

Main Idea: In Genesis 45, we see God at work through a minister of reconciliation, namely Joseph. We also learn two vital qualities that God intends for us to exhibit as we engage in the ministry of reconciliation.

The Main Characters in the Story:

- A. We see Joseph (1-15).
  - B. We see Pharaoh (16-24).
  - C. We see Jacob (25-28).
- I. A minister of reconciliation is compassionate towards people.  
Notice what Joseph did towards his brothers:
- A. He took the initiative to get close to them (4).
  - B. He helped them come to grips with their sin and guilt (4).
  - C. He talked with them (5-8).
  - D. He took steps to meet practical needs.
    - 1. He met physical needs (9-13, 21-23).
    - 2. He met emotional needs (14-15).
- II. A minister of reconciliation is confident in God.  
Notice what Joseph knew about God:
- A. God is sovereign (5, 7, 8, 9).
  - B. God is sufficient (16-28).
    - 1. He showed it through Pharaoh (16-20).
    - 2. He shared it through Joseph (21-24).
    - 3. He showered it on Jacob (25-28).

Make It Personal: Two questions to consider...

- 1. What does God want to do in me today?
- 2. What does God want to do through me this week?

*Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:16-6:2*

The truth is, if God has reconciled a person to Himself, He then intends for that person to engage in the ministry of reconciliation. That means if we are in Christ, we are ministers of reconciliation.

But what does it look like to be a minister of reconciliation? The Lord gives us a vivid picture in today's text. In Genesis 45, we see the Lord using Joseph to reconcile a family fractured by sin, so that He might eventually, through that family, work to reconcile to Himself a world fractured by sin.

In today's account we also see two vital qualities that God intends for us to exhibit as we engage in the privileged and sometimes difficult ministry of reconciliation.

So do you know anybody who is not right with God or with another person?

We're about to see what it takes to help them.

The story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50 is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. It's incredible to watch how this man handled severe adversity. While a teenager, his brothers spitefully sold him into slavery. Later while doing his job a seductive woman framed him and forced him to spend time in prison.

Yet he never threw in the towel. Joseph is certainly a man, by God's grace, worthy of our attention.

Yet what made him such a noteworthy person? If you think about it, Joseph never accomplished any of the things we normally associate with biblical greatness.<sup>2</sup> As Chuck

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<sup>\*\*\*</sup>Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> This message is adapted from two series at WBC in 1992 and 2002.

Swindoll observes, he never slew a giant. He never walked on water. He never healed a blind man. He never wrote a verse of Scripture. He never survived a lion's den. In fact, he never performed a single miracle. He was an ordinary person that grew up in what we call today a dysfunctional family.

So what made Joseph a great person? Of course, ultimately, it's not *what* but *who*. God made Joseph a great person. God was with Joseph. God worked through Joseph.

But to what end? God worked through Joseph to bring about reconciliation, first for his family, and then through that family and the Messiah who would come from that family, for the world.

So in Genesis 45, we see two qualities of a truly great person. They are also two vital qualities that God intends for us to exhibit as we engage in the ministry of reconciliation. Let's keep in mind, by featuring Joseph the text actually teaches us about *God* and how He works with people. More about that at the end of this message.

### The Main Characters in the Story:

In chapter 45 the spotlight moves across three main characters...

**A. We see Joseph (1-15).** The eleventh son of Jacob, the grandson of Isaac, and the great-grandson of Abraham, the family with whom God established a special covenant relationship (Gen 12:1-3).

**B. We see Pharaoh (16-24).** The ruler of Egypt. Joseph's boss.

**C. We see Jacob (25-28).** A dad whose heart has been broken for twenty-five years, broken because his cherished son is gone.

But he's about to meet this son again, because this son is a minister of reconciliation whom God used and from whom we can learn much.

