

The Wonder of Reconciliation

Genesis 42 (ESV)

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We're excited to be able to open up the Word today to Genesis 42. We're continuing this series in the life of Joseph. We have so much to celebrate! The life of Joseph is a picture of Christ. Yet, there are so many practical lessons as well. Joseph points us to this ultimate Messiah who is going to be the one who is mistreated by His brethren. He spends time unjustly condemned. Yet, he rises to glory and it enables Him to bring salvation to his brothers. Of course, that's just a little small story that explodes on the pages of the New Testament. We celebrate it at Christmas time. We're in Genesis 42. As we talk about Joseph, we're mindful of how we live in a broken world. We're going to see this brokenness invading this special family this morning. But in the midst of a broken world, God's promises continue to be unbroken. Not one of them ever has or ever will be broken. We can hold onto those and we can live by His promises.

1 When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" 2 And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." 3 So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. 5 Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

6 Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. 7 Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." 8 And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. 9 And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land." 10 They said to him, "No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. 11 We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies."

12 He said to them, "No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see." 13 And they said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more." 14 But Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you. You are spies. 15 By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. 16 Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies." 17 And he put them all together in custody for three days.

18 On the third day Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: 19 if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine for your households, 20 and bring your youngest brother to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die.” And they did so. 21 Then they said to one another, “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.” 22 And Reuben answered them, “Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.” 23 They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. 24 Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. 25 And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man’s money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them.

26 Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed. 27 And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack. 28 He said to his brothers, “My money has been put back; here it is in the mouth of my sack!” At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, “What is this that God has done to us?”

29 When they came to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, 30 “The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us and took us to be spies of the land. 31 But we said to him, ‘We are honest men; we have never been spies. 32 We are twelve brothers, sons of our father. One is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.’ 33 Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, ‘By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. 34 Bring your youngest brother to me. Then I shall know that you are not spies but honest men, and I will deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land.’”

35 As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man’s bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid. 36 And Jacob their father said to them, “You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me.” 37 Then Reuben said to his father, “Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you.” 38 But he said, “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol.”

May God encourage us through His Word, today!

Have you ever experienced a painful break of relationship in your family or among your friendships? Has that ever happened to any of us, here? If I were to ask you to raise your hand, I think most of us, perhaps all of us, would raise our hands and say, “Yes, I’ve experienced that.” I know my hand certainly would be up. Close relationships are some

of God's sweetest blessings, yet Satan is active in working to disrupt them and to destroy them, especially within God's family. Satan loves to build great big walls and he loves to destroy bridges. God does the opposite. He is a God who tears down walls and He is a God who builds bridges in such a way that we can only describe it as a miracle.

With Joseph, we begin with the story of a man and a woman to whom God speaks. They leave their homeland and they're just on a journey to the land that God is going to show them. In their very old age, God says to them, "Abram and Sarai, you're going to have children. In fact, you're going to be the father of a nation." That's hard to believe because they are very advanced in years. Yet, God miraculously fulfills His promise to them as He gives them a son named Isaac.

Perhaps at Isaac's birth, we could begin to think this family is special. It is begun by God. It's uniquely blessed by God. They have received a covenant from God that is an eternal covenant to not only be blessed as a people and a nation ultimately, but also to be a blessing to all the people in the world. Surely if there is a family on the face of the earth that is going to avoid conflicts and is going to avoid division and is going to avoid the kind of darkness that other families in this dark world experience, if any family can avoid this kind of brokenness, it has to be this one, right?

Yet right away, Isaac marries Rebekah and they have twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Jacob is the second born. In selfishness, he tempts his brother Esau to sell his birthright for a bowl of stew. Then after taking the birthright, Jacob cheats his brother, Esau, out of his father's blessing by deceiving Isaac in his old age. This sets Esau in an incredible rage. In fact, he is in so much of a rage that Jacob's mom says "You have to get out of the country because Esau is going to kill you." That would have happened. So now we see tremendous brokenness.

