

Joseph The Peacemaker

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“So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father’s household. And Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. Joseph saw Ephraim’s children to the third generation. The children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were also brought up on Joseph’s knees. And Joseph said to his brethren, “I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.” So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.”

-Genesis 50:22-26

For the most part, we have been able to look at each individual chapter of Genesis in isolation and pull out the profound meanings contained in the narrative. But in these last couple chapters of the book, I honestly think that it would be a little inappropriate. The reason for this is that the last chapters of this book are some of the best, and most compelling narrative writing in the entire Bible, and I really don’t think we can see the beauty and coherence of this narrative unless we observe it as a whole. However, since a lot happens in these final eight chapters, we will instead focus on the main figures and see how these final chapters wrap up their stories, starting with Joseph.

To give a brief overview of these chapters, when we left off in chapter 41, Joseph’s plan to save Egypt was already underway, food was stored up during the seven years of plenty, and now the world is facing the intense seven year long famine that Pharaoh dreamed about. When we pick things up in chapter 42 Joseph’s family are impacted by the famine and need to travel to Egypt in order to buy grain. When they are there, Joseph hides his identity from his brothers and sets them up in a type of test to see if they had changed during his years of absence. In order to do this, he gets them to bring their younger brother Benjamin, who had become Jacob’s new favorite son after Joseph’s “disappearance”, and gives them an opportunity to allow Benjamin to take the fall for a crime he didn’t commit and become a slave in Egypt.

Given this opportunity though, Judah, who was the one who originally suggested selling Joseph as a slave, offers his own life in exchange for Benjamin’s. At this point, Joseph reveals himself and Jacob, through the direct bidding of God, is brought up to live in Egypt with Joseph’s brothers. The book then ends with a final benediction from Jacob to

his son's, and we are told of Jacob and Joseph's deaths at the very end of the book, and a reminder that God will eventually lead his people out of Egypt and back to the promised land. Obviously for the sake of brevity I had to leave out many crucial details, and I would strongly recommend that you read through these final eight chapters to get the full emotional weight and gravity of these events.

However, for the purposes of our study today, we will focus primarily on the life of Joseph and reflect on his great legacy and what he can teach us about the life of blessedness.

Blessed are the Peacemakers

*"Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God."
-Matthew 5:9*

When Jesus began His first major public teaching, what we commonly call "The Sermon on the Mount", He taught His followers what it meant to be "blessed". For ancient people, the "blessed" life was the ideal life. To be blessed was much more than being prosperous or happy, a blessed person was one who was intrinsically joyous, content, and satisfied, it was the person whose life was wrapped up in divine and eternal meaning. For most people though, they tend to associate blessedness with external prosperity, but Jesus shocks His followers by declaring that the blessed life is not the one that necessarily contains external success, in fact He seems to suggest that the blessed life is wrapped up in suffering many external things. The blessed life is the one that is lived in submission to the will of God and for His eternal purposes, not the one lived for immediate pleasure or prosperity.

Amongst His various admonitions Jesus tells us that in order to be blessed, we must be "peacemakers", and by doing this we "shall be called sons of God." Meaning that those who make peace in their world, are those who reflect the heart and will of God, they "resemble" Him the way a natural son resembles their earthly father. In thinking about these final chapters of Genesis, I don't think that there is any greater term for Joseph than "peacemaker".

The term "peace" in the ancient world meant far more than we mean today. For a modern person, "peace" tends to mean an absence of conflict, hence we talk about "peace treaties" and things like this. For the ancient world, "peace" meant far more than this. It wasn't just an absence of conflict, it conveyed the idea of wholeness, completion, or harmony. Let's take the latter example to explain this point. A musician has the ability to take disparate notes and "harmonize" them, or bring them into a cohesive whole. So,

what a “peacemaker” is, is not merely someone who can end conflict, but instead they are someone who can bring harmony out of discord, and this is exactly what Joseph is able to do. And it is for this reason that Joseph is honored more than his brothers, take the final blessing that Joseph is given by his father:

“Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a well; His branches run over the wall. The archers have bitterly grieved him, Shot at him and hated him. But his bow remained in strength, And the arms of his hands were made strong By the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), By the God of your father who will help you, And by the Almighty who will bless you With blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath, Blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father Have excelled the blessings of my ancestors, Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.”