### I. A minister of reconciliation is compassionate towards people.

Let's join the drama, already in progress. Joseph and his eleven brothers are together. The brothers still don't know it's Joseph. He tested them in chapter 44 by putting his silver cup in Benjamin's satchel. He announced that the penalty for his "crime" would be that Benjamin would become a slave, while the others could go free.

That was the reality test. Joseph wanted to see if his brothers had changed. Would they dump Benjamin like they dumped him 25 years earlier? Had they learned to love anybody besides themselves?

By their response, Joseph saw that God had changed their hearts. Judah spoke up and volunteered, "Please sir, if you do that my father will die. I can't bear the thought. Make me your slave instead of my brother Benjamin. Let him go free."

Judah is a different man. And Joseph can't contain himself.

Verse 1, "Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, 'Have everyone leave my presence!' So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers."

Why could Joseph not control himself? I think it's because he has now seen evidence of his brothers' repentance and change of heart. They had learned their lesson

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<sup>2</sup> Observation by C. Swindoll

from their sin two decades before. So Joseph commanded everyone to leave the room, except for his eleven brothers.

Verse 2, “And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh’s household heard about it.”

Real men don't cry, right? Only wimps show emotion, right?

Friends, there's not a person in this room who is more of a man than Joseph. Joseph knew how to face danger head on. He wasn't afraid to tackle huge obstacles. But he was not ashamed to weep either. In fact, this is the third of five times Joseph wept over his brothers. And it wasn't a few muffled sobs either. What does verse 2 say? The Egyptians in the other room could hear his cries.

Joseph was a man of great compassion. It would be well for us to learn to weep at times. There are things that ought to break our hearts.

I received something in the mail from Cedarville University this week that caught my eye. “Parker’s Story,” it said. And I read the following:

I came to Cedarville less than a year after watching my father die from ALS. I arrived arrogant and immature and full of anger. I thought crying or showing emotion was a sign of weakness, so I held it in.

At Cedarville, I saw strong men who were so passionate about God’s Word and so burdened for a lost world, and they weren’t afraid to show their emotions. I was surrounded by professors who immediately started pouring into my life. They challenged and encouraged me. I had professors show me it was okay to grieve, to be angry, to be honest with God. And I finally felt the freedom to grieve.

When I was going through a good time, my professors celebrated with me. When I was going through a difficult time, they cried with me. Through everything, they pointed me to God’s Word as the source of truth.<sup>3</sup>

At this point, the brothers are a basket case, trembling in their sandals. They have no idea what's gotten a hold of this Egyptian governor.

Then came the real shocker. Remember he'd been speaking to them in Egyptian through a translator. But now the translator is gone and they hear him say something in their native Hebrew tongue.

Verse 3—“Ani Yosaph!” “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?”

The brothers couldn't believe their ears. They were speechless. They were terrified. This must be some bizarre joke. But then they heard a shocking statement that only their long-lost brother could make.

Verse 4, “Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Come close to me.’ When they had done so, he said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!’”

It was Joseph! And he hadn't forgotten what they had done to him. Surely the cat and mouse game was over. He'd played with them long enough. Now he will call in the Egyptian bouncers and make them pay for the unthinkable pain they had caused him. He had every right.

But he didn't. He did not retaliate. He didn't do to them as they'd done to him. We see not one trace of vengeance coming out of Joseph's heart.

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<sup>3</sup> Story told in CU mailing, March 2017; Parker McGoldrick is a senior biblical studies major at Cedarville.

And this is why we so highly esteem Joseph. He didn't do anything miraculous, but then again, he most certainly did.

Actually, God did it, and as we'll see in a moment, even Joseph will say, the glory belongs to God alone!

It seems so unnatural, doesn't it? There's something within us that cries out, "The person who wronged me must pay."

But that voice isn't God's voice. When God is real to us, as He was to Joseph, He produces a very different aspiration. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faithfulness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23)."

He enables us to be compassionate towards people, and that includes those who have wronged us. And it's not just talking about compassion either.