Jacob flees. Where does he go? He goes to his Uncle Laban and he falls in love with a girl by the name of Rachel. He asks to marry her and Laban said, "Sure, you can marry Rachel." We don't know exactly what happened at the wedding reception, but he woke up next to Leah. He finds himself married to Rachel's sister. Then he is allowed to marry Rachel, but there is this competition between the two. It's a competition particularly about children. First, Rachel gives a maidservant to Jacob and the maidservant has children. Then Leah gives a maidservant and the maidservant has children. Leah has some children. Here is poor Rachel. Finally, after ten sons of Jacob, there is the eleventh son. His name is Joseph. He is born to Rachel, the woman whom Jacob loved all along. He is special to Jacob.

Now, this is crazy dysfunction. We could go on in greater description. It sets the backdrop for Joseph's brothers' murderous hatred toward him. When Joseph is seventeen years of age, as a teenager, he is sort of oblivious to how much his brothers hate him. He arrives to visit them on a mission from his dad to just say "How are you doing? How can I help you?" He is all happy. He finally found them and he is kind of excited about it. They meet him with a tremendous fury. They decide first to kill him and ultimately to throw him in a pit. While he is in the pit, they decide to sell him into slavery.

So at the beginning of this family story, when God sets His love upon this couple and promises them that they're going to be a family and in fact their family is going to become a nation, we're tempted to ask, "How could anything break this family apart?" Just a few short chapters later in the biblical record of this story, we're asking, "How could anything bring this family back together again?" How could that even happen? You're not going to recover from this kind of brokenness. That just can't happen.

The point is that even in this most blessed and favored family, we find deep brokenness. Only a miracle of reconciliation is going to put this family back together again. Yet lo and behold, inside the big story in which this story is a part, the big story is all about reconciliation. It's about God being a God of reconciliation. It's about God loving to do the impossible of taking all the mess, all the brokenness, all the destruction that sin and Satan brings into relationships and in a miracle, He brings them back together in a wonderful harmony, a wonderful unity. The Gospel of Jesus Christ first opens the door for us to experience reconciliation in the most broken relationship that has ever existed in all the world. That's the relationship between us and God.

All throughout God's Word, He describes our condition so that we would know how broken the relationship is. God uses some really strong terms. They are so strong in fact that the secular world doesn't use these terms because they're too strong. They're too abrasive. They are too weighty. The Bible describes all of us, not just a few of us, but all of us, as sinners. That's quite a word, isn't it? It describes us as transgressors. This is God giving a description of our heart. He describes us as wicked. He describes us as evil doers, as godless, as the unrighteous, as without hope, as dead in our transgressions and sins, and as enemies of God.

If God left us in our natural state, there would be no hope for reconciliation. But God, through a miracle, brought a way when there was no way. He had His eternal Son, God of very God, take on human flesh for the express purpose of shedding human blood on a cross so that through an atoning sacrifice of sin, we who were once enemies of God might be reconciled. In fact, He did that while we were enemies. While we were still sinners, Christ Jesus died in our place. All of this was so that a door might be open for us to actually have relationship with the living God. Paul writes in

Romans 5:10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

That work of reconciliation is permanent. Reconciliation is at the very center of God's work of grace through Jesus Christ. This reconciliation bridges the greatest gap, the gap between us and God. It's an eternal gap. No way can it be overcome. This reconciliation through Jesus provides a bridge first for that greatest gap, but then for every other small gap between us and other people who have wronged us or other people whom we have wronged. All reconciliation requires Jesus to be at the center because He is the miracle worker. He is the key to reconciliation. But wherever Jesus is the center, reconciliation is guaranteed. It's not just possible. Wherever Jesus is the center in human relationships, reconciliation is absolutely guaranteed.