-Genesis 49:22-26

Joseph is also presented to us as a clear picture of the coming Messiah. Joseph, although he is unjustly persecuted, is able to save the world he was born into as a result of his betrayal. Joseph’s story ends the book of Genesis because he reveals, more clearly than any before him, the mission of the coming Messiah.

“And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

-Genesis 3:15

This is the prophecy given to Adam and Eve after the fall. That a coming “seed” of woman would first receive a wound from the serpent before he crushed its head. Joseph is afflicted by evil, before he is raised up in the land and brings peace and salvation to the entire world, including his family. This is the mission of Christ. He is brought low by the evil of the earth, but then ascends on high in the resurrection and brings peace to the earth:

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

-Philippians 2:5-11

So for the rest of this paper, let's focus on the ways that Joseph made peace in his life and hopefully learn from his story how to become peacemakers in our own lives.

"When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, 'Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him.' So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, 'Before your father died he commanded, saying, 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: 'I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.' ' Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.' And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, 'Behold, we are your servants.' Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 'But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. 'Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.' And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."

-Genesis 50:15-21

Peace With God

"Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph; does my father still live?'" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. "But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. "For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. "And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. "So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt."

-Genesis 45:3-8

The most incredible thing about Joseph's story is how fervently he believed in the purposes of God throughout his life. Even some of the most faithful men and women in the Bible, when they are put to the test, struggle to have peace with God. Instead, they tend to grow angry with God and struggle to find harmony with Him and His purposes. Take this quote from the prophet Jeremiah as a simple example. Speaking of God he says this:

"I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath. He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light. Surely He has turned His hand against me Time and time again throughout the day. He has aged my flesh and my skin, And broken my bones. He has besieged me And surrounded me with bitterness and woe. He has set me in dark places Like the dead of long ago. He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy. Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer.
-Lamentations 3:1-8

This is the common response to suffering and adversity that most people have. It is hard for us to have peace with God when we are undergoing terrible circumstances, and it is almost impossible to hold onto our faith that God is actively loving us during our times of greatest trial. As we have spoken of before, since Joseph is presented as a "messianic" figure, it is possible that he did have struggles, but if he did, we are not told about them. Instead, Joseph is never portrayed as doubting God's purpose for his life, and he remains unflinchingly faithful to God even during his time as a slave or in prison. But it is Joseph's ability to maintain his faith in God's good purposes that allowed him to maintain peace in his own soul:

"You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You."
-Isaiah 26:3

Once we understand that "peace" means wholeness or completion, it should be easy for us to understand that the ancient word for "anxiety" meant to come apart or to be fractured. The fact of the matter is that it isn't suffering per se that crushes the heart of man, but meaningless suffering. It is the genuine worry that all the evil that we are facing is for no purpose at all, that we are the unfortunate victims of blind, meaningless, purposeless suffering. It is this belief that genuinely robs peace from our souls and casts us into despair and anxiety. Joseph on the other hand is held together in the midst of his suffering, not because he was stronger than the average person, but instead because he kept his mind "stayed" on God and continued to trust His purposes, no matter what. This is exactly what the apostle Paul teaches us in the New Testament:

"We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body."
-2 Corinthians 4:8-10

It's not that the Christian is never "hard-pressed" or "perplexed", but when our hope is set on the purposes of God we will not be "crushed" or left in despair. Because, though

we are persecuted, we are not forsaken by God. And Paul looks to the cross of Jesus as his ultimate example. There was nothing more seemingly senseless than the death of Christ. The only innocent man in history given over to death due to petty jealousies and resentments from the religious authorities of his day. And though He wasn't found guilty in court, the political officials caved to the voice of the mob and brutally, and shamefully, murdered the Son of God. From the perspective of the apostles, this was a senseless act of violence that destroyed all the work that Christ had accomplished during His short life.

But, what seemed meaningless to others, and what seemed like a mistake by God actually became the source of salvation for all people. Therefore, the one who can trust their lives completely to God, can receive suffering with this same hope. Not with happiness, but in faith that the purposes of God are being achieved. This is the strength that kept Joseph from becoming bitter or despairing in his affliction.

