#1. WHEN TENSIONS BOIL OVER

Today, we're diving into a powerful narrative—one that spans four chapters but feels like a lifetime of raw emotions and fractured relationships. But this isn't just any story; it's a true account that lays bare the painful rifts in Jacob's family, with division, favoritism, and the weight of unresolved conflicts at its core.

As we explore this gripping tale, we'll confront heavy themes—years of simmering resentment, the choking grip of guilt, and the challenging choice to show undeserved grace and the difficult path toward forgiveness. It's a journey so profound that, honestly, it might even bring tears to your eyes. But before we delve into the heart of this account, let's pause for a moment and reflect on a couple of key questions.

First and foremost, we must ask what was going through Joseph's mind during those years after he rose to such a powerful position in Egypt? More than two decades have passed since he was first betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery. Imagine standing now, at the pinnacle of success, yet at a personal level, feeling the void of unresolved family ties and bitter heartache over being betrayed by one's own kin. This brings us to our second question: Why didn't Joseph rush back to his father, to ease his anguish and to whisper those long-awaited words—"I'm alive"? Surely, he must have known how deeply his father was hurting.

While these questions linger heavily, they capture the tension and raw emotion of this ancient narrative—one shaped by the brokenness caused by sin. Reflecting on them can help us understand how God's grace in Christ can mend what seems irreparably broken in our lives and relationships.

#2. SETTING THINGS UP

Read Genesis 42.

- ✞ Joseph accused the brothers of being spies. How did this "set up" what Joseph was trying to accomplish?

- ✞ Why does Joseph insist they must bring Benjamin to Egypt? What effect does imprisoning the brothers have upon them? What is revealed in the conversation that ensues in verses 21-23? Why does Joseph imprison Simeon and not the oldest, Ruben?

- ✞ Why do you think Joseph returns their money in the grain sacks and what might this teach us about showing grace even to those who have hurt us?

#3. Read Genesis 43

- ✞ This is the first time we have seen something positive and good about the character of Judah. Why are his words to his father more noble than Reuben's words at the end of the previous chapter?

- ✞ Have you ever been in a situation where you needed to seek forgiveness or make amends with someone? What emotions did you experience? Was the process easy and quickly accomplished or long and drawn out?

#4. Read Genesis 44:1 – 45:3

- ✞ Joseph's reasons for placing the silver cup in Benjamin's sack might initially appear random, but how does this calculated act serve as a revealing test of his brothers' loyalty and character? In what ways does Joseph's decision to frame Benjamin illuminate the transformation of his brothers since their earlier betrayal, and what does it ultimately reveal about their willingness to protect and support their younger brother in a time of crisis? Additionally, how does this situation contribute to the overarching themes of forgiveness and reconciliation within the narrative?

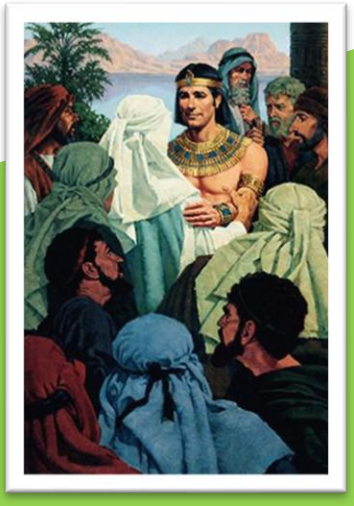
- ✞ There was no way out. "Go home. Leave Benjamin here," Joseph said. Judah responded with one of the most beautiful requests in Scripture. What parts of Judah's response do you think Joseph was looking for? What part do you think moved him the most?

#5. Read Genesis 45:4-28

- ✞ Why did Joseph call the brother's attention to the fact that God had caused everything to happen as it did?

- ✞ In verses 7 and 11, Joseph looked at the long-range blessing God brought about by sending him down to Egypt. What blessing was that?

- ✞ When bad things happen, people sometimes say, "God merely allowed this to happen." How should we view the relationship between the bad things that come into our lives and God?



SESSION 17 Answer Key:

Question 1:
The fact that he did not immediately go up to Canaan to punish his brothers makes it immediately clear that he never held a grudge against his brothers and that all the trouble he put them through was motivated by something else.

The key thought is this: Joseph knew what he had to do for his family, that is, for the kingdom of God. Imagine what might have happened to the family if their father had discovered what the brothers had done, or if the brothers had discovered that Joseph was alive and ruled Egypt. Unless there was this preparation, the family would have been devastated. Using his wisdom, Joseph prepared for what was to happen.

