother down?’”** Judah said to his father Israel, **“Send the lad with me and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, we as well as you and our little ones. I myself will be surety [i.e., collateral]³ for him; you may hold me responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame before you forever. For if we had not delayed, surely by now we could have returned twice”** (43:7-10). The information the brothers gave to Joseph was in response to his direct questioning. By complaining to his sons, Jacob was rebuking them for telling the truth. Again, Jacob is living up to his nickname of “deceiver.” Fortunately, Judah steps up and lovingly puts him in his place. This is the first good thing we find Judah doing in Genesis so far. Up until now, he was like his father, completely self-centered and self-absorbed:

- 1) It was Judah who proposed the sale of Joseph to the Midianites (37:26-27).
- 2) It was Judah who had separated himself from his family to live with the Canaanites (38:1a).
- 3) It was Judah who hung around with an ungodly man named Hirah (38:1b).
- 4) It was Judah who married an unbeliever (38:2).
- 5) It was Judah who was not a spiritual leader and lost two of his sons in death (38:7, 10).
- 6) It was Judah who was sexually immoral and slept with a supposed prostitute (38:15-18).

But now, in Genesis 43, Judah appears to be a different man! He has changed! He urges his father to stop thinking of himself and to act in the best interest of the entire family. While Jacob spoke only of “I,” “me,” and “my,” Judah speaks in terms of “we,” “us,” and “our” (contrast 42:36, 38 with 43:8). What a reminder that if Judah can change, anyone can change. God specializes in character transformation.

Jacob’s back is to the wall, so he reluctantly agrees to let Benjamin go. He says to his sons, **“If it must be so, then do this: take some of the best products of the land in your bags, and carry down to the man as a present, a little balm and a little honey, aromatic gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. Take double the money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was a mistake. Take your brother also, and arise, return to the man; and may God Almighty⁴ grant you compassion in the sight of the man, so that he will release to you your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved”**⁵ (43:11-14). The words and actions of Jacob in this section do not sound like words of faith and confidence in God. Nonetheless, he agrees to this risky “double your money back” plan. Jacob’s love language must have been gift giving, because every time he is in a fix, he heads to Costco with a shopping list! You may recall that he employed the same tactics when he was preparing to meet his brother, Esau (33:10-16). But Jacob’s gift giving wasn’t motivated by love or friendship. For Jacob it was simply a tool of diplomacy intended to soften the heart of the Egyptian leader. There is irony here. The gift was of the same produce that the original caravan bore that took Joseph to Egypt, including the silver! Life is coming full circle.⁶

This is an interesting passage because it shows a certain amount of quiet resignation to the goodness of God. It’s kind of a question, “Has it really come to this?” When you come to the end of your rope and you simply have to trust God, does it really come to that? This is a different Jacob than we’ve seen before. This is a Jacob in which there’s now trust in God—no conniving, no second-guessing, no plan B’s—he simply has come to the end of all that and he has to trust God. While Jacob offers a prayer or blessing, it is more like a last resort when it should have been his first line of defense. Prayer and dependence on God should always be our first response to trouble and uncertainty in life. But it doesn’t come naturally! It is a learned behavior that becomes a lifestyle by virtue of habitual practice. Jacob had much to learn and so do most believers.

Scene 2: The Brothers’ Explanation (43:15-25). “So the men took this present, and they took double the money in their hand, and Benjamin; then they arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph. When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his house steward, ‘Bring the men into the house, and slay an animal and make ready; for the men are to dine with me at noon.’ So the man did as Joseph said, and brought the men to Joseph’s house. Now the men were afraid, because they were brought to Joseph’s house; and they said, ‘It is because of the money that was returned in our sacks the first time that we are being brought in, that he may seek occasion against us and fall upon us, and take us for slaves with our donkeys.’ So they came near to Joseph’s house steward, and spoke to him at the entrance of the house, and said, ‘Oh, my lord, we indeed came down the first time to buy food, and it came about when we came to the lodging place, that we opened our sacks, and behold, each man’s money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full. So we have brought it back in our hand. We have also brought down other money in our hand to buy food; we do not know who put our money in our sacks.’ He said, ‘Be at ease, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks;⁷ I had your money.’ Then he brought Simeon out to them. Then the man brought the men into Joseph’s house and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys fodder. So they prepared the present for Joseph’s coming at noon; for they had heard that they were to eat a meal there.” The brothers went from agony to ecstasy in a matter of moments. God was certainly in their midst.