Peace With His Past

“And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: “For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house.” And the name of the second he called Ephraim: “For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

-Genesis 41:50-52

One of the most pervasive buzz words of the modern world is undoubtedly “trauma”. Growing up in the 90’s I almost never heard anyone using phrases like “trauma”, “PTSD”, “triggered”, and so on. These words seemed to appear in the public vocabulary very suddenly about 10 years ago and they have become increasingly pervasive as time has gone on. As a combat veteran, I do have a level of thanksgiving that this topic is being discussed in the aftermath of my deployments, as opposed to some previous generations of veterans who gave vague, almost meaningless titles to this phenomenon like “combat fatigue” or “shell shock”. But as happy as I am that our culture is now talking about this phenomenon and that veterans and other people who have suffered through traumatic experiences now have a vocabulary to speak about their issues, our modern discourse seems far more interested in empathy and understanding than it is in actually helping people recover and move on.

As a result, the issues of PTSD don’t seem to be going down in our culture, but they seem to be expanding at an exponential rate. To give a brief, and overly simplified, explanation of this phenomenon, (if you want a fuller explanation you can always read

my book on the topic “The Fellowship of Suffering”), we all function in a sphere of, what we consider, “normal occurrences”. These normal occurrences include both good and bad things, but they are things that we have come to expect with relative amounts of dependency. For instance, though we don’t like it, it wouldn’t be strange for us to be stuck in traffic on the way home, to get into a minor car accident, have a fight with our spouse, or to see one of our children get moderately injured. Once again, while these things are bad, they are contained in our sphere of “normal occurrences” and therefore, we have the language to process these events and move on.

However, outside of our sphere of normality, there are potential events that might happen to us. So while we may have the language to deal with a minor car accident, if we underwent a severe car accident that resulted in a fatality and/or massive injury, our likelihood of being able to handle this event goes down. This remains true in regards to every potentially traumatic event that we might suffer. Whether the reason for our trauma is shame over an action we never thought we would do, fear over something we never thought could happen to us, or something else, when we don’t have the language to process an event, we can’t integrate that event into our identity. As such, instead of healing, that mental wound instead festers and rots creating more damage to our psyches as time goes on.

Again, this is an overly-simplistic way of looking at this phenomenon, but it should serve us well for understanding Joseph and why this didn’t happen to him. It isn’t as though Joseph was immune to trauma, or that these events in his life didn’t bother him, look again at the names he gave his children:

“And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: “For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house.” And the name of the second he called Ephraim: “For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

-Genesis 41:50-52

Joseph acknowledges a type of “toil” that he had suffered that was related to his “father’s house”. Joseph was clearly damaged by what his brothers did to him, in more ways than one. But, instead of being held captive by what he suffered, he instead found a way to “forget” this toil. It would be easy to interpret this phrase as meaning that Joseph blocked out the events of his childhood, but we know that can’t be the case for two reasons. First is that he named his second child Ephraim because “God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.” Joseph had not blocked out his suffering, since he actively tied his present prosperity to his past suffering.

Second, when he encounters his brothers again, he doesn't fly into a panic, nor does he act as though he has forgotten his brothers or what they did to him. Instead, he is able to confront them and put them to a relevant test to prove their repentance. After this, he is able to reconcile with his brothers. This is not the behavior of someone who has "blocked out" his past, but instead it is the behavior of someone who has made "peace" with his past.

"Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

-Philippians 3:13-14

But how did he do this? I would say that the biggest factor in Joseph's ability was his peace with God. In order for us to make peace with our past, we have to first accept that it is a part of our past. This might sound like a simple point, but it is actually deeply complex. The reason why traumatic wounds tend to fester is specifically because we *don't* want to make peace with our past. The traumatic event is something that we are desperate to forget and to move past, as a result we don't want to think about it. Or, on the other hand, modern people tend to think almost exclusively about their past trauma and use it as an excuse for their present behavior and as a means to gain sympathy and respect. In this case they aren't making peace with their past, or seeking ways to integrate their past trauma into their present identity, but instead they are shaping their identity *around* their past trauma.

Joseph's action, which cuts through these two negative alternatives, was not to ignore his past, nor was it to fixate upon it, but instead it was to "forget his toil..." We have spoken about this before, but the term "toil" in the Bible is usually used to express, not labor per se, but *meaningless* labor.

"Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return."

-Genesis 3:17-19

The labor that is given to Adam in this verse is not a new labor, since he had already been tending the garden prior to the fall. Instead, this labor was now one of "toil". Now

he could labor at the field and instead of bringing forth useful plants, there were instead thorns and thistles. And ultimately this labor would not preserve his life indefinitely, for no matter how much food he produced through his labor, he was now destined to die. In the same way, it isn't the traumatic instance per se that defeats us, it is the feeling of meaninglessness that prevents us from integrating the event with our identity. Because we wrestle with the meaning we either find a false meaning in conforming our identity to our trauma, or we attempt to ignore it altogether.

Joseph does something very different, he doesn't ignore his trauma, but instead he finds meaning within it. By naming his second child Ephraim, he is making it clear that his healing was not found in ignoring his past, but in finding purpose within it. This is also why it is significant that Ephraim ends up receiving the higher blessing than Manasseh:

"Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations."

-Genesis 48:17-19

At this point of the story, Joseph's father has come to be with him in Egypt and wants to give Joseph a blessing. But, because of Joseph's faithfulness, he gives him a "double portion" by making Joseph's two sons part of the "twelve tribes". This is why there is no "tribe of Joseph" in the book of Joshua when the Israelites come back to the land and divide the land between the various tribes. Instead, Joseph receives a double portion in that both sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, are tribes in themselves and receive their own land. However, even though Manasseh is the firstborn, Jacob gives the greater blessing to Ephraim then to Manasseh.

The reason for this is multifaceted, going back to God's desire to upset cultural norms by frequently giving the larger blessing to the younger, like in the case of Jacob and Esau. But symbolically, this is an extremely significant act. By doing this we are shown that the healing of Joseph, which began with him simply being able to "forget the toil" of his past, is surpassed by the fruit that abounded to him in the land of his affliction.

In other words, when we practice this virtue correctly, it isn't just that we forget the toil of our pain, but instead we are able to receive the fruit of God's providence. As difficult as

this is to do. If we can never see, even with simply the virtues of faith and hope, that God has intended good within each and every circumstance of our lives, both good and bad, we will never be able to integrate our past or find healing for what we have been through. But to the level that we can, is the level of healing that we will enjoy. This doesn't make this process simple or fast, but it should give us hope that it is possible and fruitful.

This is also why it is significant that Joseph does not make this pronouncement until he has children in Egypt. Even though he had already enjoyed much success in spite of his persecution, Joseph waits to express this beautiful truth until after he has children. Why? In becoming a father in the land of his affliction, he was given a small piece of God's providence. When you become a parent, and you see your child, it is simply beyond comprehension to fathom the uniqueness of each child. For the same two parents can produce children that are so vastly different that they might not even seem as though they are related.

But this same union, spread out over time, can produce so much diversity of temperament, character, and physical appearance that it can boggle our minds. When we have children, and we truly love the uniqueness of our children in such a way that we couldn't imagine life without them, it should move us into a state of awe of all the particular circumstances that led us to have this specific child. This is more than who we marry, even though that in itself is a wonder, but even the specific time of conception could vastly change the child that we receive. It is in the awe and wonder of this divine providence that led Joseph to these two unique and beautiful children that he is able to fully appreciate the beautiful providence of God in both his prosperity and his adversity.

“Do not remember the former things, Nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness And rivers in the desert.”

-Isaiah 43:18-19

Peace With His Environment

“And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace.”

-Jeremiah 29:7

Another amazing thing that Joseph was able to do was to seek peace with his environment. Another great tragedy of undergoing true trauma is that it separates us from our environment. When someone undergoes trauma it is easy for them to see

themselves as damaged and broken. Because of this, they can easily either grow in resentment and jealousy of those who aren't similarly afflicted, or even grow to "hate" themselves. Seeing themselves as tragically broken and even as a liability to the happiness and prosperity of all those around them.

