



Near and Now

For Good – Joseph
By Pastor Miranda Bermes-Goller

Warm-up Question

*Think of a time when you had to forgive or ask for forgiveness from a close friend or family member.
How did you feel before and after?*

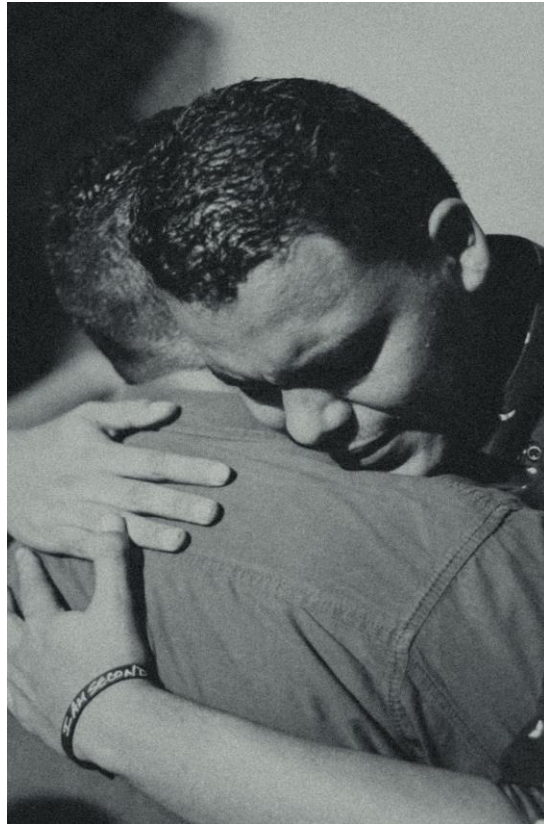


Photo by [Josue Escoto](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Discussion Questions

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What do you feel looking at this image?
3. What stories from your own life does this image bring to mind?
4. What stories of the world does this image bring to mind?

God Intended It For Good

Read [Genesis 50:15-21](#)

Bible Story Reflection

Joseph could have so easily laughed his brothers out of the room. After enduring their hatred and abuse as a child before they sold him into slavery, anyone would understand if Joseph no longer felt any kind of familial bond or responsibility towards them. And yet, when they came to him in Egypt seeking food during the famine, Joseph gave them the chance to prove that they had changed their hearts. However, the crime the brothers had committed against Joseph was so severe that they worried Joseph's acceptance of them was only for the sake of their father; that after his passing, Joseph would enact some kind of retribution against them. So, they once again fell at Joseph's feet and humbled themselves before him, asking for forgiveness and offering themselves as slaves to him, as they had once condemned him to.

After enduring a trauma or loss, many of us have been told some version of the phrase "Everything happens for a reason." Often this comes across as an excuse or justification, in a way that is dismissive of the pain and suffering one has endured. And yet, in this text, we hear Joseph understand his own trauma through the lens of God's larger plan, able to hold the tension between the harm his brothers intended and the good that God intended. Had Joseph not been sold into slavery and set on his journey to Egypt, he might never have been able to warn Pharaoh of the famine, saving countless lives from starvation. While this doesn't excuse the abuse of his brothers, Joseph was given the time and space he needed to heal from those wounds, thereby enabling him to offer forgiveness and a path forward into relationship for his brothers.

Though God does not inflict pain or punishment on our lives, neither does God stand idly by and watch us endure pointless suffering. God is present in every aspect of our lives, especially times of struggle, forming and shaping our experiences to keep leading us forward into God's plan for goodness in our lives. Forgiveness is not something that can be rushed or forced, but it does allow us to release the past without forgetting it, in order to move into the future God is calling us towards. By offering forgiveness to his brothers, he gives them the chance to find forgiveness for themselves and, in time, see God's plan for goodness in their lives as well.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways do you identify with Joseph? In what ways do you identify with the brothers?
2. Do you think the brothers were genuine in asking for Joseph's forgiveness? Does this change the forgiveness Joseph offered them?
3. What barriers prevent us from offering or asking for forgiveness?
4. Think of a time when you endured struggle or suffering that you didn't understand at the time, but you now understand better. How did that time form you into the person you are now?
5. How have you seen God at work in your life in unexpected ways?
6. Have you ever been offered forgiveness by someone? How did that enable you to see God's plan in a new way?
7. How do you see God's plan for goodness at work in the world?
8. How does the God who intends all things for good call you to participate in this work of forgiveness and relationship?

Activity Suggestions

Think of someone in your life (or from your past) who you would like to forgive or ask for forgiveness. Write them a letter – you don't need to send this letter if you are not ready, but note how the act of writing it made you feel.

Try this breath prayer, alone or as a group:

Breathe in: "The God of goodness..."

Breathe out: "...will lead me into wholeness."

If practicing in a group, take turns going around the circle and repeating the prayer until each person has spoken.

Use colored pencils, markers, or other creative supplies to create a visual representation of God transforming times of struggle into opportunities for goodness.

Prayer Concerns

For those who have experienced harm or abuse.

For those suffering with guilt or shame.

For those in need of forgiveness and those who are trying to forgive.

Closing Prayer

Strengthen me to trust that you work all things together for good, even when it is hard to see or I do not understand. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