Scene 3: Feasting with Joseph (43:26-34). Joseph hosts a meal for his brothers who years before had callously sat down to eat while he languished in a pit (cf. 37:25). Moses writes, **“When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present which was in their hand and bowed to the ground before him. Then he asked them about their welfare, and said, ‘Is your old father well, of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?’ They said, ‘Your servant our father is well; he is still alive.’ They bowed down in homage. As he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother’s son, he said, ‘Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me?’ And he said, ‘May God be gracious to you, my son.’⁸ Joseph hurried out for he was deeply stirred over his brother, and he sought a place to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out; and he controlled himself and said, ‘Serve the meal.’ So they served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians. Now they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, and the men looked at one another in astonishment. He took portions to them from his own table, but Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they feasted and drank freely with him.”** Jacob had hoped that the nuts and gifts would appease “the man.” But the truth is, Joseph didn’t care about pistachio nuts and honey, he cares about people! He cares about his brother Benjamin, his father Jacob, and his other brothers. It appears that Joseph didn’t even acknowledge these gifts.

The brothers’ attempt to win Joseph’s favor with nuts and honey is a lot like our futile attempts to appease God. We try to make up for our sins, but (1) we don’t realize how grievous our sin actually is, (2) we don’t realize who we’re dealing with, (3) we mistakenly think that we can reverse our sinful status before God with a bag of pistachio nuts (i.e., good works). God wants us to approach Him through His Son, the Lord Jesus. He does not want us to cling to anything or anyone but His Son. Jesus said, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). It is as simple as receiving a gift.

Joseph showed respect to Benjamin as his distinguished guest by giving him larger and better servings of food than his brothers received (43:34). Special honorees frequently received double portions, but a fivefold portion was the sign of highest privilege. With this favor Joseph sought not only to honor Benjamin but also to test his other brothers’ feelings toward Benjamin. He wanted to see if they would hate him as they had hated himself, his father’s former favorite. Evidently they passed this test. Coming forth from this crucible, the formerly callous brothers emerge a bonded family, shining with integrity and love toward one another.⁹

This is the second occasion that the brothers bow down before Joseph. This is a powerful example of God’s sovereignty over human intention and will. Why should Joseph’s brothers be “astonished” when they were seated in chronological order by a host who (presumably) was entirely ignorant of their birth order? The reason *why* they were astonished was because the chance factor of a stranger seating them in exact birth order was approximately 1 in 40 million. They immediately knew this was more than coincidence!

Mercy is written all over this chapter. Jacob’s prayer had been answered. Mercy rained down on the sons all day long. Joseph extended mercy toward Benjamin. The feast was one of grace and mercy. The celebration went on into the night. The time passed with hilarity and pleasure. The brothers’ fears proved groundless. But morning was coming. And with it was a test over Benjamin that would try their mettle. The day of mercy had been a beautiful beginning. But there was much more to be done. A day of severer mercy was about to dawn.¹⁰ The question is how will Joseph’s brothers pass this test? Will they humble themselves in repentance or will they harden their hearts?