For people who are given to resentment, they won't find peace in their environment because they want the world around them to experience the same brokenness that they feel internally. They are unconsciously consumed by their own bitterness, and sabotage their own lives as well as the lives of those around them. This would be like the prophet Jonah who was, understandably, bitter at the Assyrian empire for the trauma that they had caused his people. But because he was so embittered at them, the last thing he wanted was peace for them. In fact, when God spares the capital of Assyria, Nineveh, ironically through his preaching, this is Jonah's response:

"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. "Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"

-Jonah 4:1-3

His desire for their suffering was so great that he didn't even want to live in a world where his enemies prospered. While many won't experience this level of bitterness, it is nevertheless common. I remember that after coming home from Afghanistan, I was so bitter at what I had witnessed that my cynicism moved into overdrive. I secretly wanted tragedy to come, and I was pessimistic about everything around me. I had not noticed that my own bitterness had poisoned my heart to the point where I only anticipated tragedy and could not hope for good. While I have gotten a little better, this is still an issue for me.

Joseph on the other hand never falls for this trap. His heart burns for peace and he pursues peace within Egypt and his family even at great personal cost to himself. It is through Joseph's faithfulness that peace comes to Egypt and his family, and he never, like Jonah, resents his success, but instead revels in the prosperity that even his enemies achieve. This heart is rare, and is only available to those who can appropriately forgive the wrongs committed against them, but to the one who finds this peace and forgiveness, they will also fervently seek the peace of those around them. The one who can't will project their own disharmony on all those around them.

For the person who considers themselves broken, bitterness is not really the issue. It isn't that they are eaten up with hatred for others, but instead they almost "resent" themselves. They see themselves as weak and broken and sincerely believe that they can't integrate into their larger communities. They tend to see all problems as their fault and adopt a strange martyr complex. They also preemptively push people away from them, not because they actually resent these people, but they have become convinced in their own souls that they are no good for those around them.

Joseph once again doesn't fall into this trap. Although he suffers severely, he is able to soberly understand the issues of his past. He doesn't feel somehow "worthy" of the mistreatment of his past, nor does he heap unjust bitterness against those who harmed him. He sees things as they actually happened and is therefore able to approach things with a sober spirit.

Our current culture has really prevented modern people from performing this action. By calling people to fixate on their past traumas, they are all but assuring that people will either be eaten up with intense bitterness, or a sense of internal brokenness, or both. Instead of encouraging people to seek peace within their communities, we give them an excuse to not do this. Although we see this as compassion, it is actually preventing people from healing and finding "fruit in their land of affliction". Take this quote from the war-time journalist Sebastian Junger in his book "Tribe".

"Anthropologist Brandon Kohrt found a similar phenomenon in the villages of southern Nepal, where a civil war has been rumbling for years. There are two kinds of villages in that area: exclusively Hindu ones that have sharp class distinctions, and mixed Hindu and Buddhist ones that are far more open and cohesive. Child soldiers of either sex who went back to stratified villages could remain traumatized almost indefinitely, while those who returned to more communal villages tended to recover fairly quickly. "Some had trauma rates that were no different from children that had not gone to war at all," Kohrt told me about those ex-combatants. "PTSD is a disorder of recovery, and if treatment only focuses on identifying symptoms, it pathologizes and alienates vets. But if the focus is on family and community, it puts them in a situation of collective healing." Israel is arguably the only modern country that retains a sufficient sense of community to mitigate the effects of combat on a mass scale. Despite decades of intermittent war, the Israel Defense Forces have by some measures a PTSD rate as low as 1 percent."

-Sebastian Junger - "Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging"

By trying to help people by fixating on their trauma, we are actually assuring that they never recover from their past or find peace in their given communities. It also makes average friends and family members feel ill-equipped to talk to their loved ones about

their past. We think that only professionals can help them “process” their trauma and develop good coping strategies. While this advice appears wise, it has had an adverse effect. Without being able to appropriately talk about our past, not with the kind of unlimited validation perspective of our modern talk-therapy class, but to have real conversations with people who love us and can actually push us and tell us when we are acting poorly, we won’t find this proper peace with our environment.

When modern people claim that they are “healing” what is most confounding to me, is that their “healing” has nothing to do with finding peace in their environment. Meaning that they can claim that they are healing even when they have pushed away their family and friends and are living in a more isolated environment. They claim that they have cut out the “toxic” influences of their past, and don’t get me wrong, this isn’t a totally invalid idea, but they haven’t reckoned that true healing should result in peace with our environment. To put it more simply, we can *know* that Joseph healed, not because of some vague self-affirming statement that he feels healed or something like that, but because he has objectively become a blessing to those around him. He is an active force for good and keeps peace within his family for multiple generations.