Look at Joseph. Watch what he did next towards the very brothers who had wronged him—four compassionate actions.

**A. He took the initiative to get close to them (4).** Verse 4 again, "Come close to me," he told them.

If there's going to be reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers, if the barrier is going to come down, someone must take the first step. And Joseph took it.

And remember, Joseph wasn't the one who created the barrier. But it didn't matter. He knew that God wanted that wall to come down. So he made himself vulnerable and invited his brothers into his life.

Remember what Jesus did with Peter after he'd denied him? He took the initiative to restore him. So must we. Ephesians 4:32 says, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ has forgiven you."

**B. He helped them come to grips with their sin and guilt (4).** Notice the end of verse 4, "I am... *the one you sold into Egypt.*"

Why did Joseph bring up the past? Was he rubbing it in? No. He'd already forgiven his brothers in his heart. He brought up the past now for their own good. He'd come to grips with the past, by God's help. Now he wants his brothers to do the same.

Jesus would later teach, "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him (Luke 17:3)." He would also say, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over (Matt 18:15)."

**C. He talked with them (5-8).** We mustn't minimize this step. One of the hardest things to do with those who have wronged us is this. Talk with them.

It's the opposite of the silent treatment. Ever given that to anybody? Ephesians 4:26 says, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry." If there's a problem, we must talk it out and come up with a God-honoring solution.

Like Joseph did. He talked with his brothers. Listen to what he told them in verses 5-8, "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>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."

It's a simple thing, but so vital if reconciliation is to occur. Joseph *talked* with them. He chose to communicate with the very ones who had hurt him.

But not like we often do in Appalachia, where we talk, yes, but about surfacey things, as if nothing ever happened to put us at odds. We're good at peace-faking rather than peace-making.

Again, we need to see what Joseph did, by God's help. He addressed the sin problem. *You sold me into Egypt.* He said it twice, in verse 4 and again in verse 5. But he's not holding it against them. He's urging them to do what he has done, to look at the past from God's perspective.

Yes, you sinned against me. *But God.* But God is going to use this whole thing to do something amazing, to *save lives.*

In essence, by talking to them, Joseph let his brothers know he had released them from their past. And he wants them to get out of the past, because God has something to accomplish with them in the present and future.

**D. He took steps to meet practical needs.** Compassion, when its real, is practical. It's not just nice talk, but overcoming evil with good (Rom 12:21).

Watch Joseph.

1. *He met physical needs (9-13, 21-23).* Verses 9-13, "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."

Again, you don't see Joseph being aloof with his brothers. And he didn't put them in the proverbial dog house. Instead, he saw God in this situation and chose to deal with his brothers as God does with us.

"God sends the rain on the just and the unjust," Jesus said (Matt 5:46)."

So Joseph proposed to meet his brothers' physical needs. Later, we'll see that he took concrete steps to meet those needs (in verses 21-23).

But Joseph didn't stop with meeting physical needs.

2. *He met emotional needs (14-15).* Verses 14-15, "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."

He *kissed* them. That is significant. How could Joseph kiss the very men that had violated and robbed him of the prime of his life? Only by God's help, as we'll see.

But he did. He ministered a healing touch to those who had sinned against him.

And how did his deeds of compassion affect his brothers? Notice the end of verse 15 again, "Afterward, his brothers talked with him."

That simple statement speaks volumes. It shows us that the brothers' deep-seated hatred and jealousy are gone. Joseph diffused their hatred with his compassion.

A minister of reconciliation is compassionate towards people, including those, and shall we say, *particularly* those who have sinned against us.

Does this describe you and me, brothers and sisters? If the Lord has reconciled us to Himself, He then calls us to engage in the ministry of reconciliation with the people He places in our lives.

He wants us to start with those closest to us, our family members, our neighbors, the people we go to school with, and work with, and then beyond. We are to urge them to be reconciled to God through faith in Christ.