As a people who have been reconciled to God through the gift of Jesus, we now have an interest in the reconciliation of all relationships. The Christian who is not interested in the reconciliation of broken relationships is a person who is not following Jesus. It's an oxymoron; a follower of Jesus who is not following Jesus. Jesus as our Shepherd always leads us on the path of reconciliation. That's why He came into this world.

Today, we open up our Bibles to Genesis 42-43 where we see God work a miracle in a family that is broken. He works a miracle of reconciliation. The main idea that we're going to trace as we look through this passage is that God reconciles us to Himself through the gift of His Son. So that's the first reconciliation miracle that we need between us and God. But then God gives us a ministry of reconciliation to apply in every one of our broken relationships. So He provides the means by which we can be instruments in God's hands to offer reconciliation. If you're taking notes, we're going to look at five foundations of reconciliation.

1 When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt,

He says what dads love to say to their sons who are sitting around and are not getting busy with problem solving.

he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?"

Why are you just staring at each other? You have to get busy, here.

2 And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt.

Why are you still here? You need to be going.

Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die."

Now, what's happening behind this circumstance is God's invisible hand is setting up a meeting between Joseph, the sinned-against brother and the ten brothers who, in malice, sinned against him. That's what God is doing. He is setting up a meeting. How else is He going to get this family together? It's been twenty-two long years since they had seen each other. Joseph is now thirty-nine years old. He has spent over half his life in Egypt now. Remember, he started out as a seventeen year old when he was first sold. So twenty-two years later, here he is in Egypt. He hasn't seen his brothers for half of his life. He is thirty-nine years old.

6 Now Joseph was governor over the land.

God has ascended him into power.

He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. 7 Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them,

His brothers don't recognize him. Remember the cause of this broken relationship, too. In Genesis 37, do you remember how Jacob made Joseph his favorite because he was the firstborn of the wife whom he loved in the beginning? This is where it all started.

Genesis 37:4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

Please understand that this break in relationship didn't happen because of anything that Joseph did. Joseph is completely innocent in all of this. We can fault Jacob for having a favorite and for communicating it so drastically. That's not wise. But they didn't hate their dad. They hated Joseph, a person who just simply was born into this world. Then after Joseph receives his beautiful coat, God gives him two dreams and these dreams also become a source of hatred. Joseph shares the dreams that God gave him. He didn't make up these dreams. These are dreams that God gave him and he was compelled to tell what God revealed to him. That's what Godly people do. As God reveals truth to us through the Word, we share it with others. Joseph is not wrong for telling his dreams. In fact, he's right for telling the dreams. But they hate him because God gave him a dream.

So again, I make this point because from the standpoint of reconciliation, Joseph is a uniquely innocent party. I say uniquely because in my experience, most of the time in the breaks that we experience, there is some fault on both parties. It might be 95% to 5% even, but there is some fault on both parties. As we read this story, it seems as though there is no fault at all on Joseph's behalf. Sometimes one party is completely responsible for the break in relationship, but here is the good news. Joseph doesn't have access to reconciliation. The brothers don't have access to reconciliation. But God is a God of reconciliation. He brings about access if the parties come together around Him. Here's what the Apostle John would write in 1 John. It's fascinating!

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another,

Relationships become whole again if we walk in the light. Walk in Christ as Christ is in the light. Then suddenly this reconciliation we experience opens the door to us to everyone who is walking in the light together, to experience fellowship with one another.

1 John 1:7 ...and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

The sin problem is obliterated by the blood of Christ.

The Gospel also recognizes, however, that some relationships will not be reconciled in this world because one of the parties refuses to walk in the light. The Gospel recognizes that. So while there is the guarantee of reconciliation for two people or a family of people who decide we're going to walk in the light, reconciliation is going to happen. Christ will see to that. But sometimes, in fact oftentimes, the other party that is part of that brokenness refuses to walk in the light. That's where the Apostle Paul says

Romans 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

I think what he is saying is make sure you're not the one who is not walking in the light. In other words, make sure that you're not the influence. Whether you're the one sinned against or the one who has done the sinning in the first place to bring about the break, make sure you're the one walking in the light.

