

Longing for Relationship

December 12, 2021

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Genesis 45:1-2

Session Outline

1. The Brothers' Condition (Genesis 45:1-3)
2. The Brothers' Hope (Genesis 45:4-8)
3. The Brothers' Assurance (Genesis 45:9-11)

Theological Theme

People are made to be in relationship with God and one another. However, sin has disrupted both. Because of sin, our relationship with God is broken and our relationship with our neighbor is dysfunctional. Jesus came to restore both.



Leader Guide

Longing for Relationship

Introduction

- ❓ What are some common ideas about heaven?
- ❓ Which of those ideas are backed up by what the Bible says, and which are not?
- ❓ Why do you think the idea of heaven interests people in general? What does that tell us about life here and now?

Everyone longs for a better place. Everyone longs for heaven. There is so much going wrong with the here and now that we are driven to imagine the sweet by and by, whatever that may look like according to the individual person. Though the details may differ, the idea is the same: a place of rest, peace, joy, love, and security. Everyone on earth has been touched by disease, loneliness, war, distress, and death. We long to be rid of these curses. Heaven is where that happens. One of the greatest longings of humans is for deep and true relationships. Many people look forward to heaven because there will no longer be dysfunctional, broken relationships.

Session Summary


One of the ways to understand how an Old Testament narrative helps us live today is by placing ourselves in the story. We can take on the role of the character and then think about how his or her situation relates to ours. This can be a helpful way to study Scripture when done thoughtfully and carefully. There is a danger here, though. This can be perilous if we force the text to say something that isn't there. And we can also make the mistake of putting on the wrong coat of many colors, as it were. In the passage we are studying today, there is a gloriously clear picture of the gospel, but this picture gets obscured if we don't take care.

If we look at this account as a picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who are we in this story? Whose situation is most akin to our own? Who can we most relate to? We may be tempted to make ourselves the hero of this story. It's easy to put ourselves in the shoes of Joseph. But this is not the case. We can certainly learn from Joseph's life and seek to imitate his characteristics, but if we are honest with ourselves, we are far from the

righteous example of Joseph. We are most like Joseph's brothers. That may be a hard pill to swallow for some. No doubt, it's bitter. But it's true. It's never an easy, comfortable thing when we must confront our own sinfulness and fess up to our own need.

Joseph's father played favorites. His brothers mistreated him. Broken relationships and family dysfunction led to a life of separation and resentment. Jacob, Joseph's brothers, and Joseph all desired restored relationship. They had a deep longing for a restored relationship with one another. Ultimately, they longed for a restored relationship with God. Like Joseph's story, Jesus came to break down the dividing wall of hostility. In Christ, believers can be reconciled to God and build deep relationships with others. Furthermore, our longing for relationship and community will ultimately be realized when He comes again to set all things right.

1. The Brothers' Condition (Genesis 45:1-3)

 Skim chapters 37–44 of Genesis. What had brought about the situation in which Joseph's brothers found themselves in today's passage?

Joseph's brothers join an infamous list of folks whose wretchedness was placed on full display in the Scriptures. Like Cain, they hated their brother. And, though they did not kill him, several of them wanted to. Some may even say what they did to him was worse than murder. They sold their own brother as a slave to some traders on their way to Egypt.

It's true they may have had reason to be frustrated with him since Jacob, their father, openly favored him. It also didn't help that Joseph's dreams featured his brothers bowing down before him. It may have been wiser for him to keep those to himself. His brothers were not pleased to hear of his dreams. But surely selling Joseph into slavery was too much. The punishment hardly fit the crime.

Leading up to today's passage, the brothers had sinned against Joseph by hating him, envying him, seeking to destroy him, and ultimately selling him into slavery. Not only that, but then they sinned against their father by deceiving him when they told him that they found Joseph's cloak drenched in blood. They led Jacob to believe a wild beast had torn him to pieces.