God's work of reconciling the world to Himself was not hasty. "In the fullness of time, God sent His son…" Galatians 4:4. God's grace in Christ and forgiveness in our relationships also might take time to work themselves out in the "for good" way that God promises in Romans 8:28.

Question 2:

Read Genesis 42

- First, it put the brothers on the defensive. After all, Egypt did have a lot to protect so it would makes sense that Joseph was cautions with strangers. Especially 10 grown men traveling together. Second, it gave Joseph a pretext to interrogate the brothers. The brothers use their family relationship as a defense. What would be the likelihood that 10 spies were sons of the same man? And to further the authenticity, they elaborate how the youngest is still at home and one brother is dead—if 10 brothers is remarkable, they were once 12! But this then gives Joseph opportunity to question them about their father, about Benjamin and to probe their consciences about what they did to Joseph.

- Joseph obviously wants to see his brother, who was only a toddler when he last saw him. The imprisonment is perhaps a chance to give them a taste of their own medicine because they imprisoned him in the well. It also gives Joseph a chance to cool down and think. The imprisonment wears on the brother's consciences and almost immediately they start confessing amongst themselves their sin and regret over what they did to Joseph. They assume that God is punishing them. Joseph, of course, can hear all of this and it cuts him to the heart. Whatever anger and bitterness and revenge he was harboring begins to melt and he begins to desire reconciliation and peace and forgiveness. Repentance and forgiveness go hand-in-hand in this way. Simeon is held captive perhaps because Joseph learns that Ruben was innocent and tried to stop his brothers. Simeon is the next oldest. It was no doubt also very hard for Joseph to hear them describe his pleas and begging them when he was in the pit.

- This obviously heightens the tension and weighs heavy on their conscience. Ironically, what would normally be perceived as a great blessing—free grain—their guilty consciences can only perceive it as divine retribution. Joseph also has faith and certainty in God's word revealed through Pharaoh's dreams. Joseph knows that the famine will last another 6 years. The brothers will be back, one way or the other. Joseph can afford to be generous and gracious toward them. Consider how this echoes the certainty we have in knowing God's will toward us in Christ. Through our baptism into Christ, we have been made heirs of heaven—children of God. We know how the story ends for us. Because of God's grace toward us in Christ. We can afford to be kind and generous even toward those who have done evil towards us.

Question 3:

Read Genesis 43

- Reuben wrongly promised the lives of his two sons as collateral in his pledge. Judah held himself accountable and simply said that if he did not return Benjamin safely, he would bear the blame before his father all his life.

- Forgiveness is a journey, and overcoming deep emotional wounds can take a lifetime. By embracing the teachings of the gospel and expressing Christ's love, even towards those who have wronged us, we can begin to heal and embody the forgiveness we have received. This allows us to share that gift of forgiveness with the world around us.

Question 4:

Read Genesis 44

- Joseph sees that the same brothers who had once ruthlessly thrown him into a pit to die because of petty jealousy, and callously sold him into slavery to earn a little silver, are now men who are willing to put their lives on the line to save their brother Benjamin. Here we see Joseph repeatedly giving his brothers second chances to confess and prove themselves repentant. Peter once asked Jesus (Mattthew 18:22), "how many times must we forgive?" Jesus said, 7x77.

- Joseph wanted to see if the brothers cared for their father, which they could only do if they cared for Benjamin. All the passages in which Judah expressed concern for his father would have moved Joseph. Considering the fact that Joseph broke off Judah's speech where he did, perhaps the final sentence moved him the most. It was right during the seventh time Judah spoke the word father.

Question 5:

Read Genesis 45:4-28

- This would keep the brothers from thinking that Joseph might harbor a grudge. It was the most compelling way Joseph could have comforted his brothers and let them know that he, Joseph, was at peace with what had happened. Everything was in God's hands.

- Joseph certainly was aware that the Lord was using him to save the world from starvation. Yet the main blessing Joseph thanked God for was saving his chosen people from starvation and, therefore, keeping alive his promise of a Savior. Everything revolved around God fulfilling his promise to save the world—not merely from hunger but from spiritual death.

- Joseph said, "God sent me before you." He repeated that thought several times. It was a bad thing his brothers had done, and his life had been filled with hardship for many years. But he could now see the tremendous good God had brought about. In a sense he "blamed" God for the course his life had taken, but his blame was really credit to the wise and loving God who works in all things for the good of his people.