



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

*<sup>3</sup> Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.*

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>19</sup> “You are also directed to tell them, ‘Do this: Take some carts from Egypt for your children and your wives, and get your father and come.’ <sup>20</sup> Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.’”

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

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

Watch this [video about Bruce Murakami’s](#) story of forgiveness which appeared on Dateline NBC.<sup>1</sup>

How is such forgiveness and reconciliation possible? I talked with Bruce on Friday afternoon and he told me that his wife, who was killed in the accident, led him to the Lord early in their marriage. Is reconciliation a necessary part of the process of repentance and forgiveness or can I stop short at forgiveness? Is it reasonable to expect that we be reconciled with someone who has killed our spouse and children? Isn’t that going a little too far and asking too much?<sup>2</sup>

One could equally ask how Joseph could have been reconciled to his brothers who sold him into slavery. In one sense, having been sold into slavery was better than killing Joseph, or so thought Judah. But you could make the case that selling someone into slavery was more cruel than killing them since slavery would have almost certainly have meant a shortened life of great suffering. But Joseph did more than just help lead his brothers to repentance. Joseph did more than pardon his brothers for their offense. He also reconciled with them. In fact, his purpose for leading them to repentance was so that he could forgive them and be reconciled with them.

Our question for this morning is what is reconciliation? This is the third in a series, the first two being what is forgiveness and what is repentance. These three messages hang together. If you miss one or more of them, please read or listen to them online. You cannot truly understand one without the others. Here is the premise for the message—if you are not willing to reconcile with someone who has offended you, then you are not really forgiving them. Reconciliation is the end goal of all forgiveness. In fact, forgiveness does not have any meaning at all unless reconciliation is in view.

This can be understood easily in terms of our relationship with God. Before our conversion we were enemies of God. We were alienated from him and his wrath justly rested upon us. There was the complete absence of a relationship. But Christ’s atoning sacrifice brought about reconciliation, as Col. 1:21-22 describes. *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.*

Reconciliation is not just the absence of sin through forgiveness but the presence of a relationship. Reconciliation is the restoration of a broken relationship. The Lord does not say to us, “I forgive you, now get out of my sight! God reconciled us in order to restore the broken relationship with us. His reconciliation makes us sons and daughters of the King. This was Joseph’s goal from when he first recognized his brothers. His chief desire was to be reconciled with his brothers but he knew that could not happen without genuine repentance from them and genuine forgiveness on his part.

The usual interpretation of this chapter claims that Joseph was finished making his brothers suffer so he chose to end the charade and reveal himself, or that regardless of Joseph’s motives, he could no longer control himself and was more or less emotionally forced to reveal himself. That is a faulty and shortsighted understanding of this marvelous reunion. How much better is it to understand this whole drama as the outworking of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation?

Verse two tells a story unto itself—Joseph wept so loudly that everyone could hear him and told Pharaoh about it. This was the third time that Joseph cried and each time it happened it got more and more intense and finally erupted into this loud wailing. You can imagine that part of the weeping came from twenty two years of pent up emotions and from pure, unadulterated joy.

But the brothers were not nearly as joyful as Joseph. They were mute with terror. We can imagine the reason for their extreme fear. If they allowed themselves to believe that it really was Joseph, then they knew that they were as good as dead. If their little brother who they tried to kill had now become the second most powerful man in the world, surely he was just ready to crush them. We all know how a cat plays with a mouse before consuming it. At that moment the brothers must have felt like little tiny field mice about to be devoured by the giant cat.

Except for the tears. Why was Joseph crying? Enemies don’t cry before the kill. What Joseph did next is one of the most amazing displays of forgiveness and reconciliation you will ever witness. But first, let me remind you of the steps leading up to this moment.

1. Joseph dealt with his own anger and bitterness. He had forgotten “about his troubles and his father’s household” (Gen 41:51)
2. Joseph was willing to forgive his brothers as evidenced by his patience with them.
3. Joseph assisted in their genuine repentance by leading them through a time of testing (chapters 42-44)
  - The brothers recognized their sin “now we must give an accounting for his blood” (42:22) “God has uncovered your servants’ guilt” (44:16)
  - The brothers felt remorse for their sin “we saw how distressed he was” (42:21)
  - The brothers sought pardon for their sin “please let your servant remain here as my lord’s slave in place of the boy” (44:33)

Now in chapter 45 we see the final two steps.

4. Joseph forgave/pardoned his brothers
5. They all began the process of reconciliation

Most of chapter 45 is about Joseph trying to convince his brothers that he has indeed pardoned their guilt. Notice how lovingly and gentle he spoke with them.

