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Like Joseph's Brothers

By Teresa Hampton

Every time I read anew the story of Joseph, I am swept up with the drama, emotion, and forgiveness that define his life. Subtle nuances seem to pop out of scripture. Why didn't I see that?

Joseph was loved so dearly by his father, but despised by his brothers (Genesis 39-45). In an act of jealousy, hatred, and betrayal, they threw him into a pit and shortly sold him to traveling merchants. The brothers chose a dark path that brought great, unimaginable sorrow to their father.

Joseph arrived in Egypt as a slave, and for years dealt with the ups and downs of life, putting it mildly. At last he rose to power and prepared the land for years of famine. His brothers journeyed to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph recognized them. Perhaps the memories of their cruelty flashed through his mind. They did not recognize him. Joseph had to find out if they had changed, if their hearts were different. He gave them grain but kept one of the brothers, asking that they bring back their youngest brother to verify the truthfulness of their words. The brothers' minds went back to their unmerciful treatment of Joseph. Was this payback? Guilt is painful and unrelenting.

On the second trip the brothers brought Benjamin. After a time, Joseph sent them back with more grain, and tested them by having his cup placed in Benjamin's pack. Not long after they left, Benjamin was arrested, and all of them came before the ruler again.

Joseph saw in their eyes guilt, wretchedness, and turmoil. And he heard in their words a determination not to go down that road again. They simply would not allow their father to be wounded with the loss of Benjamin. Judah even offered to take Benjamin's place. Despite having suffered their rejection, Joseph extended mercy and grace to his brothers. They certainly had done nothing to earn his favor. In fact, the opposite was true. But Joseph chose the path of forgiveness. He saw the ultimate good that God was accomplishing through his pain and suffering.

What did I fail to see? Jesus, God's only begotten Son, was despised and hated by his brethren, the Jews. They plotted against Him and executed Him. However, unlike Joseph, from the beginning Jesus saw the ultimate good God was accomplishing through His suffering (John 3:14-15).

What else did I fail to see? There are times when we are like Joseph's brothers, too. We think, say, and do things that bring our Father great loss and sorrow. As brothers and sisters, we reject the Father's Son. But despite the rejection and pain we've inflicted on the Him, Jesus loves us and wants to see change in our hearts. Godly sorrow compels us to confess our sins, then lay down our guilt, wretchedness, and turmoil at His feet, and resolve to live rightly (2 Cor. 7:10). When we do so, praise God, He forgives us!

Today's Verse: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9).

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