

From Blame to Brownies

Genesis 45:1–15 • Matthew 15:10–28

Gen. 45:1 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. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

Gen. 45:3 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.

Gen. 45:4 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! ⁵ 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. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. 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.

Gen. 45:8 "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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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.'

Gen. 45:12 "You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. ¹³ Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly."

Gen. 45:14 Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

The story is told that one day, Boudreaux was out fishing when he came back in with a boat load of fish. The game warden was watching and came over. He said, "Boudreaux, how did you catch all those fish?" Boudreaux said, "Come on and I'll show you." They both went out again until Boudreaux said, "This is the spot." Then he pulled out a stick of dynamite and lit it. The warden started hollering, "Boudreaux, you can't do that! You can't fish with dynamite! What are you thinking?" Just then Boudreaux threw the dynamite to the warden who caught it. Boudreaux said to the warden, "Are you going to sit there a-hollerin'...or are you gonna fish?"¹ There are definitely times in

¹www.sermoncentral.com. Contributed by Mike Richardson of New Life Church.

our lives when explosive situations fall into our laps and we have to figure out what we're going to do with them. That's one of the things I love about our Bible passages for today: in both of them, how these people face these explosive situations can offer some hints as to how we can deal with our own explosive situations too. But today we'll focus on mostly on Joseph.

In our Old Testament lesson, Joseph is facing the very people who almost killed him, and who did sell him into slavery...and they are his brothers! Talk about explosive situations! The thing that makes it doubly explosive is that Joseph holds the number two position in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. He can truly repay his brothers for their cruelty, because they are completely in his power. So what should Joseph do? Amy Biehl's parents faced a similar situation. In 1993, Amy Biehl died a violent death. She was a 26-year-old, Fulbright scholar who had gone to South Africa to help register black voters for their first free election. Even though she was seeking to help the people of South Africa, as she was driving one day, she was dragged out of her car, and brutally killed by a mob committed to violence as the way to overthrow the apartheid government. Soon afterward, Amy's parents—Linda and Peter Biehl—quit their jobs and moved from their Orange County, California home to South Africa...not to seek revenge, but to start a foundation in Amy's name. Today, two of her killers work for the foundation. They call Mrs. Biehl, "Makhulu," or grandmother, because of the way she treats them. She says, "Forgiving is looking at ourselves and saying, 'I don't want to go through life feeling hateful and revengeful, because that's not going to do me any good.' We took Amy's lead. We did what we felt she would want."² That's what reconciliation looks like. More than forgiving, reconciliation holds out the hope of a restored relationship. Joseph chooses this path too. He comes off his throne, and calls them close. He says, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life." And in Genesis chapter 50:20, Joseph adds, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." In modern South Africa or in ancient Egypt, forgiveness is the path that leads to life.

What amazes me about both our passages for today is that they look past the barricades to find the grace God intends. If grace is the undeserved blessing of God, then neither the Canaanite woman nor the brothers have any claim on grace from Jesus or Joseph. And when it comes, grace changes everything. Forgiveness pays back good for evil and points us to the very heart of God, the very path of life. It's why God sent Jesus to be with us, to show us that path. It's natural to want to get even when someone hurts us. Jesus endured the taunting and cruelty of the cross, and prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It's natural to hold a grudge. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that

²Bella English, "Why do they forgive us?", *Boston Globe*, 23 April 2003. Reposted with permission at <http://www.mindfully.org/Reform/2003/Amy-Biehl-Foundation23apr03.htm>.

you may be children of your Father in heaven...If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be mature, therefore, as your heavenly Father is mature.”

Forgiveness and its close partner reconciliation are not optional pieces of following Jesus Christ—they are essential to life with God. When an explosive situation lands in our laps, the world (like Boudreaux) says, “Are you going to holler or fish?” But that’s really a false choice because it suggests we have to *either* hang onto the explosiveness (a sure way to self-destruction) *or* throw it out there to destroy someone or something else. For us as Christians, we can place the explosive situation in God’s hands, to seek God’s wisdom and grace. How can even this be used to God’s glory? Instead of an explosion of destructive power, God will give us the explosive power of forgiveness and grace. Instead of destroying, forgiveness transforms lives and relationships, to restore what was broken, and to bring hope and light into dark places. When an explosive situation is thrown into our laps, how will we know what to do? How will we know what to say? Where can we find the strength to do what seems so hard? Paul writes, “But if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...”³ When your next explosive situation falls in your lap, will you let it destroy you with anger and hate? Will you throw it back at the folks who have hurt you? Or will you hand it to God, trusting the love that will come from Christ, the wisdom that flows from God, and the power that fills us from the Holy Spirit. We have One God who longs to bring healing to the world through our touch.

³Paul, *The Bible*, 2 Corinthians 5:17–19