There were four college sophomores who were taking Chemistry. The four men were all good students, good friends, and were living together in off-campus housing. Unfortunately, the night before their final exam, rather than studying, they stayed out late partying and overslept the next morning missing their final exam. Later that day, they found their professor and told him that they had gotten a flat tire and didn't have a spare. As a result, they missed the final. They begged him to let them take the final the next day. The professor thought it over and agreed. The guys were elated and relieved. They studied hard that night and went in the next day at the time the professor had told them. He placed them in separate rooms and handed each of them a test booklet, and told them to begin. The first problem was worth five points—an easy question about the chemical elements. “Yeah,” they thought at the same time, each one in his separate room, “this is going to be easy.” Each finished the problem and then turned the page. On the second page was written: (For 95 points): “Which tire?”

Genesis 44 reveals Joseph's effort to discover the truth—to find out whether his brothers were still the selfish, godless, wicked men who had sold him into slavery 20 years earlier or had they changed? Had they repented of their sins or were they still telling the same old lies? In essence, he was asking, “Which tire?” Joseph knew that real reconciliation could never occur with his brothers until they dealt honestly with their sinful past. For the last 20 years, the brothers had lied to each other, lied to their father, and lied to God. And now they were lying to Joseph. But God, through His servant Joseph, was about to give them a final exam they would never forget!¹¹

Scene 4: Joseph Frames His Brothers (44:1-13). “Then he [Joseph] commanded his house steward, saying, ‘Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack. Put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his money for the grain.’ And he did as Joseph had told him” (44:1-2). A silver cup was, of course, valuable. But its use here involved Joseph's personal recollection that his brothers had sold him into slavery for 20 pieces of silver. So he now harasses and tests them with silver! This nuance indicates how carefully calculated Joseph was.¹² Our story continues in 44:3-9: The brothers wake up early and hit the road for Canaan. They are probably groggy and hung over after partying with Joseph (cf. 43:34).¹³ After the brothers exited the city, Joseph sent his steward to chase down his brothers and say to them, “**Why have you repaid evil for good? Is not this the one from which my lord drinks and which he indeed uses for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.**’ So he [the steward] overtook them and spoke these words to them. They said to him, ‘Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing. Behold, the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks we have brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? **With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves.**’” The brothers are no doubt indignant at the steward's accusation because they are confident in their righteousness. Maybe they even said, “Come on, Mr. Steward! Do thieves voluntarily return valuables only to steal again?” Joseph's steward must have smiled inside as he said, “**Now let it also be according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and the rest of you shall be innocent.**’ Then they hurried, each man lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. He searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Then they tore their clothes, and when each man loaded his donkey, they returned to the city” (44:10-13). When Joseph disappeared, it was only Jacob who tore his clothes (37:34); now all the brothers do.¹⁴ Indeed, they are broken and they are family. Yet, this is the worst news they could possibly hear. It was bad enough to stand before a powerful Egyptian governor who was angered at the theft of his silver cup, but to realize that this man was their brother whom they had sold into slavery 20 years earlier—it was simply overwhelming! Their sin had been exposed. Their greatest fears had come to pass. Their minds were reeling with the ugly reality. They were doomed!

Scene 5: The Bothers Repent and Reconcile with Joseph (44:14-45:15). In 44:14-17, Moses writes, **“When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house, he was still there, and they fell to the ground before him. [Again, Joseph’s brothers bow before him.] Joseph said to them, ‘What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed practice divination?’ So Judah said, ‘What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God¹⁵ has found out the iniquity of your servants; behold, we are my lord’s slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found.’ But he said, ‘Far be it from me to do this. The man in whose possession the cup has been found, he shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father.’”** That Joseph practiced divination is not clear from 44:5, 15. He may have, but this seems inconsistent with his character as a man of faith in the Lord. It appears to be part of the ruse.¹⁶ It also seems unlikely since Joseph had the gift of interpreting dreams (divine revelations) from God. If anyone needed to resort to divination it would not have been Joseph. The first statement made by Joseph’s servant may have been a lie (44:5). The second statement made by Joseph did not claim to practice divination (44:15). Joseph said that such a person as he could do it. These references to divination seem intended to impress Joseph’s brothers with the value of the cup that had disappeared. The brothers inferred that Joseph used it for purposes other than simply drinking.¹⁷