We ask the question: What does God hold me responsible to do when I experience broken relationships? I trust that most of you have some broken relationships today. So what does God call you and me to do as we experience broken relationships? We're going to look at these five foundations in answer to that question. In short, a faithful follower of Jesus first invites the Holy Spirit into that question. That's the first step. Am I interested in this? It's possible for you, as soon as you start thinking about that broken relationship, to say "I don't need this sermon because that relationship is already done. It's toasted. I've written it off. I don't even want to think about it. In fact, it bothers me to think about it. I don't want to have to think about it. I've already written it off as a loss." The first thing a follower of Christ does is says, "I received this miracle of reconciliation through a work of God that is impossible with man. I've been a recipient of that. So I'm going to keep my heart open. I'm going to ask the Holy Spirit, "Lord, what would you have me to do? What's my part?" I want to be the one who is walking in the light. I don't want to be the one who contributes presently, right now, to a continuation of that brokenness.

We're going to look at five foundations that are set before us in Scripture. Two of these foundations, the first two answer that question for the person who sinned and began the brokenness through sin. So the first two have to do with, what happens if I cause the break through my sin? The second two foundations answer that question for the person who is sinned against. They were innocent. What do they do when they've been sinned against and a relationship is broken because someone else sinned against them? Many times, all four of these principles apply because in broken relationships, we have both sinned and been sinned against.

Foundation #1: An awakened conscience.

8 And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. 9 And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them.

He comes up with an idea to test them. This is all testing. I believe it's all a testing of grace, actually.

And he said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land."

Notice what they said.

10 They said to him, "No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. 11 We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies."

Do you notice as we're reading in chapter 42, how often we see that claim, "We're honest men"? We're honest men. We're not spies. We've just come to buy food. We're honest men. Now, how do you suppose Joseph received the words, "We are honest men"? We're honest men. How could you dare challenge our integrity?

Do you remember the big lie that they told their dad twenty-two years earlier? They took that coat and tore it up. They dipped it in blood and said, "Dad, here's what we found. We don't know what happened to Joseph. Here's what we found." Then the dad said an animal obviously tore him to pieces and ate him. He's gone. They let their dad believe that for twenty-two years and dad never got over it. Twenty-two years later, he is still grieving it. He is grieving a lie.

Here these guys are, saying, "How could you say that? We're honest men." They're righteously indignant that they would be accused of being dishonest. Do you see how sin hardens our hearts so we can't even see the sin that is so obvious? We can't even acknowledge it. We won't. We refuse to acknowledge it. So Joseph presses because I believe Joseph is an instrument of God. God is working to awaken their conscience. It required this kind of treatment for their consciences to stop and sit for a moment and to dwell upon this sin of their past and to be awakened.

12 He said to them, "No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see." 13 And they said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more."

They remember the story. They don't know what happened to Joseph. They're presuming that in twenty-two years as a slave, he didn't survive.

14 But Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you. You are spies. 15 By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. 16 Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies."

Joseph knows their dishonest hearts. He says here's the test to see whether there is truth at all in you.

17 And he put them all together in custody for three days.

I think that's significant because what do you suppose the brothers talked about for three days while they're in custody in an Egyptian jail? Again, I think this is designed by God. What can they talk about? "We're honest men, but now he is wanting us to bring back the one son, the second son of Rachel, after we did this to Joseph." All the while, they start talking together about something they did twenty-two years earlier. We're not told a lot of the behind the scenes working. It is my impression that this is the first time they talked together about it. For twenty-two years they said, "We did it. We don't want to think about it. We don't want to talk about it. It's hurtful. It's embarrassing. Let's just put it

behind us. Let's just stuff it." Now twenty-two years later, for three days this is all they have to talk about. What is God doing? He is taking this painful circumstance in order to bring something beautiful to their hearts, an awakened conscience. Their conscience up to this point had been dead. It had been dormant. It had been hardened.