Joseph's brothers were selfish, jealous, lying, deceptive, hateful, and murderous men. They were guilty and should have been condemned. They arrived to Joseph deserving to be condemned. They were bankrupt

Joseph Revealed

Joseph was overwhelmed by Judah's words. Not wishing to lose his dignity before his Egyptian attendants, he ordered everyone but his brothers out of the room. Joseph then released more than twenty years of pent-up emotions, weeping so loudly that the Egyptians outside the room heard it. Joseph's revelation of his true identity—undoubtedly spoken in Hebrew, not Egyptian—so terrified his brothers that they could not answer his question about his father's well-being. Violating protocol, Joseph ordered the brothers to come near to him so he could speak to them more intimately, this time explicitly identifying himself.

and desperate. They could not help themselves and deserved no help from Joseph. They were totally at his mercy, which they did not deserve.




Thinking of this account through the lens of the gospel, how does the condition of Joseph's brothers match all of our conditions?

Joseph's brothers were bad, but so are all people. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There are none who do good. None are righteous. (See Romans 3.) The fact of the matter is that all people are born in iniquity and are bent toward transgression in their very natures. As soon as a child is able to rebel against God, they do. Because of this sinfulness, people are spiritually dead and separated from God.

When a person walks by the light of their own fire, their sins against God pile higher and higher. Their constant transgression of God's law shows just how radical their own corruption is. Their continual leaning away from God reveals just how total their depravity is. What hope do they possibly have after offending such a great God to such a great degree?


Those who have not been born again are just as sin-soaked and guilty as Joseph's brothers. They are without hope and will not receive mercy. But if you are in Christ, then you have received mercy from God on the basis of the shed blood of Christ. Like Joseph's brothers, all those who come to Christ are guilty and their relationship with God has been shattered. They come with no bargaining chips and no power. Their only hope is mercy and forgiveness.

We must understand that God stood ready to allow His wrath to fall on us as sinners. God's justice would surely be satisfied for our sins by eternal condemnation and judgment. We stood guilty before a holy God and our sentence of death was ready to be handed down. That is, until Christ appeared to intercede. The Mediator, Christ Jesus, bore our sin. As Scripture says, "And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses. He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him" (Colossians 2:13-15). Though our condition was dire, we are now blessed beyond measure. Not only has our record of sin been canceled, but we have been adopted into God's family and enjoy all the rights and privileges of sons and daughters (John 1:12).

-  Application: If you are a Christian, how are you driven to worship of God as you recall your position before Him outside of Christ? If you have not yet trusted Christ to pay for your sins, how is God calling you to respond?

2. The Brothers' Hope (Genesis 45:4-8)

The brothers were guilty of terrible crimes against their own flesh and blood. Not only were they destitute physically because of the famine in the land, but they were destitute spiritually as well.

-  What was surprising about Joseph's response to his brothers in these verses? How might you have expected him to respond?

It is safe to say these men were very near being hopeless. They thought that there was a glimmer of hope because they had heard that there was some grain in Egypt with which they could fill their empty stomachs (Genesis 43:1-2). But this was but a temporal and empty hope. They actually had no hope at all. Think about it. First, they had no crops, no food, no storehouse, and no real prospects. Second, they had no merit. They were spiritually bankrupt. There was nothing desirable in them that would make Joseph want to help them. They were sinners who had sold their own brother into slavery. They arrived to Joseph with absolutely nothing to offer, bankrupt offenders. Joseph had every reason to condemn them and zero reason to aid them.

When Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, he also revealed certain things about his beliefs. These beliefs had been forged in the fires of loss and grief, of great disappointment and anger. This was a moment of redemption. The prideful young man was gone, and what remained was a humble leader who recognized God's good purposes in even the worst of times.

Ultimately, Joseph did not blame his brothers for the hardship and persecution he endured. Instead, He recognized God as sovereign through his circumstances (45:8), orchestrating each situation and change to achieve His ultimate purposes—through slavery, prisons, famine, and all.

-  How has Christ met us similarly in our great hopelessness?

Like Joseph's brothers, we came as pitiful, vile creatures to the only One who could help us. We came as guilty criminals. We came with nothing in our hands to offer as payment. We had no negotiation power, no merit. We came and threw ourselves completely on the mercy of Christ. Like

Joseph, Christ had every reason to condemn us and He had absolutely no reason to pardon us. What grace and mercy! What love the Father has extended to sinners in Christ Jesus!

- Application: How should the mercy and grace we have received in Jesus change the way we interact with those who have wronged us? How does it change your perspective to compare ways you've been wronged with the ways you have wronged God?