In 44:18-34, Judah speaks up and provides the longest and most moving speech in the book of Genesis.¹⁸ **Then Judah approached him, and said, ‘Oh my lord, may your servant please speak a word in my lord’s ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are equal to Pharaoh. My lord asked his servants, saying, ‘Have you a father or a brother?’ We said to my lord, ‘We have an old father and a little child of his old age. Now his brother is dead, so he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him.’ Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me that I may set my eyes on him.’ But we said to my lord, ‘The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.’ You said to your servants, however, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.’ Thus it came about when we went up to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. Our father said, ‘Go back, buy us a little food.’ But we said, ‘We cannot go down. If our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we cannot see the man’s face unless our youngest brother is with us.’ Your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons; and the one went out from me, and I said, ‘Surely he is torn in pieces,’ and I have not seen him since. ‘If you take this one also from me, and harm befalls him, you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.’ Now, therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad’s life, when he sees that the lad is not with us, he will die. Thus your servants will bring the gray hair of your servant our father down to Sheol in sorrow. For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then let me bear the blame before my father forever.’ Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me—for fear that I see the evil that would overtake my father?’”** Fourteen times in this speech, Judah mentions his father, Jacob (44:19-34).¹⁹ He likely spoke with tearful emotion. No more moving example of true contrition and repentance is found in Scripture, unless it be the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32).²⁰ A sinner disgraced became a sinner restored with a very tender heart.²¹

Jacob will eventually crown Judah with kingship (49:10), because he demonstrates that he has become fit to rule according to God’s ideal of kingship—that the king serves the people, not vice versa. Judah is transformed from one who sells his brother as a slave to one who is willing to be the slave for his brother. With that offer he exemplifies Israel’s ideal kingship.²²

Do we see a genuine change in Joseph's brothers? Absolutely!

- 1) They didn't resent it when Benjamin was given a larger portion (43:34).
- 2) They trusted each other and didn't accuse one another of wrong when accused of stealing the silver cup (44:9).
- 3) They stuck together when the silver cup was found. They didn't abandon Benjamin when he was about to be enslaved in Egypt (44:13).
- 4) They completely humbled themselves for the sake of Benjamin (44:14).
- 5) They knew their predicament was the result of their sin against Joseph (44:16).
- 6) They offered themselves as slaves to Egypt together with Benjamin (44:16).
- 7) They showed genuine concern for how this would affect their father (44:29-31).
- 8) Judah is willing to be made a substitutionary sacrifice for his brother, out of love for Benjamin and his father, Jacob (44:33).

Consider Joseph's brothers:

- The same brothers who once callously ignored the cries of Joseph now have expressed regret and remorse for what they did to their brother.
- The same brothers who lied to their father about Joseph's death and broke his heart are now doing everything they can to reassure Jacob and protect him.
- The same brothers who used to act with deception and treachery are now seeking to act honorably in returning money that they knew wasn't theirs.
- The same brothers who hated the children of Rachel (Joseph and Benjamin) are now promising to protect Benjamin with their life.
- The same brothers who had once abandoned Joseph now returned to rescue their brother, Simeon.

No matter how you slice it, the brothers manifested repentance. They acknowledged their sin! This is quite rare today. We are a society that is especially skilled at rationalizing and blaming. When someone is caught in a wrong you might hear:

- I come from a dysfunctional home. (I'm not responsible...blame my upbringing.)
- This is just the way I am. (I'm not responsible...blame my genes or God!)
- They started it. (I'm not responsible...they are.)
- I didn't know that was against the law. (I'm not responsible...you didn't tell me.)
- I have been oppressed. (I'm not responsible...society is.)