A guilty conscience often hardens itself by refusing to dwell upon the wickedness of a past wrong. But here, God grants them time together. He is testing them by recalling to their minds together what they had done. Let me ask you, are there any past wrongs that you avoid thinking about? "It's just too painful. I'm not going to go there. I'm not going to think about it." Beloved, do not harden your conscience through neglect. We don't rid ourselves of guilt or shame or the weight of sin by neglecting to think about it. We rid ourselves of sin by bringing our sins to Christ Jesus, who died for us. He shed His own blood so that our sins can be erased and canceled once and for all.

18 On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: 19 if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine for your households, 20 and bring your youngest brother to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die." And they did so.

Do you see how this work of God's grace is beginning?

21 Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother,

Again, I don't think that they have said that for twenty-two years. Now that they have had to talk about it together, they said, "Here's the truth. We're getting what we deserve. We are guilty of sinning against our brother."

in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us."

That twenty-two year old memory comes like it's a movie. It's like a video screen that they're replaying that is so vivid and so colorful. They remember some vivid details. "Do you remember when he begged us for his life?" They could hear the tone. They could see the tears. They could see the anguish of their brother. Do you remember when he begged us? Twenty-two years later, it was like it just happened a moment ago. Do you remember that? Their hearts are being stirred. We didn't listen. This is why this distress has come upon us. Then Reuben, of course, needs more awakening of his conscience.

22 And Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen.

It's not like he was better than his brothers, but he certainly wasn't the righteous one in the midst of that story. He says

So now there comes a reckoning for his blood."

They know God and they know God is just. God is beginning a work of repentance by awakening their conscience to their sin. God is digging up the bones that they have buried and forgotten. Why is God doing this? Is it because He enjoys seeing His people in pain? No. It's because He loves those whom He has chosen to be His. He will not abandon them to the darkness of their past sin. He will not. He doesn't allow that to happen to these ten. He set His love upon these ten. As wicked as they were, He set His love upon them. He is not going to abandon them. So He is doing a spiritual work, here.

23 They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. 24 Then he turned away from them and wept.

That's going to be important later. We see the softness of Joseph's heart toward his brothers all these years.

And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. 25 And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them.

At this point, have their consciences been sufficiently awakened? Not yet. Joseph is going to put money back in their sack. He is looking for a heart of true repentance. This is another test designed by God to dig out the cancer of their callousness toward their sin. God is digging it out. Sometimes God has to dig deep on us. God could have left the brothers in their sin and their cover up and their hardness of heart, but He set His love upon this family to redeem them and He is using Joseph to bring about His good work of awakening their conscience to bring them to salvation.

1 Peter 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

That's what God does for us. Once we're His, He guards us so that the salvation work that He begins is a salvation work that He completes. How does God guard us and preserve our faith unto salvation? Well the next few verses in 1 Peter 1 tells us.

1 Peter 1:6-7 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

God says how He guards us so that we can receive this ultimate joy and reward and inheritance of eternal life, is He guards us by bringing trials into our life. He brings trials like a famine, trials like a second-in-command claiming that we're spies. He brings trials like "You have to leave one of the brothers behind. Don't come back unless the other

brother is with you.” He brings trials like putting money in your sack. All those are trials to refine the hearts of these men who have been hardened. He does a work first vertical so that they have right relationship with God, but also horizontal so that this family would be whole. It’s absolutely essential to the story of salvation that this family becomes whole. God is going to see to it that He does that. So He is refining them. He is scraping off the dross as the heat underneath them starts to melt their hearts and they’re being purified by this process.

26 Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed. 27 And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack. 28 He said to his brothers, “My money has been put back; here it is in the mouth of my sack!” At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, “What is this that God has done to us?”