3. The Brothers' Assurance (Genesis 45:9-11)

- After Joseph received his brothers with kindness and mercy, what did he do for them? How did these actions show the truth of Joseph's spoken kindness to his brothers? How has Jesus's action shown the truth of God's love for us?

Joseph not only saved his brothers, but he kept them saved. He provided for their ongoing preservation and well-being. This is a picture of the glorious good that Jesus Christ does for those who have come to Him for pardon. When we came to Christ, prodigals that we were, He cleansed us of sin by His own blood. He nailed our sin debt to the cross. That old arrest warrant was nullified. The wrath of God that we deserved was satisfied. Christ really and truly saves sinners who come to Him for mercy.

- How was Joseph's future provision for his brothers a picture of God's eternal future provision for those in Christ?

If it were left up to God's children to maintain their salvation, they would be in a great deal of trouble. If a person could lose their salvation, they would. If you are in Christ, then let your heart be comforted. John wrote, "My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one" (1 John 2:1). And the book of Hebrews assures us that "he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, since he always lives to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

If you are in Christ, then you are living in the land of Goshen! Your soul has ample provision! Christ Himself is advocating for you and interceding for you even now. Christ's mercy is still yours. The merits of His life and death still speak on your behalf. You have been reconciled to the Father and put in right relationship with Him. Now that you are no longer slaves to sin, you are free to also have right relationships with your neighbors.

- Application: How should confident assurance in God's provision for you give you boldness in seeking gospel conversations with those around you?

Conclusion

This passage should cause us to do two things. The first is to examine ourselves: Are you saved? Have you come to Christ? Are you in the land of Goshen? Or do you remain in your sin and self-reliance? What is the root of your hope for salvation? Is the blood of Christ the root of your hope for heaven?

Second, if your hope of heaven is the mercy of Christ and you find yourself in Goshen, look upon Christ now as your only hope and comfort today and forever. The salvation of Christians begins and ends with Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” (John 10:27-30).

- ❓ How has Jesus’s first coming brought the ability to forgive?
- ❓ How does your longing direct your heart to His second coming? How is this connected to His promise of future provision?
- ❓ Who can you have a gospel conversation with using the story of Joseph and his brothers?