In 45:1-15, our story comes to a resolution. But remember that at this moment the brothers were on trial! They were being interrogated. Benjamin had been accused of stealing Joseph's silver cup. And Judah was pleading for mercy. From the brothers' perspective, it would appear that they had so angered the Egyptian official that he was either going to imprison them all for life or sentence them to death!²³ **“Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, ‘Have everyone go out from me.’ So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?’ But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed²⁴ at his presence.²⁵ Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Please come closer to me.’ And they came closer. And he said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be grieved 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 still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and**

lord of all his household 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 of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, and you and your household and all that you have would be impoverished. Behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth which is speaking to you. Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and all that you have seen; and you must hurry and bring my father down here.**’ Then he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.” After a threefold expression of Joseph’s goodwill toward his siblings (weeping, explaining, and embracing), his brothers were finally able to talk to him. Throughout the course of Joseph’s life, he had discerned God’s providential control of the events of his life. Four times he stated that God, not his brothers, was behind what had happened (45:5, 7, 8, 9).

How was Joseph able to forgive his brothers?

- He saw his situation from an eternal perspective. He realized that even though his brothers intended to harm him...God was working through even those sinful intentions.
- He was prepared long in advance to forgive his brothers. And from the first moment he saw his brothers he was working to restore their relationship, not to avenge the wrong done to him.
- He received his brothers’ confession and repentance for their sins.

In these 15 verses, there are a number of important principles on how to forgive.²⁶

- 1) ***You can keep their identity secret and conceal what they did*** (45:1). Joseph excused all of his servants before he revealed his identity to his brothers (44:34). He did this because his desire was to move his entire family to Egypt. And when his family arrived he didn’t want everyone in Egypt to know what they had done. Joseph wanted his brothers to come to Egypt and be loved and admired by the Egyptians. He chose to protect them and guard their reputations. Since God forgives our sins and removes them “as far as the east is from the west” (Ps 103:12), why not protect those that you are in individual conflict with?
- 2) ***You set them free from fear*** (45:3-4). After identifying himself to his brothers and asking about his father, Joseph urged his brothers to come close to him. Husband, has your wife treated you badly in some way and you constantly remind her of this? Wife, has your husband let you down in some way and you won’t let him forget it? Remember, love keeps no records of wrong (1 Cor 13:5).
- 3) ***You want people who have hurt you to forgive themselves*** (45:5). One of the proofs that Joseph had forgiven his brothers was that he didn’t want them to be angry with themselves. That is the way God forgives. He forgives completely and unconditionally. When we choose not to forgive ourselves, we are exercising self-hatred. When we do so we not only hurt ourselves, we hurt others. The person who hasn’t forgiven himself or herself is an unhappy person—and is usually unable to forgive others. The irony of forgiveness is this: The degree to which we forgive others will often be the degree to which we forgive ourselves; the degree to which we forgive ourselves will often be the degree to which we forgive others. It is like the age-old question: which comes first—the chicken or the egg? It is sometimes almost impossible to say which comes first—forgiving others so you will be able to forgive yourself, or forgiving yourself so that you will be able to forgive others.²⁷

- 4) ***You let them save face*** (45:7-8). Joseph does not diminish what the brothers did (“you sold me into Egypt”), but he puts it into the right perspective: “God sent me ahead of you to save lives.” Nowhere in this chapter was the sin of his brothers minimized. Yet, Joseph allowed his brothers to have some dignity by focusing on God’s sovereignty.
- 5) ***You protect them from their greatest fear*** (45:9, 13). Instead of telling his brothers to tell their father how they sinned against Joseph, the gracious Joseph let his brothers deal with the issue between their father in their own way and on their own time. Undoubtedly, when they returned home, they had to explain to their father how Joseph ended up in Egypt in the first place. Hard as it might have been, such open confession was necessary for the healing of the family.²⁸
- 6) ***You maintain your forgiveness*** (50:18-21). After living in Egypt seventeen years Jacob died. Joseph’s brothers were now convinced that he had simply waited for the day of his father’s death to take vengeance on them. So they went to him and made up the story that their father sent word to Joseph saying, “Forgive your brothers for what they did.” The brothers then bowed before Joseph and offered themselves as his slaves. Joseph said, “I forgive you!” He then told them not to be afraid because he would provide for them and their children. Even 17 years later, Joseph did not retract his forgiveness.

