

Grace Under Fire!

Genesis 50:15-21

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A. The Conscience on Fire: (v. 15; Romans 12:17-21)

1. When Joseph's brothers saw – Joseph's brothers understood that everything relevant to their father's burial was fully completed.
2. They said – Joseph's brothers kept talking to one another with no desire to stop saying what they were thinking within their hearts.
3. They said – We may try to bury the past, but it can wake us up because it is an unresolved issue.
4. Joseph's brothers saw that the father was dead and said – Sometimes we think that because everything has been put into a lovely, organized pattern that is functionally working for everyone, wounds are healed. However, wounds are only healed once we deal with them with a lot of grace, humility, and a focus on the common good.
5. Unresolved issues can become the legacy. Jacob's father, Isaac, did the same thing with him and Esau, and it was not until they were forced to address the issue that it was ever addressed (Genesis 33; lots of time had passed).
6. They said – Parents should not leave their families like this. They should love them enough to ensure the healing begins for this pass.
7. Dead – The word for dead describes that Jacob died naturally; he was not killed.

a) Jacob was embalmed for forty days (see sidebar on “Embalming”) and mourned for seventy (50:3). Herodotus also indicates a seventy-day period, though the Egyptians were well aware that forty days was the optimum period for the preparation of the body.^[1]

b) That the brothers’ message has “your father” rather than “our father” draws attention to Joseph’s obligation as a son, not as a brother. As to whether the brothers fabricated this story, we can’t judge other than by Joseph’s apparent acceptance of it.^[2]

8. Bears a grudge – They believed Joseph would bear animosity against them because of an unforgiving heart, which can lead to tragic results for them and their families.

a) This word means to harbor long-term resentment against another, implying smoldering anger and potential vengeance. It also means to use physical force against an opponent to punish or vanquish or to verbally attack another by insulting and slandering, showing anger and scorn.

b) This explains the Joseph story. His brothers sold him to Egypt to be rid of their brother, the dreamer. God, however, used their act of hate as an opportunity to save Israel from both physical famine and spiritual extinction. The rise of Joseph to a position of authority in Egypt in fulfillment of his God-given dreams illustrates the Lord’s blessing upon His people (Genesis 15:12-16). Joseph’s wisdom in administering the agricultural affairs of Egypt again fulfilled God’s promise that “I will bless him who blesses you.” What appeared to be a series of blunders and

injustices in Joseph's early experiences proved to be God at work in unseen ways to demonstrate His sovereign, kingdom work among the nations.^[3]

9. Bears a grudge – When we decide to address an issue, we must keep the facts in front of us, or our fears can cause us to invent stories that become truth.

10. Pay us back in full—They believed that Joseph had always planned in his heart to return to the point when they betrayed him.

a) It is interesting how people often evaluate you for who they are, not you. They project how they may have acted onto you. This is how they acted when the father was not present.

11. For all the wrong – They had a very negative inner attitude towards God and Joseph, and as a result, they lacked the ability to live up to the good standards of God as it relates to the jealousy they felt toward Joseph. Their lack of commitment to God's Word led them to leave their brother in the cistern to die.

12. For all the wrong—Unresolved issues are repeatedly rehearsed when our consciousness is good. Sometimes, this causes individuals to fall into depression.

13. We did to him – They admit they were committed to accomplishing everything they set out in their hearts to do to Joseph.

14. David's faithfulness to God, caring for them those many years, piled coals on their heads (Romans 12:9-12).

B. Steps that Heal Relationships: (vs. 16-17)

1. They sent a messenger – They sent a messenger who they knew would be committed to carrying out their command. They wanted to make sure this message was delivered.

a) First, they approach him through an intermediary: ויצוּ “they sent instructions.” That they did not go in person to start with is implied by v 18, “they came and fell.” Second, they say Jacob gave instructions just before his death, a particularly solemn moment. Third, they twice plead for forgiveness. Fourth, they describe their sin in the most comprehensive way, as “crime” (twice), “sin,” and “evil,” three of the four principal OT terms for wicked deeds (only עוון “iniquity” is missing here; cf. *THWAT* 1:547). Finally, they implore Joseph to act like their father’s God, who is one who “forgives iniquity, transgression [crime], and sin” (Exod 34:7; Ps 32:1, 5; Mic 7:18).^[4]

2. Your father charged – They told the messenger to tell Joseph that their father commanded them to tell Joseph what the father had in his heart to say to Joseph all along.

