

## The Heart of Reconciliation

**Big Idea:** Reconciliation is at the heart of who God is.

**Purpose:** to encourage people to seek restoration in broken relationships

**Passage:** Genesis 42-44

### Introduction

*“Family wounds are slow to heal.”* Those are the opening words of the chapter of Max Lucado’s book *You’ll Get Through This* that addresses our passage for today in the life of Joseph. And it’s true. In fact, they are not only slow to heal, but it’s also very possible for us to not experience healing from our family wounds if we don’t walk through a process to help bring about that healing.

This is particularly true of those wounds that we experience in childhood—abandonment, abuse, bullying, neglect, favoritism by a parent, broken families where a parent isn’t around. These kinds of things have a lasting effect on us. I’m willing to bet that many of you have experienced some kind of a wound from a family member, and likely something from your childhood.

Psychologically, we take those events in our lives and they become **internal objects** that affect the way we relate to others or react in certain circumstances. It’s because there’s something within us that hasn’t been reconciled. So we try to get the rest of the world around us to reconcile to that internal object—to satisfy what is unreconciled within us. **Typically, we end up repeating the things that we experienced**—not always in the exact same way, but in a root way.

You are probably not tuning in for a lesson in psychology, and that’s good, because I’m not qualified to give one. **But what I find interesting about that information is that unreconciled things in our lives—whether internal things or broken relationships—end up causing problems and grief in our lives.** Our families so often end up being at the heart of that.

Which is really interesting when we look at the story of Joseph—*because that guy’s family is messed up*. Jacob, his dad, married one woman so that later he could marry her sister, the woman he really wanted. When Jacob’s wives were in competition with one another to bear the most children, he slept with his wives’ servants to appease them by having more kids. Eventually, his favorite wife died giving birth to Benjamin, one of his favorite sons. And Jacob certainly played favorites with his kids, so that it was really obvious who he ac-

tually loved—mostly Joseph. **And when there was conflict between Joseph and his brothers, Jacob didn't handle the situation.**

Conflict turned into hatred; hatred gave birth to an evil plan; and Joseph's brother's conspired against him, first to kill him, and then after some more thought, to instead sell him for silver to become a slave in a foreign land. He was just 17 at the time—still developing as a person; just a boy.

Talk about trauma; talk about broken relationships; talk about internal and external things being unreconciled. That kind of hurt and pain stays with a person. It affects them in permanent ways. We don't need to get into the psychology of this family situation, but, in order for us to enter into our passage today, we at least need to understand that the emotional turmoil was real.

We're in our series ***You'll Get Through This***, which goes through the life of Joseph in the book of Genesis, and is connected with our current Big Read, also called *You'll Get Through This*, by Max Lucado.

Today we're covering a large chunk of Scripture, Genesis 42-44. We're going to start off by reading the first part of Genesis 42, and then I'm going to continue, summarizing what happens through the rest of this section.

## **Scripture**

*When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you just keep looking at each other?" <sup>2</sup> He continued, "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die."*

*<sup>3</sup> Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. <sup>4</sup> But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. <sup>5</sup> So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for there was famine in the land of Canaan also.*

*<sup>6</sup> Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. <sup>7</sup> As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he asked.*

*"From the land of Canaan," they replied, "to buy food."*

<sup>8</sup> Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. <sup>9</sup> Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, “You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”

<sup>10</sup> “No, my lord,” they answered. “Your servants have come to buy food. <sup>11</sup> We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.”

<sup>12</sup> “No!” he said to them. “You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”

<sup>13</sup> But they replied, “Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more.”

<sup>14</sup> Joseph said to them, “It is just as I told you: You are spies! <sup>15</sup> And this is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. <sup>16</sup> Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!”

<sup>17</sup> And he put them all in custody for three days. (Genesis 42:1-17)

## **The Rest of the Story**

- Instead of sending one brother back to the land of Canaan, Joseph sends all but one to go bring Benjamin back, keeping Simeon as a prisoner
- The brothers recognize that this may well be punishment for what they did to Joseph
- Joseph becomes overwhelmed with emotion as he deals with this situation, but he also returns the silver that his brothers had brought to buy grain
- The brothers return to their father Jacob who just has pity on himself saying “Everything is against me!” He refuses to send Benjamin, so no one returns to Egypt...
- Until they run out of food again, and then Judah finally convinces Jacob to let Benjamin go down to Egypt. They take extra provisions & money
- They arrive and Joseph is overwhelmed with emotion again and takes them all to his house for a meal

- He frees them to go back to Canaan, but then sets a trap by falsely accusing Benjamin of stealing so that Benjamin will have to stay in Egypt as a prisoner
- You can imagine Jacob's response when his sons return without his precious Benjamin