Do you see that awakening of the conscience? Now they’re interpreting every little thing to say “God is clearly coming after us because of our sin.” They’re right! God is doing that, only they think God has an ill intent, when really God has a marvelous intent for their soul. God is not content to do a superficial work of repentance. In His kindness, He brings circumstances to awaken our conscience. If God does that for us, praise Him for it because it’s an act of His grace and mercy.

Over the years, I’ve had some different skin cancer issues. This week again, I went to my Mohs surgeon. A Mohs surgeon is a surgeon who when you have some skin cancer, he cuts it out. Then immediately he looks and if he needs to cut more, he will cut it out. You could be there all day or you could be there once. But he’s going to say at the end of the day, “I know I have it all. If I have to cut out three and four times, I’ll cut out three and four times.” You want a doctor like that if you have skin cancer, don’t you? You don’t want a doctor who says, “That’s close enough.” No, you want someone who will dig it all out. Don’t just dig a big piece of it. Dig it all out. Sometimes it can be more painful because you need to have more. This time, it was just once and it was gone. Praise the Lord for that!

That’s what God does. Here is this corruption that is actually destructive to our souls and destructive to our relationships and He starts digging. Bend into the Great Physician. Don’t move away from Him. Don’t say, “I’m not going to go there. I’m not going to set up an appointment.” No, this is what we need. God often brings trials into the lives of His own to awaken our conscience to some past or present sin. God’s design is not to leave us in our guilt, but to dig out this sin completely for a work of genuine repentance. Skip forward to Genesis 44.

Genesis 44:14-15 When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground. Joseph said to them, “What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination?”

This is related to the idol now found in the sack.

Genesis 44:16 And Judah said, “What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants;

I bring that out because still weeks later, he is saying God has found it out and God is chasing us down.

How do I know if my conscience is awakened to my sin? I’m just going to list these quickly and then we’ll move to the other four foundation steps. How do I know if my conscience is awakened? I have stopped rationalizing my sin. I don’t tell myself reasons why my sin was not as wicked as it seems to others. I don’t rehearse how another person’s sin caused mine and that’s why I sinned.

Secondly, I hate my sin, not just the consequences of it. Third, I turn away from the root of sin and not just the ugly fruit of the sin. Fourth, I am not offended when others point out the sinfulness of my sin. I don’t bow up and become defensive. Fifth, I am soft to the person whom I have sinned against regardless of their attitude toward me. I’m soft to them because I know that I placed them in that position of temptation to have an ill heart toward me because it started with my sin.

Sixth, I am eager for God to deepen the work of repentance and I refuse to rush to get it over with. I don’t say, “Let’s quickly get this done. I’m sorry. Please forgive me. Let’s go.” I thank God for His forgiveness, but I don’t presume upon it. In other words, I don’t take it for granted. I understand the depth of its cost. Eighth, I’m not angry at God or man for the consequences that may come to me as a result of my sin.

Is it enough for my conscience to be fully awakened in order to bring reconciliation? No. We must move to the second foundation.

Foundation #2: An authentic confession

I’m not sure what kind of verbal confession Joseph’s brothers gave to Joseph when they discovered that he was alive. They had confessed to each other their sin remember, in private, before they knew he was Joseph. But we do know that ultimately they came to him and talked to him about their sin. They gave a confession. In chapter 45, Joseph reveals himself to the brothers.

Genesis 45:3-4 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.

Ultimately he kisses all the brothers and he weeps over them all after first kissing and holding onto Benjamin.

Genesis 45:15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

Now, that would have been a conversation! It's not recorded for us, but wouldn't that have been an interesting conversation? So what did they say? We're not sure, but we do have a recording of something they said after Jacob dies.

Genesis 50:15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him."

Again, there is an acknowledgment of evil.

Genesis 50:16-17 So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you."'"