3. The father said before he died – The father let this issue linger, only allowing it to fester for years when he had a good relationship with Joseph. This is why the scriptures guide us on how to address various issues. This is why loving God first is critical (Matthew 22:36-40).

4. Forgive – The brothers requested that Joseph remove the debt that was owed to him by his brothers with a clear conscience. When we are committed to healing, we must confront the truth:

a) I beg you, now – Our request should demonstrate our sincerity.

b) Trespass – They must admit that they willfully revolted in a rebellious way against God and Joseph.

c) Sin – They were habitually sinful and willfully carried out an offense against God's standards. They were taught better.

d) Evil – The sad thing in this story is that they are saying that they lacked the ability to do better.

7. Wept – (42:24; 43:30; 45:2,14; 46:29) – Joseph wept with a thunderous and strong outward emotion of grief. Joseph did not cry; he wept, not once but several times, and God made sure it was recorded.

a) Dealing with his pain – he wept:

- The first time Joseph wept was not when he first saw his brothers; it was when they talked about what they had done to him (Gen. 42:21-24).
- When he saw Benjamin, not when he first saw his brothers (43:26-34). He gave Benjamin more food.
- Wept when they repented (Gen. 45:2).
- Wept when he hugged his brother Benjamin (45:14).
- Couldn't stop weeping when he met his father (46:29-30)

b) They were willing to be Joseph's servants. But when Joseph heard all of this, he wept. This explains the heart of Joseph. In other words, 'y'all still there.' "I have been taking care of you all this time – what do you think that says about what I feel."

c) Joseph's brothers are not recorded as ever crying; they just seem concerned about being held accountable for the wrong they did. Their father called it a sin and a wrong (vs. 17). They proved to be honest men, but that is all. Others don't always

hurt the same way, even though they know they offended us. They may even agree they were wrong.

d) “So Joseph wept” (cf. 42:24; 43:30; 45:14–15). “He weeps because they think they need a mediator, because they are afraid of him, because they ascribe to him the attitude of v 15, because he hears his father’s voice, because he recalls his youth persecuted by their hate, and because it is they who remind him of this through their submissiveness. These his last tears are really their tears” (Jacob, 940).^[5]

8. When they spoke to him, Joseph communicated with their servant with dynamic motion. This is such humility on Joseph’s part. He could have demanded they come to him and talk with him directly or bring them to him because he had the power to do so. Joseph, however, served them.

9. The brothers also came – Apparently, the servant went and reported what Joseph said to his brothers.

10. The brothers also came—When Joseph’s brothers came to him, they had no intention of not continuously coming before him. They seemed to truly desire to make coming to him a way of life, which opened the door for a better relationship.

11. The brothers also came – Honesty and humility are the catalysis that heals relationships.

12. Fell down before him – To fall or throw oneself down before someone is to put oneself into the authority or control of that person. Maybe Joseph’s brothers remembered the dream and genuinely decided to be Joseph’s servants. They just came back from the funeral, where Joseph’s servants wept with him for seventy days because of the death of their father. The imperfect tense seems to indicate that this attitude will now be the way they are towards Joseph.

13. Fell down before him – Bowing before was different than the first time because now the entire incident is the focus.

a) *Threw themselves down* – A final fulfillment of Joseph’s earlier dreams (37:7-9).

b) *We are slaves* – They had expressed a similar willingness earlier, but under entirely different circumstances (44:9,33).