*5—do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here*

*7—But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.*

*11—I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come*

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

*22—To each of them he gave new clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five sets of clothes.*

*24—Then he sent his brothers away, and as they were leaving he said to them, “Don’t quarrel on the way!”*

These are the actions and words of a man who has obviously worked through his personal pain. This is how someone behaves who is actively seeking reconciliation with those who sinned against him. In the midst of this amazing story of reconciliation we are also given a lesson in the theology of suffering. Joseph painted a picture of the intersection of human action and divine sovereignty. In pardoning them, Joseph in no way downplayed their sinful actions.

*3—“I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!*

*5—And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here,*

What the brothers did was evil. They acted of their own free will. No one forced them to sin. However, God was working in perfect sovereignty behind the scenes to accomplish his perfect plan and purposes.

*5—because it was to save lives that **God sent me** ahead of you.*

*7—But **God sent me** ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance*

*8—“So then, it was **not you** who sent me here, **but God**.*

*8—[**God**] **made me** father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.*

After reading this our first question should be—“OK then, how did Joseph get to Egypt? Did the brothers sell him into slavery or did God send him?” The answer is yes—both are equally true. His brothers performed an incredibly evil act when they sold him to the Ishmaelite traders but at the same time God literally sent Joseph to Egypt in order to save the nation of Israel from destruction. It is not enough to say that God took a bad circumstance and made it into something good. It’s not as if God were standing by idly watching the scene play out and he thought to himself, “Ya know, I heard there might be a famine in the land. If I can just nudge Judah so that he sells Joseph to the Ishmaelites, who just happen to be on their way to Egypt and who just happen to be passing by the brothers in the middle of the desert, maybe Potiphar’s servant will buy Joseph in the slave market and maybe Potiphar’s wife will try to seduce Joseph and he will be thrown into jail...” God created and controlled all of the circumstances in such a way that Joseph could say that God sent him to Egypt to save Israel. Joseph was sent in the same way that the prophet Jonah was sent to Nineveh or Paul the missionary was sent to the Gentile lands.

This kind of intersection of human actions and divine sovereignty are seen throughout Scripture. Another clear example is seen in 1 Kings 15:27-28.

*Baasha son of Ahijah of the house of Issachar plotted against him, and he struck him down at Gibbethon, a Philistine town, while Nadab and all Israel were besieging it. Baasha killed Nadab in the third year of Asa king of Judah and succeeded him as king.*

The writer is clear here—Baasha killed Nadab in a violent coup and took over the throne of Israel. But in the very next verse we read *Then the word of the LORD came to Jehu son of Hanani against Baasha: “I lifted you up from the dust and made you leader of my people Israel (1 Kings 16:1-2).* How did Baasha become king—did he get there by his own deceit and murder or did God “lift him up from the dust and make him king?” Both are equally true. Baasha sinned and acted freely but he did what God had planned would happen. We should not have struggle when divine sovereignty and human free will come together like this, as they certainly do all throughout the Joseph story. And remember, Joseph said all of this to his brothers in order to show them that he had forgiven them. He spoke tenderly to them, wept over them and assured them of God’s sovereignty as part of the process of reconciliation.

All forgiveness must have reconciliation as the end goal. There are two more things that need to be said about reconciliation. The first is that it is a process. Jacob died seventeen years after he moved to Egypt and in chapter 50 we see that the brothers were still working through their reconciliation. When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph



holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" (Gen 50:15) That's why I like this picture (above) because it seems to show some of the brothers embracing Joseph's forgiveness while others hold back. Why were they still so afraid of Joseph after so many years and so much genuine forgiveness shown to them? This may have been due in part to the arduous process of reconciliation. It takes time to rebuild relationships that have been severed and harmed as much as the one between Joseph and his brothers. But I think the reason the brothers were still afraid after all of those years is because they did not understand true forgiveness. Joseph did all of the right things toward them but I think they could not truly believe that sins as grievous as theirs could be forgiven so easily. They were convinced that Joseph's kindness toward them was nothing but a show for their father and severe vengeance would fall upon them after Jacob died.

Two weeks ago I mentioned the parable of the unmerciful servant who was forgiven a debt of ten thousand talents by the king but immediately went out and began to choke a man who owed him a paltry sum. Did he choke him from the front? Did he get behind him and put him into a choke hold? However he did it, it was a violent and angry act. Jesus told this parable so that we would be very alarmed by it. How could the man behave in such a way if he had just been forgiven an infinite debt? The answer is quite simple—you and I know that he was forgiven but he did not believe it. In the same way that Joseph's brothers could not believe that that Joseph had forgiven them, so the man did not believe the word of the king. He assumed that the king would eventually come looking for his money so he set about collecting every last dime he could to pay back the king.



I want to illustrate this parable with this small jar of corn. Does this look like it would be enough food to feed you for a whole day? It's not a lot, is it, but if you ground it up and made corn much or corn bread or a two tortilla's, it would keep you alive. This jar represents the amount of corn that was given to 100 settlers who had just arrived in the new world on the Mayflower. The food supply was so meager that each person was given five kernels of corn per day.

