

The Way Beyond Forgiving
International Bible Lesson
Genesis 50:15-26
Sunday, January 22, 2012
L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

“[Joseph answered his brothers], ‘Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones.’ And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them” (Genesis 50:21—KJV).

“[Joseph answered his brothers], ‘You have nothing to fear. I will take care of you and your children.’ So he reassured them with kind words that touched their hearts” (Genesis 50:21—GNB).

“[Joseph answered his brothers], ‘So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.’ In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them” (Genesis 50:21—NRSV).

After their father Jacob died, Joseph’s brothers feared that Joseph would take revenge upon them for their wrongs against him. They realized how deeply they had hurt him when they had kidnapped him, sold him into slavery, and lied to their father about his death. When in Canaan, they had hated Joseph and could not speak a kind word to him, so they could not believe that Joseph would not hold resentments against them and punish them now that their father was dead and could not restrain Joseph from exercising his wrath; therefore, they lied once again. They said that their father had told them to tell Joseph not to punish them, but they also asked Joseph to forgive them for their crimes.

Joseph could easily see through their deception, but knowing that their fears motivated them to deceive; he chose to reassure them with sound reasoning and kind words about God’s purposes for all of them. He reminded them that he had forgiven them years before; now, in addition, he would meet all of their needs and the needs of their families.

The Bible does not record any wrongs that Joseph might have done. Instead, Joseph serves as one of the best examples of the kind of person Jesus wants all of His followers to become. Jesus commanded that we forgive others, not once or twice or even seven times, but seventy times seven times (Matthew 18:22). When Joseph was in a position to punish his brothers justly, he chose to forgive them, bless them, and do good things for them.

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Thinking Further

1. What are some of the things Joseph said and did to assure his brothers that he had forgiven them? What are some of the things God has said and done to assure those who believe in Him that He wants to forgive them for their sins? Why is assurance of forgiveness by God and others usually important to us?

2. What did Joseph's brothers say to him that indicated their repentance was sincere?

3. Instead of just ignoring what his brothers had done, why do you think it was important for Joseph to tell his brothers that he knew they had intended to do him harm?

4. What can or should someone do when they know in advance that someone intends to harm them? What can or should someone do after they have been harmed by someone who intended to harm them? Are there any lessons from the way Joseph handled his situations that help you in your answers?

5. Do you think God intends everything for good that others intend for evil? Why or why not? How does your understanding of God's intentions influence the way you face the future? Compare what Joseph said to his brothers about God's intentions with what Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).