14. We are your servant – They were willing to be his indentured slaves.

a) Once again (cf. 44:33) they referred to themselves as Joseph’s slaves (cf. 37:7). But Joseph (after weeping; cf. 42:24; 43:30; 45:2, 14; 50:1) reassured them (twice saying, Don’t be afraid, vv. 19, 21; cf. 43:23) that all that had happened was part of God’s plan to bring about the fulfillment of the promised blessing (cf. 45:5, 7–9). Joseph also promised again to provide for them (cf. 45:11), and he spoke kindly to them. ^[6]

C. Greater Will... It Heals: (vs. 19-21)

1. Joseph said to them – Joseph said to them with no desire to stop saying what he was thinking in his heart.

2. Do not be afraid – There was no need to provide him with emotional reverence or awe because Joseph would not harm them.

a) This, the penultimate scene of the Joseph story, is aptly called the finale by Sarna, for here the great theme of this story, the tension between Joseph and his brothers, is finally resolved. Joseph’s deeds and words (from chap. 45) had shown he wanted to be reconciled to his brothers, but they had never asked for

forgiveness, so their feelings of guilt had continued to haunt them. Now with their father dead and the great funeral over, they are gripped by fear that all Joseph has done was motivated by affection for Jacob, not out of real love for them.^[7]

3. Am I in God's place, instead – Joseph could not exchange his place with God to deliver to them an "eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth."

a) God has turned the judgment into a deliverance, and in this they must find peace and reconciliation. God has forgiven them; and, therefore, he himself can no longer retain their sins; nor would he; since that would be to put himself judicially in the place of the forgiving God.—What he says, ver. 20, gives us the grand golden key to his whole life's history—yea, it is the germ of all theodicy in the world's history.^[8]

b) "Am I in the place of God?" is the same exclamation a frustrated Jacob answered to Rachel's complaint (30:2). Divine purpose prohibits Joseph from exacting personal vengeance, even if he wanted to (cf. Lev 19:18; Deut 32:35; Ps 94:1; Rom 12:19). This is the role of God; Joseph cannot usurp deity's designs (cf. Num 23:19–20; 24:13). Second, Joseph explains that God transformed their evil intention into good, achieving the deliverance of many peoples (v. 20; cf. Prov 16:9).^[9]

c) "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, our heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." (Matthew 6:14-15)

d) Our commitment to God does not always remove the pain (Joseph wept, not cried), but it grows our relationship with God and heals broken relationships.

4. Meant – They created in their minds this evil after much meditation and no influence from Satan. They skillfully worked at doing it, and with clever military precision, the purpose in their hearts was to do him evil. They had no intention of not doing what they wanted to do. It was Reuben who saved him (37:18-25). They did not do this evil on the spur of the moment. The pain of this situation never left Joseph's heart. Every time it came before him, he wept like a child (42:24; 43:30; 45:2,14; 46:29). No matter how deeply he was hurt emotionally, it did not lead him to repay them for their evil.

5. Meant – God met the evil they intended to do with the same skillfully, clever military precision, and a purposeful heart to do Joseph well. God's every intention was to work this out for good (Romans 8:28), so every move made, even prison, was good.

a) 18–21, you meant evil: Joseph saved the lives of numerous people in the ancient world and testified to the power and goodness of the living God. God works His excellent plan even through the evil plans of evil people. Even the worst events can be used in the hands of kindly Providence for His good.

b) *“For we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purposes.”* (Romans 8:28).

6. Evil—They demonstrated an inability to live up to God's good standards because they had a very negative inner attitude towards God and Joseph.

7. It for good – God took the evil they intended and turned it around to provide Joseph with a pleasant and excellent life with practical economic benefits for a greater result. He was a prince in charge of everything and most likely living very well with the best resources.

a) “KNOWING GOD’S WILL LEADS TO ACCEPTING God’s RESULTS.”

8. Bring about this present result - God did this to establish a legacy based on His creative activity and faithfulness due to His ethical obligation and deep commitment to His covenant with Abraham.