As a side note, it is sad but interesting to note that fourteen of the eighteen adult women died in the first year. Therefore, there were only four adult women at the first Thanksgiving. That is something to consider on this coming Thursday when the men are sitting around watching football while the women do all of the work. The first Thanksgiving was prepared mostly by men.

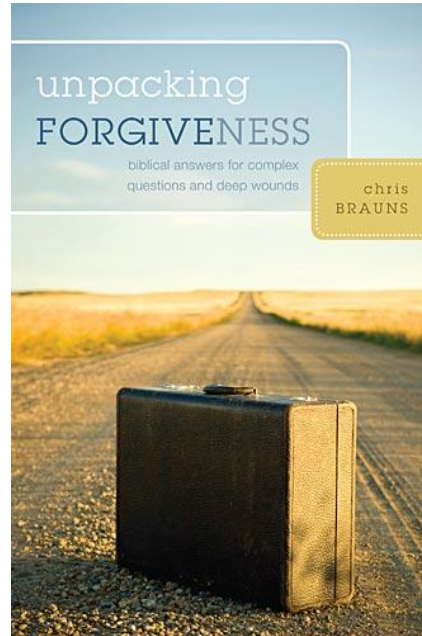


These five kernels of corn are how we sometimes offer forgiveness to others. The kernels of corn represent the amount of forgiveness we offer to others. We hold out the tiny sum and say to the one who offended us—“Here you are, I forgive you.” We offer this small sum when the forgiveness given to us through Christ is an infinite amount, represented by [this video of a combine](#). Like this corn which seems to have no end, the forgiveness and mercy of our Lord pours into our life without limit. If the person offering forgiveness does not understand it, then if they offer forgiveness at all, it will look like five small kernels worth. On the other hand, if the person being forgiven does understand, even if the offended person offers full forgiveness, it may be perceived as five kernels of forgiveness. If either of these things happens, the process of reconciliation will be prevented.

There are a few other instances when reconciliation is not possible.

1. The person who offended you is dead. Some of you may struggle with feelings of bitterness toward someone who is no longer living. Obviously, you cannot be reconciled to this person and now that you understand Biblical forgiveness you realize you cannot even forgive the person. But you can and must work through your feelings of bitterness toward them.
2. The person who offended you is not genuinely repentant and seeking pardon. By now I hope that it is clear that forgiveness cannot happen without genuine repentance and if there is no transaction of forgiveness, there cannot be any reconciliation.
3. The person who offended you, though genuinely repentant and seeking pardon, is in a position to continue to cause you harm. This is a hard category to describe, but there can be cases such as if the victim is a small child, when reconciliation could very well cause more harm to the victimized person. That being said, I would not want us to use this as an

excuse for not reconciling with others because in the vast majority of cases, reconciliation is Biblically commanded and should be worked towards. In the book, *Unpacking Forgiveness*, Pastor Chris Brauns tells the story of a ten year old who was abused by a man who shot him in the head and left him for dead. The boy whose name was Chris, was left scarred and blind in one eye but later in life he came face to face with the man who had done this to him. The evil man lay dying in a nursing home and Chris went to visit him. He confessed to the crime and asked forgiveness from Chris. Chris granted forgiveness and later led the man to Christ during one of his many visits. The story of forgiveness and reconciliation was so amazing that it somehow made it onto the news at CNN. The dying man told the CNN reporter that Chris was the best friend he had ever had.<sup>3</sup>



In closing, let me remind you of the steps in this process.

For the one offended

1. Deal with your anger and bitterness towards the offender
2. Be willing to forgive the offender
3. Assist the offender to come to repentance
4. Forgive/pardon the offender
5. Begin the process of reconciliation

For the offender

1. Recognize your sin
2. Be remorseful for your sin
3. Seek pardon for your sin

I have asked Tony Baxter to share how repentance and forgiveness has been a vital part of his life recently. ([Listen to the audio here.](#))

Rich Maurer

November 21, 2010

---

<sup>a</sup> Or *save you as a great band of survivors*

<sup>b</sup> That is, about 7 1/2 pounds (about 3.5 kilograms)

<sup>1</sup> The date was November 19, 1988 when Bruce Murakami lost his wife and eleven year old daughter in a car accident. The driver who killed them was a teenager named Justin Cabezas. Bruce fought for four years until a verdict of manslaughter was given to Justin. At the trial for Justin's sentencing, Bruce stood before the judge and asked for leniency. In lieu of prison time, Bruce asked if Justin could work with him to educate teens about safe driving. You see, Bruce had forgiven Justin for killing his wife and daughter. Bruce started an organization called [Safe Teen Driver](#) and gives presentations to schools and churches throughout the country with Justin Cabezas at his side.

<sup>2</sup> ([In this video](#), Bruce describes that he was able to forgive because he knew that the Bible commanded him to forgive.)



---

<sup>3</sup> Chris Brauns, *Unpacking Forgiveness*, Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, ©2008, p. 51-59.