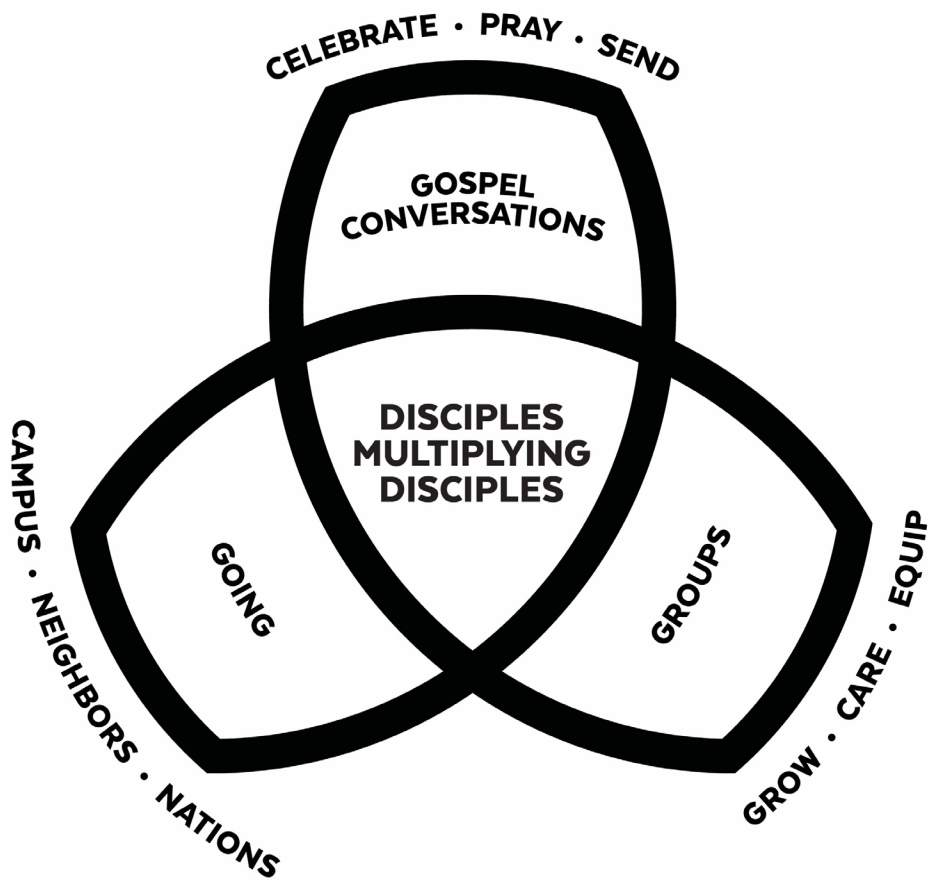
Prayer of Response

Ask the Lord to help you fully grasp the depth of your depravity and your hopelessness apart from Christ. Give Him thanks for the great work that Christ has done for you. Finally, ask the Lord to give you constant reminders of the assurance you have because of Christ’s continuing ministry to you by being your Advocate and Intercessor.

Additional Resources

- *In the Manger* by Max Lucado
- *The Greatest Gift* by Ann Voskamp
- *From Heaven* by A.W. Tozer

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



For Next Week

Session Title

- Longing For a Hero

Main Passages

- Luke 24:21; 1 Corinthians 1:22-24

Session Outline

1. Christ Our Prophet (Luke 24:21; 1 Corinthians 1:22-24)
2. Christ Our Priest (Luke 24:21; 1 Corinthians 1:22-24)
3. Christ Our King (Luke 24:21; 1 Corinthians 1:22-24)

Memorize

Joseph could no longer keep his composure in front of all his attendants, so he called out, "Send everyone away from me!" No one was with him when he revealed his identity to his brothers. ² But he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and also Pharaoh's household heard it.

-Genesis 45:1-2

Historical Context of Genesis

Purpose

Genesis lays the groundwork for everything else we read and experience in Scripture. Through Genesis we understand where we came from, how we got in the fallen state we are in, and the beginnings of God's gracious work on our behalf. Genesis unfolds God's original purpose for humanity.

Genesis provides the foundation from which we understand God's covenant with Israel that was established with the giving of the law. For the Israelite community, the stories of the origins of humanity, sin, and the covenant relationship with God helped them understand why God gave them the law.

Author

Since pre-Christian times authorship of the Torah, the five books that include the book of Genesis, has been attributed to Moses, an enormously influential Israelite leader from the second millennium BC with an aristocratic Egyptian background. Even though Genesis is technically anonymous, both the Old and New Testaments unanimously recognize Moses as the Torah's author (Jos 8:35; 23:6; 1Kg 2:3; 8:9; 2Kg 14:6; 23:25; 2Ch 23:18; 25:4; 30:16; 34:14; 35:12; Ezr 3:2; 6:18; Neh 8:1; 9:14; Dn 9:11, 13; Mal 4:4; Mk 12:19, 26; Lk 2:22; 20:28; 24:44; Jn 1:17, 45; 7:19; Ac 13:39; 15:21; 28:23; Rm 10:5; 1Co 9:9; Heb 10:28). At the same time, evidence in Genesis suggests that minor editorial changes dating to ancient times have been inserted into the text. Examples include the mention of "Dan" (14:14), a city that was not named until the days of the judges (Jdg 18:29), and the use of a phrase that assumed the existence of Israelite kings (Gn 36:31).

Setting

The Torah (a Hebrew term for "law" or "instruction") was seen as one unit until at least the second century BC. Sometime prior to the birth of Christ, the Torah was divided into five separate books, later referred to as the Pentateuch (literally, five vessels). Genesis, the first book of the Torah, provides both the universal history of humankind and the patriarchal history of the nation of Israel. The first section (chaps. 1–11) is a general history commonly called the "primeval history," showing how all humanity descended from one couple and became sinners. The second section (chaps. 12–50) is a more specific history commonly referred to as the "patriarchal history," focusing on the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants: Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons. Genesis unfolds God's plan to bless and redeem humanity through Abraham's descendants. The book concludes with the events that led to the Israelites being in the land of Egypt.

