



THE LUTHERAN CENTER  
FOR FAITH, VALUES, AND COMMUNITY

with generous support from Lilly Endowment Inc.

## The Nourishing Vocation Project Near and Now:

*Reframing Regret: From Hindsight to Insight – Joseph and His  
Brothers*

### Warm-up Question

*When was the most recent time that you have received forgiveness?*



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### Discussion Questions

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What do you feel looking at this image?
3. What stories from your own life does this image bring to mind?
4. What stories of the world does this image bring to mind?

## God Intended It For Good

Read [Genesis 50:15-21](#)

### Bible Story Reflection

As with other family relationships in the Hebrew Bible, the relationship between Joseph and his brothers is a bit strained and tense. Earlier in Genesis, Jacob was thrown into a pit by his brothers and taken into slavery. And why? Over jealousy and a coat of many colors? Things look pretty bleak for Joseph for a while as he is enslaved and later thrown in jail, but his ability to interpret dreams gets him favor from Pharaoh, and he moves up in the world. Not too shabby for someone thrown in a pit by his siblings!

Joseph's situation definitely improved, but I can't imagine that he was totally over that broken relationship with his brothers. It was a traumatic thing that happened to him, and humans hold trauma for a long time. His brothers caused him a lot of pain, and I don't think any of us could say that what they did wasn't terrible. So, imagine what it would have felt like to see family that betrayed you like that suddenly appear in your life again.

The first interaction that they had since the pit incident happens a few chapters before our text today, and while Joseph instantly recognizes them, the brothers don't realize that it is him. Joseph is anonymous for a few more chapters, but eventually chooses to reveal his identity to his brothers, which seemed unimaginable to them. And then, we get to the part of the story that we just heard today, where Joseph forgives his brothers. They were instructed by their father, who was dying, to return to Joseph and apologize. We hear of their fear as they wonder if Joseph still held a grudge against them. And it made sense for them to be afraid! After what they had done to their brother, the idea that he would forgive them probably seemed pretty unimaginable.

I can imagine that moment: the moment that Joseph and his brothers were standing there as they asked for forgiveness must have been a heavy moment. They were all feeling all of the feelings as they waited to see how Joseph would respond to them. It reminds me of a moment from the popular Broadway musical, Hamilton. In one of the songs called "It's Quiet Uptown," the main character, Alexander, returns to his wife as they deal with the grief of their son's death. Alexander had caused his wife an immense amount of pain earlier in the musical as he had an affair with another woman. So here they are, standing in this heavy moment that has suddenly become so much heavier. There is a line that the ensemble sings in the background: "They are trying to do the unimaginable." And it's true. The two characters are in a moment that they never imagined that they would be in: addressing the harm that one did to another while holding the loss of someone so dear to them. It is unimaginable. It is unimaginable to Joseph and his brothers that they are in the same room as they remember the time at the pit and wait to see what their relationship will look like.

Finally, towards the end of the song from Hamilton, the ensemble sings: "Forgiveness. Can you imagine?" Alexander and his wife imagine what forgiveness might look like in



their broken relationship. Joseph imagines what forgiveness might look like with his brothers. Is it even possible? Forgiveness. Can you imagine?

When thinking about forgiveness, it is sometimes tempting to think that it simply involves forgetting that the things that caused harm ever happened, but I don't think that is really what it is. After all, when there is a need for forgiveness, someone has been hurt by the actions of another, and it is neither wise, nor respectful to ignore that pain. That pain was felt, and it was real, regardless of whether a person meant to cause it or not.

In the case of this story, Joseph's brothers inflicted severe pain upon him. They didn't kill him, but they caused him to become enslaved, something that no one should ever have to go through. Sure, he is now in a position of power in Egypt, but he can never forget the pain he experienced, nor should he be expected to. He does not deny the fact that they caused harm, but instead of responding with hate, Joseph responds with love. It would have been easy for Joseph to slip into vengeance and inflict harm on the brothers in response to his own pain, but instead he responds with care, opening a path for reconciliation down the road. This reconciliation takes time and they still had to work to repair the trust that was broken and the pain that was felt.

Reconciliation and reparations take time, more than the time frame of this story, but this was the first step. The love is still extended and it provides a possibility of a better life. Reconciliation is not easy and requires work and time, but by extending more love instead of hatred, a door is opened towards the possibility of a better life.

### Discussion Questions

1. In what ways do you identify with Joseph?
2. In what ways do you identify with Joseph's brothers?
3. How do you think Joseph would tell his own story?
4. How do you think Joseph's brothers would tell their own story?
5. Why do you think it is difficult to forgive?
6. Think about a time when you had to ask for forgiveness. How did it go? What made it go well or what do you feel like you could have done better?
7. Have you ever experienced a time when you were forgiven? How did it feel?
8. What can we learn from this interaction between Joseph and his brothers? How might you apply what you learned in your own life?
9. After this portion of Genesis, it jumps ahead to Joseph's last days. What do you think happened in the time in between?

### Activity Suggestions

Think about someone who you may have fallen out of touch with. Write them a letter or reach out to reconnect.



Pick a character from the story and write a monologue. What were they thinking and feeling as the events in this story occurred?

Look through family pictures that you have. If possible, share them with a family member and see what memories they have as well.

### **Prayer Concerns**

Those struggling with family divisions, those that have been hurt, and those that struggle to forgive

### **Closing Prayer**

Bind up the wounds of my mistakes, O God, and help me learn from them. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