## Broken Relationships

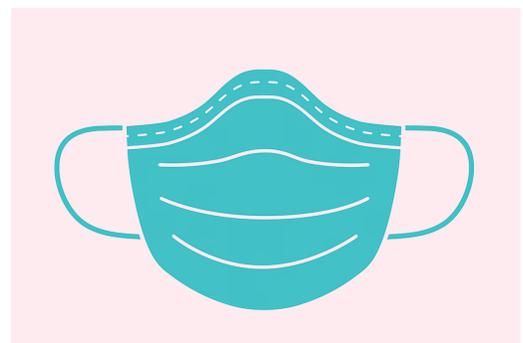
Other than in the Psalms, it's not often that the Bible gives us a picture of someone's emotional turmoil. Usually it glosses over those kinds of things, but here we see it in Joseph. He's crying—multiple times in this story it says he cries. He's feeling the weight of this moment—seeing his brothers, hearing them talk about him, and his father, and Benjamin. And then he tests them and puts them in situations that cause them anxiety and fear. He starts off quite harsh—it says that he, *“pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them.”* (Genesis 42:7) And he came up with a pretty harsh scenario where he was going to keep all but one of them a prisoner, but then he vacillates, and on the third day he says, “I fear God,” and he softens a little toward them.

You get a sense that he's wrestling with himself. These are severely broken relationships. This has been the story since the beginning of Genesis. **Adam and Eve go from being intimate partners who rule together over God's creation to become those who have to cover up around each other; to hide parts of themselves from the other.** And their problems—their brokenness—is bred into their offspring. One son (Cain) kills another (Abel): hatred within a family. **From there on out, all of the episodes that follow depict broken relationship after broken relationship; and Joseph's story is a swirl of them.**

The same holds true for today. Just as Adam and Eve cover themselves, and just as Joseph hides who he is from his brothers, we hide parts of ourselves today, right?

We do, though, experience so many of the same things today. Broken relationships; unreconciled tensions, internally, externally. **It**

**seems like it's pretty hard to be a human and not have some kind of broken relationship—to not have some unreconciled spaces in our lives.** We see it in our society, we experience it individually.



I know I experience it in my family. I'm going to tell you a few personal stories from my family today, and you might feel tempted to look down on some of my family members, but there's no use pretending any of us is perfect. So please have grace as you listen.

My parents were divorced when I was pretty young, maybe four or five. It was a bitter, bitter divorce, complete with custody battles and court cases and words that I can't say at church and manipulation of kids. I remember feeling that from both of my parents. When the legal battles ended, my parents completely stopped talking to each other, and my dad refused to see us kids anymore.

Several years went by, and I was at the mall with my mom and sister. My mom and sister were fighting, and the fight reached a boiling point. And my mom suddenly said, "That's it, I'm taking you to your dad's." We all walked quietly back to the car. We hadn't seen our father in years. I think my sister and I were both just in shock of what was about to happen.

We drove straight to my dad's house. I can still picture the moment of pulling up that day. While I played with my step brothers, dad and my mom negotiated leaving my sister there. Once things were figured out, my mom and I got in the car and drove off and left my sister there. My mom told me that, somewhere in that conversation, my dad had said, "Don't expect me to start seeing Michael again." It was several more years before the next time that I saw him.

That kind of rejection from a parent sticks with a child—it sticks with a person into adulthood. **It not only breaks the relationship between father and son, but it breaks the way a person relates to himself, to God, to others.**

Now, my dad has his own story, his own circumstances, his own brokenness. **He's a part of what we're all a part of. It's what I contribute to the relationship around me. It's likely what you contribute to the relationships around you.** It started with Adam and Eve and it's been carried through to today, and we see it keenly in Joseph's story—broken relationships that are in need of reconciliation.

At this moment in the story, as Joseph is concealing himself from his brothers, wrestling through his emotions and even his actions, we're all waiting to see if he is going to hold on to his bitterness. **Is he going to hate his brothers like they hated him? Is he going to have revenge on them?** He's surely got the power to do so!

How about for you and me? Are we going to hold on to that bitterness? Are we going to let our hearts be filled with hate? I know *hate* is a strong word. We try to avoid it in our house. Our kids call it the “H” word. **But that’s really what forms in our hearts when we hold onto bitterness in our broken relationships.** It’s a harmful thing; but not in the way we want it to be.

Here’s a cartoon for you.