So their dad also knows the story. There was authentic confession to their dad about what happened because dad knows. But then they say

Genesis 50:17 ...And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.

I don't think this is the first time they said it. I think they're just reiterating it, but it's an authentic confession. An authentic confession means that we agree with God about the sin and that we make a spoken request of the person we sinned against to forgive us. So we agree with God about the sin. We agree that our sin is sinful and that we're completely responsible for it. There is nothing that excuses it. There is no rationale for it. It indeed comes from a darkened heart. There is evil inside of us. We indeed sorrow over our sin. We know that we do not deserve forgiveness. We don't merit it. We acknowledge the suffering that our sins caused and then we find hope in Jesus' death to bring mercy to our soul. That's confession.

The first part of it is all kind of dark. It's recognition about what is true and agreeing with God about what is true about our sin. But the last part of confession is just as important. It's the faith part. We're looking to Christ now. He is the one who is the sin-solver. So this is what authentic confession does. It's confession that is verbal. So let me ask you, if you've sinned against another person that has caused brokenness, whatever you own, have you become convicted? Have you made confession? Those are the first two issues.

We're going to go very quickly through foundations three and four. These are important because sometimes we are the innocent party of a break. Now, let's be careful not to put ourselves in Joseph's sandals too fast. We read the story and say "I'm Joseph. They sinned against me." We still have a responsibility, a big responsibility. But let's not put ourselves there too quickly because oftentimes, there is something that the Holy Spirit would reveal to us. But if we are a completely innocent party, whatever part that we're innocent of, here is what God would have us to do.

Foundation #3: A freedom from bitterness

I just observe that not once in all this story do we get a whiff of the fowl odor of bitterness in Joseph's life. Not once! Not while he is traveling in chains with the Ishmaelites to Egypt. Not while he is in Mr. Potiphar's house and not while he is in Mr. Potiphar's prison. Not after he ascends to second-in-command. Not after he is rejoined to his brothers. Joseph doesn't hide the past. He recognizes their sin, but he doesn't grind on it. He doesn't rehearse the wrongs of his brothers over and over. He doesn't dwell upon it. In this, Joseph is a picture of Jesus. The Scripture tells us that when Jesus was reviled, He didn't revile in return. But rather, He entrusted Himself to God and He bore in His body our sins, so that we might become dead to sin and alive to God.

Hebrews tells us that when bitterness springs up, it causes trouble and many become defiled by bitterness. So the first issue is I want to be the person who makes sure I'm ready for reconciliation. If the other party who sins, God convicts them and God brings about authentic confession, I want that path to be easy. It doesn't seem like it's really hard for Joseph to forgive at this point. He loves them from the beginning. He hugs them. He embraces them. He provides for them right away.

Here are some commitments that guard our hearts from bitterness. I refuse to rehearse and nurse wrongs suffered. I entrust myself to God who is just and sovereign. I remember the depth of my own sin against God. I pray for God's blessing upon those who hurt me. I never assume that I am free from this fight. As long as I live, I need to fight to keep bitterness at bay. I fight with the weapons that God supplies.

Foundation #4: An open heart

He is free from bitterness. That's sort of the negative angle. The positive angle is he keeps a really open heart of love toward his brothers. He is open to a future relationship. In New Testament terms, we say Joseph believed that God could change his brothers' heart and he wanted to make sure that if God ever did that work of grace that there would not be a moment of hesitation for him to receive all the goodness that that would bring. He had a completely open heart toward his brothers. Over and over he demonstrated that open heart to his brothers. Ultimately at the end of Genesis 50, Joseph weeps when they speak to him and ask will you forgive us?

Genesis 50:17-19 Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?"

God is the ultimate judge. I'm not!

Genesis 50:20-21 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

He said I'm going to make sure in my position that I'm going to extend grace upon grace to you. He comforted them. He was concerned that they were afraid. He didn't say, "You don't have to be afraid, but it's kind of good for you to be afraid. I like seeing that." No, his heart was completely open. I want to relieve you so that you live a life of peace, so that you live a life filled with the mercy of God.