But it's tough to urge someone to be reconciled to God if we are in need of reconciliation with them. "Blessed are the peacemakers," said Jesus (Matt 5:8)." And that starts right here. With compassion.

You say, "I really want to be a more effective minister of reconciliation, like Joseph. So how can I become more compassionate towards people, especially those who have wronged me? It seems so unnatural."

The answer is connected to a second quality in Joseph's life. A minister of reconciliation is compassionate towards people. And...

## II. A minister of reconciliation is confident in God.

We've said it several times before, and we'll say it again. Joseph is not the prime character in Genesis 37-50. "This is the account of Jacob," says 37:2. But it's really not so much a story about Jacob, nor Joseph, but about their God.

The reason Joseph could do what we struggle to do is because he knew and took to heart two important attributes of God. Indeed, what he knew about God generated confidence in God.

**A. God is sovereign (5, 7, 8, 9).** Look again at Joseph's striking comment in verse 5, "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."

God sent me. You sold me. You bartered with the Midianite slave traders. You tried to get rid of me. But God sent me. God used your wicked deed to accomplish His good purpose.

Joseph knew that God is sovereign. He refers to God's control several more times. In verse 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." In verse 8, "So then, it was not you who sent me here, *but God*. He made me a father to Pharaoh." And verse 9, "*God has made me* lord of all Egypt."

Joseph's assurance of God's sovereignty is what enabled him to respond with compassion towards his brothers. He told them, God sent me to Egypt. God has promoted me in Egypt. God is in control of my life. You didn't send me here. God did.

But Joseph helps us keep God's sovereignty in its biblical balance. He didn't excuse his brothers' sin, and indeed pointed it out to them. But he also acknowledged the truth that nothing can happen to us without coming through the wise hands of God.

Joseph was the kind of person that prompted those around him to look at situations from God's perspective. A minister of reconciliation is confident in God and His sovereignty.

"So yes, you sinned. But what is God up to in this?"

I've met with dozens and dozens and dozens of people (no exaggeration) who came into my study seeking help because of problems generated by sin, either their own sin, or sin committed against them, or typically, a combination. And those who experienced life-transforming hope are the ones who put their weight into this truth.

God is sovereign. They believed Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." And they believed 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."

Now think about this. Twenty-five years have passed since the crime the brothers committed against Joseph in Genesis 37. Now finally we're told WHY God allowed the tragedy. It didn't really start making sense until 25 years later, but all along God has been using this family tragedy to accomplish something very good for this family and beyond.

I read an interesting article entitled, "The Joseph Syndrome," that said this:<sup>4</sup>

Joseph had no idea why he was born into a home with as much strife and hostility as his, why his father favored him, why God permitted the painful events in his life. The end of the story helps answer those questions: He was sent to Egypt to save his family from starvation. He unknowingly set the stage for the exodus of Moses and Israel by inviting Jacob and his brothers to live in Egypt with him. He was ultimately used to preserve the family lineage through which the Messiah would one day come.

Even at the end of his life, I suspect there were unanswered questions. He was able to say, as he surveyed the painful wreckage of his past relationships with his brothers, 'You meant this for evil, but God meant it for good.' But why did reconciliation have to take so long? Why so many years of separation? Joseph probably went to his grave with some of the mysteries still unanswered.

Brothers and sisters, this is reality. Joseph had to wait two decades to find out *why*. Some of us wait a lifetime, and still not find out why.

But God knows why. He is sovereign. Which means He is superintending every detail in this universe to accomplish His good plan He decreed before He ever created the first molecule.

Yet there's more. There's something else about God that generates confidence in the heart of a minister of reconciliation. In fact, if you don't know it, God's sovereignty might feel sort of cruel, as in, "If God is in control, why doesn't He do something?"

We need to know more than God is sovereign. We need to know this.

**B. God is sufficient (16-28).** We see the Lord express His sufficiency in three ways in verses 16-28.

1. *He showed it through Pharaoh (16-20).* Notice verses 16-20, "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, '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

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<sup>4</sup> *Leadership Journal*, Fall 92, p. 130.