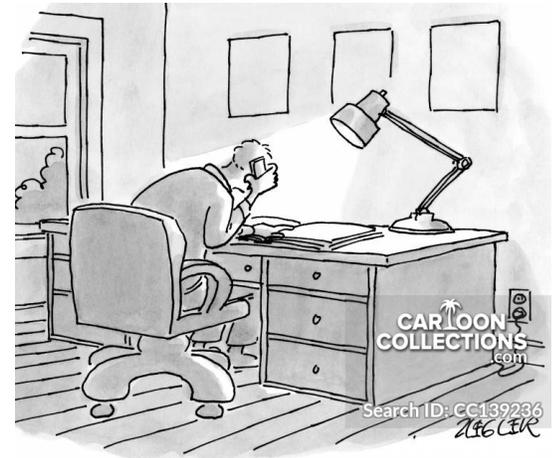
**WHEN WE HOLD ON TO BITTERNESS AND HATRED, THE PERSON WE HURT THE MOST IS OURSELVES.** We hope the other person is bothered by it, but it almost always affects us more than it does the other.

That’s the game that the devil plays: one that we so often fall into. Ephesians 4 says, ‘In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. (Ephesians 4:26-27) Don’t give him an opportunity. Don’t let him take advantage, because that’s where he’ll do it—it’s one of His primary schemes—**THE DEVIL IS OUT TO BREAK RELATIONSHIPS.**

### Reconciliation

God, on the other hand—**HE MOVED HEAVEN AND EARTH TO HEAL BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS.** As soon as the original break happened between Adam and Eve, God put a plan in motion to bring reconciliation. **RECONCILIATION IS AT THE HEART OF WHO GOD IS.** Some people see reconciliation as *the central theme* that ties the whole story of the Scripture together. **This is the constant movement of God: working out His plan of reconciliation, which we are to live out as well.** In the Sermon on the Mount, some of Jesus’ most quintessential teachings, He said, *“If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”* (Matthew 5:23-24)

The problem is that reconciliation isn’t easy! You probably already know that. It’s not easy to heal wounded relationships. That’s why we see in this passage Joseph going back and forth in how he’s treating his brothers, kind of one step forward and two steps back. **It isn’t quick or easy. RECONCILIATION IS**



*“Oh, not much. Just sitting here sifting through an old scrapbook of past injustices and imagined slights.”*

**A PROCESS, BOTH INTERNALLY AND RELATIONALLY.** It takes time and effort to work through it.

The next time that I saw my dad was on my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. He came into Safeway, where I was working at the time, to bring me a birthday card. I had to look at him for a moment. *Wait...is that my dad?* We talked for a bit and said we would keep in touch. And for a few years we did. We'd talk on birthdays and holidays, and generally just get to know each other a bit. Then there was another falling out. My sister was getting married and there was a conflict between her and my dad's wife. My dad didn't come to the wedding, and that was followed by more years of no contact. One step forward, two steps back.

Look, we can talk about the importance of reconciliation and the difficulties of it all day—I think you get it—but eventually we actually have to do it!

**You've got to make some movement toward it; you can't passively wait for it to happen.** I think ultimately, in order to work through reconciliation, there are a few key elements:

To find reconciliation, we must:

- Address the hurts that we've experienced
- Recognize how we've hurt others
- Offer and accept forgiveness

Now let me lay out for you the perfect roadmap on reconciliation from the story of Joseph. I'm just kidding. It's not there. There are very few really great human examples in the Bible. Joseph is a pretty good guy, but he's not perfect. And ultimately, this passage isn't trying to teach us **how** to reconcile.

I think we can kind of see that Joseph's trying to deal with the hurt that he's experienced. There are all the times that we see Joseph's emotions. From this point on, there are seven times in the story where Joseph cries or is trying to hold back his tears.

There's some indication that Joseph's brothers recognize the pain that they caused when they say, "*Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us,*" (Genesis 42:21), but I don't know if that counts. I think they're mostly just afraid.

**What we do see eventually is Joseph offering forgiveness to his brothers.** He says, "*I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! 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.”* (Genesis 45:4-5). It was a process to get there for him, but he got to a point where he could forgive them, even to the point of saying, “don’t be angry with yourselves.”

This is where Joseph is an example for us. He’s offering the kind of undeserved forgiveness that God offers us in Christ. In the book of Colossians it says, “*Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*” (Colossians 3:13)

Now Joseph is forgiving people who abused him. *But please recognize that if you are in an abusive relationship, patterns of forgiveness are not the right way.* There are circumstances for reconciliation and there are circumstances for protecting yourself.

Eventually, my dad came back around again. There were grandkids in the picture, and he wanted to be a part of that. He spoke to my sister and me individually and apologized to each of us for not being present in our lives. We forgave him and our relationships have grown stronger and stronger over the years. I think my childhood—and not just this experience, but others as well—still affect who I am, but there’s reconciliation there. And there’s joy and healing in being together.