In our country we have a law called the law of double jeopardy. We find this in the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution. Double jeopardy means you cannot be tried for the same crime twice. If you are declared innocent of a crime no one can try you for that crime again. If you have been sentenced and serve your time, the matter is closed. In like fashion, once you have been declared forgiven by God, you cannot be tried again. The verdict has been declared. The price has been paid. The matter is settled. And you and I need to remind ourselves of this every time our own conscience begins to accuse us again. As someone has written, “God has cast our sin into the sea and he has posted a sign that says, ‘No Fishing.’”²⁹

The thrust of this section is this: Will you be a family member, friend, or coworker like Joseph: firm, forbearing, and forgiving?³⁰ Will you see that God’s sovereignty allows you to forgive others for whatever sin they have committed against you?

Scene 6: The Brothers Return to Jacob (45:16-24). “Now when the news was heard in Pharaoh’s house that Joseph’s brothers had come, it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Say to your brothers, ‘Do this: load your beasts and go to the land of Canaan, and take your father and your households and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you will eat the fat of the land.’ Now you are ordered, ‘Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come. Do not concern yourselves with your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.’ Then the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them wagons according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. To each of them he gave changes of garments, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of garments. To his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and sustenance for his father on the journey. So he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, ‘Do not quarrel on the journey.’” Joseph’s admonition to his brothers not to quarrel on their journey (45:24) is a bit unclear. Probably he meant just that, not to become involved in arguing and recriminations over the past (cf. Prov 29:9). Since Joseph had forgiven them, they should forgive one another (cf. Matt 18:21-35).³¹ The brothers had already quarreled over their sin against Joseph in Gen 42:21-22. Joseph knew that as soon as these men left his presence they would be tempted to assign blame

to one another. Accusations would fly and a heated argument would follow. But it would be pointless since all had been forgiven. Their trip would be a happier one if they focused upon God's grace rather than their own guilt.

Scene 7: Jacob is Granted the Desire of his Heart (45:25-28). Our story concludes with these words: **“Then they went up from Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. They told him, saying, ‘Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.’ But he was stunned, for he did not believe them. When they told him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. Then Israel said, ‘It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.’”** Jacob was told Joseph was dead and he believed it. Now he is told Joseph is alive, and he doesn't believe it. However, God grants Jacob the desire of his heart (Ps 37:4). God is good to Jacob even though Jacob has been characterized by unbelief.

The only survivor of a shipwreck washed up on a small uninhabited island. He cried out to God to save him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a rough hut and put his few possessions in it. But then one day, after hunting for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. The worst had happened; he was stung with grief. Early the next day, though, a ship drew near the island and rescued him. “How did you know I was here?” he asked the crew. “We saw your smoke signal,” they replied. Though it may not seem so now, your present difficulty may be instrumental to your future happiness.³²

God wants us to remember that life is a jigsaw puzzle and we don't have all the pieces. But one day things will make more sense than they do now. But for now, we are to trust that our Father knows best.

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Notes

¹ Like Genesis 42, which it echoes, it consists of seven scenes arranged palistrophically with the central scene being the arrest of Joseph's brothers (Gen 44:1-13). Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, Vol. 2: WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1994), 418-19. Kaiser agrees and writes, "The most natural part of the structure to observe is the climax to a story. This is its denouement or peak, which usually serves as the focus of the story as well. Accordingly, the Joseph story rises to the high point when Joseph reveals who he is to his brothers in Genesis 43-45." Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Preaching and Teaching From the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 74.

² Ed Underwood, "God's Hand Is On The Rebel" (Genesis 42-45:15): *Nutshell Notes* 2/10/1991.

³ Ronald F. Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 262.

⁴ "God Almighty" (*El Shaddai*) is used in desperate situations (see Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11).