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.”

Wow! Talk about a turn of events! First, for Joseph, from the prison to the palace. And now for the rest of the chosen family. Mighty Pharaoh hears about the brothers’ reunion, authorizes an entourage of gifts to be sent to Joseph’s father, and declares that Egypt’s best now belongs to this family.

Talk about sufficiency! God gives His people what they need when they need it. You say, “Wait a minute. Pharaoh did this. I don’t see any mention of God.”

No, you don’t see His name in the story, but He is writing it. Just like He is your story and mine. Sometimes He sends manna—that’s a miracle. Sometimes He gives you good health so you can work and buy your bread—not a miracle, but a certainly an expression of His sufficiency. And sometimes He takes you into a season of *not* good health, so He can manifest His sufficiency in other ways.

God is sufficient. First, He showed it through Pharaoh.

2. *He shared it through Joseph (21-24)*. Verses 21-23, “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 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.”

Just moments ago the brothers were petrified, thinking they were losing Benjamin who was sentenced to become a slave. Now they’re seeing the brother they sold into slavery lavishing them with gifts and saving them from the famine. Again, no mention of God in this paragraph. But there’s no explanation of it *except God*.

I chuckle at what Joseph told his brothers as they were leaving. Verse 24, “Then he sent his brothers away, and as they were leaving he said to them, ‘Don’t quarrel on the way!’”

Don’t resort to old tactics, brothers! Don’t start pointing fingers at each other. Just go get my dad and get back here quickly!

So God shared His sufficiency through Joseph, with the food, and now even this practical piece of counsel. But He’s not done yet.

3. *He showered it on Jacob (25-28)*. “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.’”

Again, no mention of God, but His sufficiency is all over this scene. Do you think Jacob offered any prayers of thanks when he went to bed that night?

My friend, God is sovereign. And God is sufficient. That’s why we can put our absolute confidence in Him.

In Genesis we see the sovereign and sufficient One using a minister of reconciliation to turn a tragedy into salvation.<sup>5</sup> Here it was for a family. At the cross He did it for the world.

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<sup>5</sup> He does the same throughout the Bible.<sup>5</sup>



At the cross God worked through *the* minister of reconciliation, His own Son who entered the world as a descendant of this chosen family. He too like Joseph was despised and rejected. And He too responded with the offer of forgiveness and salvation.

What response does the sovereign and sufficient God want from us? He wants us to *trust* Him. Like Joseph did.

Jeremiah 17:7, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him [KJV, "whose hope the LORD is"]."

Can God still use tragedy to accomplish His purposes? He does it all the time.

A few years ago I was impacted at the OARBC conference by a testimony from a pastor from the Cleveland area. At the time Pastor Lynn Rogers had shepherded there forty years. He and his wife had just endured an incredible experience. It had to do with their son. It's a modern day prodigal son story. But in this case, the son died of AIDS.

I'd like to read the story as told by that son, Daniel Rogers, entitled "How Aids Saved My Life."

[read testimony]

We've seen two traits of a minister of reconciliation. A minister of reconciliation is compassionate towards others and confident in God.

#### Make It Personal: Two questions to consider...

1. *What does God want to do in me today?* In order to be a minister of reconciliation, we must first experience the saving power of *The Reconciler*, Jesus Christ. For we are sinners, all of us, yet we are reconciled to God the moment we put our trust in Jesus Christ.

Have you put your trust in Christ? If not, that's what needs to happen *in you* today.

But it doesn't stop there. *Are you trusting in Christ my fellow Christian?* If you're fearful, make a study of His attributes. Meditate on His sovereignty and sufficiency.

2. *What does God want to do through me this week?* Who has He placed in your life that needs the ministry of reconciliation? What expression of compassion does He want to express through you towards that person this week? Ask Him. And watch what He does!