9. To preserve many people alive, God saved Joseph and his people to experience a true relationship with God, providing security, protection, and deliverance. This one day, He led us to eternal life through Jesus Christ. To protect everyone from evil, God used this to bless everyone with good.

a) Judas and Christ

10. To preserve many people alive - Our decisions can affect others. We cannot just think of ourselves; we are called Biblically to deny ourselves (Luke 14:26-17). Relationships are often damaged because we act on our fears and anger rather than wisdom focused on the purposes of God.

11. Do not be afraid – Because God intends this for good, there is no need to give Joseph emotional reverence or awe. Because Joseph’s heart is to please God, they do not need to worry about him harming them.

a) Joseph repeats to them twice so they are not afraid (vs. 19, 21). “... *he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.*” (vs. 21).

b) “Your fears are groundless,” says Joseph, and he recalls what he had said the first time he disclosed his identity to them (cf. 45:5–11). What he promised to them before his father arrived in Egypt he now reaffirms after he has gone. In these two passages we have expressed the key idea that informs the whole Joseph story, that through sinful men God works out his saving purposes. ^[10]

12. So he comforted them – Joseph’s compassion made them breathe out. They were completely convinced that they had no need to fear and there was no need to become Joseph’s slaves.

13. Spoke kindly to them—Joseph communicated with deep feelings toward them, with much wisdom and understanding in his words. Joseph's communication made it clear that he had no grudge against them and absolutely no desire to harm them or their families.

a) The “joy of the Lord is our strength.” It is not our joy; it is His joy. In the NT, that joy is the fruit of the Spirit. So, it is the fruit that comes from the Spirit that is my love, not my joy, not my acts of kindness; it is all His so that I can no longer walk in the flesh but in the Spirit.

14. When grace came under fire, Joseph's commitment to God saved lives and established God’s legacy.

15. 50:26. Joseph’s age. Joseph died at the age of 110, considered the ideal age for an Egyptian. Examination of mummies has demonstrated that the average life expectancy in Egypt was between forty and fifty years. The use of the coffin or sarcophagus in mummification was an Egyptian, not an Israelite, practice. [\[11\]](#)

a) 50:22, one hundred and ten years: God blessed Joseph with a long life. This age may be compared to the 175 years of Abraham (25:7), 180 years of Isaac (35:28), and 147 years of Jacob (47:28).

b) In this oath Joseph expressed his complete belief that God would keep His promise to give the land of Canaan to the Israelites (Heb. 11:22). Hundreds of years

later, Moses would keep the Israelites' oath by taking Joseph's bones with the people into the wilderness (Ex. 13:19). Finally, Joshua would bury the bones of Joseph at Shechem after the conquest of Canaan (Josh. 24:32).^[12]

16. Life will rock and roll, but when we choose to endure the processes that God allows us to go through, in the long run, God will heal us and bless us because we made a willful decision to trust Him rather than be led by our emotions.

^[1] Walton, J. H. (2009). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Vol. 1, p. 137). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

^[2] Mathews, K. A. (2005). *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (Vol. 1B, p. 925). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^[3] Merrill, E. H. (1998). [The Pentateuch](#). In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman concise Bible commentary* (p. 19). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^[4] Wenham, G. J. (1998). *Genesis 16–50* (Vol. 2, p. 490). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

^[5] Wenham, G. J. (1994). [Genesis 16–50](#) (Vol. 2, p. 490). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

^[6] Ross, A. P. (1985). Genesis. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.) *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^[7] Wenham, G. J. (1994). [Genesis 16–50](#) (Vol. 2, p. 489). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

^[8] Lange, J. P., Schaff, P., Lewis, T., & Gosman, A. (2008). [A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Genesis](#) (p. 664). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

^[9] Mathews, K. A. (2005). *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (Vol. 1B, p. 927). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^[10] Wenham, G. J. (1998). *Genesis 16–50* (Vol. 2, p. 490). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

^[11] Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). *The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament* (electronic ed.). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

^[12] Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary*. Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.