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## THE POWERFUL DECISION TO FORGIVE – Part 1 (Genesis 45:3-15)

*Welcome to a new legislative session in Annapolis! Since about one third of this General Assembly are new to your positions, many of you will be new to our ministry. My name is Brent Alderman and I serve with a group called Capitol Commission. I (as my 23 colleagues do in their respective states) seek to be a pastoral presence for you in the legislature as well as your staff members. I do not lobby, but want to point you to what the Scripture says, encourage you in any way I can, offer to be a listening ear, and pray for you and your staff regularly.*

*Each week of session, you will receive a Bible study like this one with the notes we will discuss for that week in our weekly meeting. All in the capitol community are welcome to attend that prayer time on Thursday mornings during the session at 8:00 a.m. in Room 153 of the House Office Building. If you ever have any questions or need to contact me for any reason, my cell number and email address are at the top of each set of Bible study notes.*

*Session can be stressful and tiring. Let me encourage you, though, that making time in your busy schedule for our time of prayer each week can be a true oasis to recharge your spiritual and emotional batteries. Again, there is nothing partisan about the prayer time – all are welcome and I look forward to meeting you.*

*Last year in our Bible studies, we looked to the book of Genesis to see lessons we could learn from the example of the Old Testament character of Joseph. He had quite an eventful life with many ups and downs, so there is much that we can learn from him. Since we didn't completely finish his story, we'll pick up where we left off and cover his life for a few more weeks.*

### WHAT JOSEPH HAD TO ENDURE

The life Joseph led was remarkable for the negative situations he dealt with, which were through no fault of his own. We've considered many of these in previous studies, but let's review them quickly.

His first problem was that he was the clear favorite child of his father, Jacob, who demonstrated his favoritism when he gave Joseph a fancy, colorful coat. As a young man, Joseph understood (through dreams sent to him by God) that he would be in a position of authority someday over his eleven brothers. When he related these visions to his brothers, they were angry and looked for a way to get rid of him. They threw him in a pit, took his coat, and eventually sold him into slavery. His new owners took him to Egypt.

Even though he was in a strange land and knew nobody, he began to distinguish himself to his employer, Potiphar. He was given more and more responsibility and eventually was running the house and all of Potiphar's affairs. When Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph, he fled. She then falsely accused him of rape, angering Potiphar and landing him in prison.

While in jail, Joseph interpreted the dreams of two cellmates, a cupbearer and a baker. He correctly predicted that one would be released and one would be executed and he asked the cupbearer if he would mention him to Pharaoh after his release. The cupbearer forgot about Joseph, who languished in prison for another two years.

Things began to turn in a better direction for Joseph after this when Pharaoh experienced some troubling dreams and the cupbearer remembered Joseph's ability to interpret. Again, he impressed many once he was released from prison and helped Pharaoh, ultimately rising to the second highest position in Egypt.

Even though Joseph’s journey ended successfully, the path obviously wasn’t easy. He had been severely wronged, suffered physical, emotional, psychological and verbal abuse, and was ostracized and totally rejected. Few of us will endure what Joseph did, so seeing his response is important.

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*Most of the grand truths of God must be learned by trouble; they must be burned into us with the hot iron of affliction, otherwise we shall not truly receive them.*

- Charles Haddon Spurgeon -

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## WHAT JOSEPH HAD TO DECIDE

As Joseph rose to prominence in Egypt, his family back in Canaan were suffering in a famine. His brothers made their way to Egypt to find food and eventually stood before Joseph, who now held their future in his hands. They didn’t recognize him, though.

This clearly was a crossroads for Joseph. We all face the same fork in the road when we deal with people who have wronged us. Would he give them the harshness they deserved and send them away emptyhanded or extend an olive branch to try to mend the broken relationships?

The Scripture tells us that he first chose to give undeserved favor in place of revenge.

*Genesis 45:3-5 - And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. So Joseph said to his brothers, “**Come near to me, please.**” And they came near. And he said, “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.**”*

Joseph also chose to see God’s goodness in the middle of relational conflict.

*Genesis 45:7, 8 - And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. **So it was not you who sent me here,***

***but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.***

Thirdly, Joseph chose to have a heart of mercy instead of bitterness.

*Genesis 45:10, 11 - You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and **you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.**’*

As much as his brothers had put him through, it was Joseph’s decision and priority to seek restoration over estrangement, starting with his younger brother, Benjamin.

*Genesis 45:14, 15 - Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. And **he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.***

Joseph’s determination to reconcile paved the way for his brothers to embrace him as well. Keep in mind that deciding to forgive is done by an individual, but reconciling takes more than one.

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*There is such a big difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. It takes two to reconcile, so it is not always possible to be reconciled. But it takes only one to forgive. So if people do you wrong, forgive them, whether or not they ask for forgiveness. You cannot cancel their sin. Only God can do that, and He will only do it if they repent. But what you can do is set aside your own anger, bitterness, and resentment towards them.*

- Philip Graham Ryken -

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## BIBLE STUDY

Legislators and Staff (During Session)  
Thursdays, 8:00 a.m.  
Room 153, House Office Building