Reconciliation does not require that we sweep wrongs under the rug and pretend that they never happened. That is not biblical reconciliation. A lot of Christians say, "I'm just going to pretend it didn't happen and we're good, right?" That's not what God does. That's a false reconciliation. It is a reconciliation created by man that robs God of His glory and reconciliation of its strength. It's a reconciliation that ultimately is built upon the quicksand of a lie. It's going to sink. Reconciliation requires that the sinner and the sinned against bring our sins and the sins, whether we've committed them or been sinned against, to the cross of Jesus. Let's go to Jesus and let us ask Jesus to do what Jesus always does when a people bring sins to Him. We can't solve this problem. This is the last foundation. Reconciliation is ultimately

Foundation #5: A work of God

There are responsibilities we have and we have just underlined four of them. But ultimately, we can do everything right and still not experience reconciliation in a broken relationship. God must do a miracle. I just want to stop for a moment and think of all that God has done to bring about this miracle for this family.

God arranged after twenty two years, a meeting between Joseph and his ten brothers. What is the likelihood of that happening and that these guys would ever be in the same room together? God gives Joseph wisdom to press into their consciences. There is a plan where things aren't just swept under the rug, but they are considering their sin so that their conscience would be awakened. God then awakened these ten brothers' consciences after twenty-two long years. For most people, naturally we think if I bury something for twenty-two years, I'm going to bury it for the next twenty-two. But God did a new work. It is amazing! God preserved Joseph from bitterness day after day after day after day in spite of all the pain and the difficulty that he endured as a result of his brothers' actions. God keeps Joseph's heart open to his brothers. He wanted relationship to happen. God moves the family to Egypt through the circumstance of a famine, to live together. In living together, God heals that relationship and creates a nation. That's what happens. This is a nation that will ultimately bring about the Messiah.

How can I pursue reconciliation in a broken relationship? We've said a lot. In short, let's pray for it. When was the last time you prayed for that broken relationship that you thought about at the beginning of this message? When was the last time you prayed over that? Some of you said today, because it's on your heart. Some of you said "I stopped praying for that years ago and I don't even know if I want to pray for it anymore. Frankly, it's a lot more peaceful not to pray for it." I know it's more peaceful. That's a human solution to a spiritual problem. Human solutions aren't really solutions. So I'm

going to ask you to begin afresh and pray, “God, keep my heart open. God, do a work of reconciliation.”

Secondly, do everything your part requires. I don’t know what that is, but ask the Holy Spirit. I believe He will lead you. Do everything. Don’t just do part, but do everything your part requires. Do you know what’s going to happen? Here’s what happened to me. Let’s say there are five things on the list. You do three of them and think that was good. Yet I’m kind of stuck on the fourth thing because I really, really don’t want to do that. I don’t want to make the phone call. I don’t want to write the note, whatever it is. There is a part of it where I feel good because I’m doing these things, but then I hit a wall because I don’t want to do that other thing. What do we do when we don’t want to do what God wants us to do? We pray and we say “God, open my heart. Do a miracle in me.”

Then third, let’s wait patiently for God to work a miracle. Never give up hoping for reconciliation, not as long as you live. As long as you have breath, wait patiently upon the Lord. He will renew our strength when we do. Because God Himself works to bring reconciliation in broken relationships, no relationship is without hope of repair.

There are two questions I close with. One is the most important. Have you been reconciled to God? Has your relationship with God been made whole by the blood of Jesus? Have you come to Christ? That’s where we begin. That’s the whole point, I believe, of Joseph and the reconciliation of his own people here in this area. It’s to point us to the great reconciliation that we need through Christ, God’s Messiah. Secondly, do you have any relationship that is broken right now? Just leave with this question. God, what are you leading me to do?