Special Features

The book of Genesis is the great book of beginnings in the Bible. True to the meanings of its Hebrew and Greek names (Hb *bereshith*, "In Beginning" [based on 1:1]; Gk *Geneseos*, "Of Birth" [based on 2:4]), Genesis permits us to view the beginning of a multitude of realities that shape our daily existence: the creation of the universe and the planet earth; the origins of plant and animal life; and the origins of human beings, marriage, families, nations, industry, artistic expression, religious ritual, prophecy, sin, law, crime, conflict, punishment, and death.

Extended Commentary

Genesis 45:1-11

45:1-3. The urgent pleas by Judah on behalf of Benjamin and his father caused Joseph to break emotionally. Unable to restrain himself any longer, Joseph ordered his attendants out and revealed his true identity to his brothers: I am Joseph! Is my father still living? What a shock! He disclosed his identity in an atmosphere of such intense emotion that the weeping by Joseph was heard by his household and reported to Pharaoh's household. First, Joseph wanted his brothers to know who he was and then he wanted to be reassured of his father's welfare. He said nothing about his treatment by his brothers twenty-two years before.

His brothers were terrified at his presence. All the gracious and generous treatment by Joseph was forgotten. Their minds could not comprehend what this revelation might mean since all they apparently could remember now was their brutal treatment of him.

45:4-15. Joseph repeated his assertion that he was their brother Joseph. This time he added, the one you sold into Egypt. But this was done for confirmation purposes only. He went on to assure them that they were not to be distressed or angry with themselves for selling him into slavery. Joseph had interpreted the circumstances theologically. He realized that it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. Four times he would state that God was behind the events of his life.

Joseph also revealed to his brothers the knowledge he had that the present famine would last for another five years. His brothers were reassured again that Joseph harbored no ill will toward them. He believed that God had overruled their evil plan in order to guarantee that the family of Israel would survive.

He urged them to bring their father Jacob back with them and to make plans to live in Egypt. Joseph, in anticipation of his brothers' repentance, had already made plans for where they could live (Goshen) so they could be near him. In order to encourage Jacob to make the move, even at his advanced age, he was to be told about all the honor accorded me [Joseph] in Egypt. Part of the Abrahamic covenant, especially the promise of a great name, was being fulfilled in Jacob's son Joseph, because God has made me lord of all Egypt (see Ps. 105:16-22).

Embracing first his brother Benjamin and then all the brothers, Joseph then kissed them all and wept for joy. Afterward his brothers talked with him, and Joseph explained his unbelievable journey of the last twenty-two years.¹

References

1. Kenneth O. Gangel and Stephen J. Bramer, *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Genesis*, ed. Max Anders (B&H Publishing Group, 2002), <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>.

Author Bio

Kenneth Gangel (Genesis)

Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel (1935-2009): A prolific author and an experienced leader has been influential in the field of Christian education for over forty years. He's written numerous articles and over 50 books, while pastoring, teaching, raising a family and leading schools. His impact reaches around the world through students, co-authored books, and working with leaders of churches and schools.

Stephen Bramer (Genesis)

Dr. Bramer taught for 16 years at Briercrest Bible College and at Briercrest Biblical Seminary in Saskatchewan, Canada, before joining the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary. He serves as an adjunct professor for Word of Life Bible Institute, Hungary; Briercrest Seminary, Canada; as well as at the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS) in Jordan. He is a teaching pastor at Waterbrook Bible Fellowship.

Max Lucado (In the Manger)

Since entering the ministry in 1978, Max Lucado has served churches in Miami, Florida; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and San Antonio, Texas. He currently serves as Teaching Minister of Oak Hills Church in San Antonio. He is America's bestselling inspirational author with more than 140 million books in print.

Ann Voskamp (The Greatest Gift)

Ann Voskamp is a writer with DaySpring (a division of Hallmark), a contributing editor to Laity Lodge's *The High Calling*, and a global advocate for the poor traveling for Compassion International. With an educational background in psychology and education from York University and the University of Waterloo, Ann and her husband are farmers in the Mennonite countryside of southwestern Ontario, raising a half dozen kids, crops of corn, and the roof in praise. She writes every day about the everyday wonder every day at www.aholyexperience.com.

A.W. Tozer (From Heaven)

Although he never received any formal theological training, A.W. Tozer was the author of over forty books on Christian faith and spirituality, and was editor of *Alliance Life*, the denominational publication of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, in whose churches he ministered and preached. He died in 1963.