⁵ Jacob has no guarantee *El Shaddai* will do anything. His "if I am to be bereaved, bereaved I shall be" is the same Hebrew construction as Esther's "if I perish, I perish" (Est 4:16). See Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50*: NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 545.

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 503.

⁷ This is the first clear reference in the story to the theme of divine providence – that God works through the human actions to do His will. See NET Bible Notes.

⁸ The essence of this phrase would become well known and loved in benedictions and prayers of later years (see Num 6:25; Ps 67:1). Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis*, 263.

⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 557.

¹⁰ Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing*, 507.

¹¹ Bob Hallman, "The Cup Of Testing" (Genesis 44:1-34):

<http://www3.calvarychapel.com/kauai/teachings/genesis.html>.

¹² Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing*, 510.

¹³ Waltke translates the phrase "drank freely" literally "they drank and got drunk." Waltke, *Genesis*, 557.

¹⁴ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 425.

¹⁵ Thus, in the entirety of the Book of Genesis, Joseph's brothers acknowledge God on only three occasions and each of those occasions are crisis situations: 42:28—the brothers' fear of being caught with "stolen" money; 44:16 – Judah's fear of what the Egyptian official would do to Benjamin (and to the rest of the brothers) because of the "stolen" cup that belonged to the Egyptian official and the money that was found in Benjamin's sack; and 50:17—the brothers' fear that Joseph might take revenge on them, now that their father had died. Barry C. Davis, *Genesis* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Biblical Seminary unpublished class Notes, 2003).

¹⁶ Waltke, *Genesis*, 559.

¹⁷ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Genesis* (<http://www.sonlight.com/constable/notes/pdf/genesis.pdf>, 2005), 253.

¹⁸ Bill T. Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 158.

¹⁹ Constable writes, "Jacob had not changed; he still doted on his youngest son. However the brothers had changed; they now loved their father and Benjamin. Judah manifested concern for Jacob as well as Benjamin (v. 31). Rather than hating their father for favoring Joseph and then Benjamin, the brothers were now working for his welfare. The supreme proof of Judah's repentance was his willingness to trade places with Benjamin and remain in Egypt as a slave (vv. 33-34; cf. John 15:13). This is the first instance of human substitution in Scripture." Constable, *Notes on Genesis*, 254.

²⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 431.

²¹ Michael Eaton, *Preaching Through the Bible: Genesis 24-50* (Kent, England: Sovereign World, 1999), 103.

²² Waltke, *Genesis*, 567.

²³ Gene A. Getz, *Joseph: Finding God's Strength in Times of Trial* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1983), 142.

²⁴ The term "dismayed" or "terrified" (*NIJ*) is a term used of paralyzing fear as felt by those involved in war (Exod 15:15; Judg 20:41; 1 Sam 28:21; Ps 48:5). Waltke, *Genesis*, 563.

²⁵ It is worth noting that in 45:1, Joseph could not restrain himself because of his emotions, and in 45:3, his brothers could not speak because of their terror. Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988 [2002 ed.]), 672.

²⁶ R.T. Kendall, *All's Well that End's Well: The Life of Jacob* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 257-261.

²⁷ R.T. Kendall, *Total Forgiveness* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2002), 140-141.

²⁸ Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 674.

²⁹ Bruce Goettsche, “The Motivating Power of Guilt” (Genesis 43):

<http://www.unionchurch.com/archive/021300.html>.

³⁰ Underwood, “God’s Hand Is On The Rebel.”

³¹ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 430. The verb means “stir up.” Some understand the Hebrew verb *ragaz*, “to stir up” as a reference to quarreling (see Prov 29:9, where it has this connotation), but in Exod 15:14 and other passages it means “to fear.” This might refer to a fear of robbers, but more likely it is an assuring word that they need not be fearful about returning to Egypt. They might have thought that once Jacob was in Egypt, Joseph would take his revenge on them. See NET Bible Notes.

³² Bob Hallman, “God’s Advance Man” (Genesis 45:1-28):

<http://www3.calvarychapel.com/kauai/teachings/genesis.html>.