## **Judah and Jesus**

I’ve highlighted all of these troubles with Joseph’s family, the broken relationships that are there, the need for reconciliation in those relationships, but that’s not really the focus of the passage. The author isn’t really trying to teach us about our broken relationships and how we reconcile interpersonally—that’s why there isn’t a step-by-step process there for us. **THE PASSAGE HAS MUCH MORE TO DO WITH WHO GOD IS AND WHAT HE IS WORKING OUT.** And what we see of God in this passage is that He is working out reconciliation.

Remember, **RECONCILIATION IS AT THE HEART OF WHO GOD IS. Once broken relationships became the *en vogue* thing amongst His human creation, He began putting a plan into place to bring about reconciliation.** And not just an individual reconciliation. Colossians 1 says, “*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*” (Colossians 1:19-20).

## God's working on a major reconciliation project, and it actually shows up in this passage.

In fact, the whole Joseph story is moving toward this reconciliation from God. There is this really intricate structural feature to the story that pinpoints the events of Genesis 43. The structure is called a *chiasm*, and it works like this. There are these episodes through the Joseph story that are related by theme or language. The related episodes start on the two ends of the story and work their way in to the middle of the story.

So, at the beginning and the end of the story, there is a repeated timespan of 17 years. Joseph lives 17 years under the protection of Jacob's house, and then Jacob lives 17 years under the protection of Joseph's house.

Moving in a little bit on each end of the story, Joseph is enslaved to an Egyptian, and then later Joseph enslaves all Egypt.

Moving in a little further, there are repeated episodes of the brothers going down to Egypt, repeated episodes of the brothers bowing down to Joseph, and repeated episodes of Jacob being

- Joseph lives 17 under Jacob (Gen. 37)
- Joseph is enslaved to an Egyptian (Gen. 39)
- The brothers go to Egypt without Benjamin (Gen. 42a)
- The brothers bow down to Joseph (Gen. 42b)
- Jacob is deprived of children (Gen. 42c)
- ➡ JUDAH BEARS THE BLAME (GEN. 43a)
- Jacob is deprived of children (Gen. 43b)
- The brothers bow down to Joseph (Gen. 43c)
- The brothers go to Egypt with Benjamin (Gen. 43d)
- Joseph enslaves all Egypt (Gen. 47)
- Jacob lives 17 years under Joseph (Gen. 47)

deprived of children and agonizing over Benjamin.

There are many more details to all of this, but I mostly just want you to see that there is an intentional structure to the whole story that finds its pinnacle in the first part of chapter 43 where Judah offers to Jacob to bear the blame if anything happens to his precious son, Benjamin. It says, *"I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life."* (Genesis 43:9)

Judah actually plays a unique role throughout the story. It's his idea in Genesis 37 that saves Joseph's life. It's his birth line that is very oddly preserved in Genesis 38. It's his willingness to take responsibility in Genesis 43 that brings Benjamin down to Egypt. **And, at the end, when Jacob is blessing his sons in**

**Genesis 49, it's of Judah that he says,** “...*your father's sons will bow down to you.*” (Genesis 49:8). *Wait, I thought everyone was bowing down to Joseph...* Well, in the story, yes, but the whole structure of it is pointing to the fact that someone from the line of Judah is going to be very important, and that everyone will bow down to him. And for those of you who are a little more familiar with the Bible, you can probably guess that that someone is going to be the Messiah—the promised reconciler of God. The one who will reconcile all things to himself. **THE ONE WHO WILL RECONCILE YOU TO GOD.** The whole work of Genesis is pointing forward toward that.

**RECONCILIATION IS AT THE HEART OF WHO GOD IS,** and it's woven throughout the story of Scripture. Not just in Joseph being reconciled to his brothers, but in God healing our broken relationship with him. He did everything for reconciliation.

In the book of Romans, it reads, “*For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*” (Romans 5:10-11)

**OUR RECONCILIATION STARTS WITH JESUS.** As we experience that reconciliation, it paves the way for us to be reconciled with one another. If you haven't experienced that reconciliation through Jesus, you can. God wants it. He wants you. He wants to be reconciled to you.

One more family story for you. My family has never been very affectionate with each other. Growing up, we didn't say things like “I love you” and it was pretty rare, and even a little awkward when we would hug each other. After I experienced the love of God in my life, I wanted to share that with my family. I started saying “I love you” regularly to them and giving them hugs when I saw them. Honestly, it was a bit uncomfortable at first. It took time, but it's become a regular thing in our family. **It's a step toward each other because God first stepped toward us.**

## **Conclusion**

Maybe you need to step toward someone today. Where are the broken relationships in your life? Where is reconciliation needed? **RECONCILIATION IS AT THE HEART OF WHO GOD IS.** Let God's heart for reconciliation shape your heart and affect your relationships.