“So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father’s household. And Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. Joseph saw Ephraim’s children to the third generation. The children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were also brought up on Joseph’s knees. And Joseph said to his brethren, “I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.” So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.”

-Genesis 50:22-26

Peace With His Family

“Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Make everyone go out from me!” So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph; does my father still live?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come near to me.” So they came near. Then he said: “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. “But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. “For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. “And

God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. "So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. "Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph: "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. "You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. "There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine." ' "And behold, your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my mouth that speaks to you. "So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hurry and bring my father down here." Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him."

-Genesis 45:1-15

This is where Joseph's healing is most manifest, in his ability to heal his own family. Now I am certainly not saying that this is possible in all families, we will talk more about this, but what I am saying is that in the person who is genuinely healing, they create peace wherever they are, as long as it is up to them. However, you will notice that Joseph does not immediately make peace with his brothers, which is a part of this story that perplexes many readers.

When Joseph first meets his brothers, he hides his identity and even tricks them and speaks harshly to them. We have already spoken of the reason, but it bears repeating. The reason for this was both to produce deeper healing within his family, as well as allowing his brothers to show that they had really repented. Now we will talk about the effect of Joseph's "trick" on his brothers next week when we can really focus on them, so for this week's study, let's instead focus on his brother's repentance.

"Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. "And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."

-Luke 17:3-4

There are many overly-simplistic beliefs floating around Christian circles nowadays. Some Christians think that we are to have peace with all people, even if they are actively mistreating us, simply if they want a relationship with us. So, if there is a wife that is being mistreated by her husband, some would think that as long as the husband wants to stay married, her role is to simply treat him well, forgive him, and submit to the mistreatment. The problem with that theory is contained in the above verse. Jesus

clearly says that if our brother sins against us we are to “rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.”

When someone wrongs us, their behavior has fractured the relationship, kind of like tearing a piece of fabric. When the fabric is torn, it has lost unity, and can only be repaired if it is sewn back together. In the same way, sin fragments necessarily fragment relationships. This is why God tells His people:

“Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.”

-Isaiah 59:1-2

Notice, God’s people are not rejecting Him outright, but their “sins” have separated them from God. This is the nature of sin, it necessarily separates which is why God forbids it. To the degree that I sin against another person is the degree of separation that I cause in that relationship. And nothing short of repentance and forgiveness can actually fix the relationship. This is the strange thing about Joseph’s story. Even though he clearly wants to reconcile with his brothers when he first sees them, he holds himself back even though it causes him distress to do so:

“Then he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother’s son, and said, “Is this your younger brother of whom you spoke to me?” And he said, “God be gracious to you, my son.” Now his heart yearned for his brother; so Joseph made haste and sought somewhere to weep. And he went into his chamber and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out; and he restrained himself, and said, “Serve the bread.” So they set him a place by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; because the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth; and the men looked in astonishment at one another. Then he took servings to them from before him, but Benjamin’s serving was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him.”

-Genesis 43:29-34

Why did he cause himself so much pain? Because Joseph knew that if he tried to force reconciliation with his brothers, without proper repentance, any unity that they achieved would be artificial and weak. He wanted proper reconciliation which could only come through proper repentance. So when does Joseph reveal himself to his brothers? As stated before, Joseph puts his brothers in the identical situation that caused them to

betray him in the past. He takes the new favorite of Jacob, Benjamin, and sets him up to be found “guilty” of stealing Joseph’s cup. He then tells the brothers that he is content to simply enslave the offending party, namely Benjamin, and let the rest of them go.

This is identical to the situation that caused his brothers to betray him in the first place. Joseph was the favorite, and when given the opportunity to enslave Joseph to make their lives easier, they took it. But this time, it doesn’t go this way, Judah, who was the one who came up with the idea to sell Joseph as a slave responds this way:

“Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. “For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?”

-Genesis 44:33-34

The brothers, with Judah at their lead, have found genuine repentance. Not only does Judah not sell out his brother, he volunteers to be a slave in his place. We will talk more about the significance of this moment in next week’s study, but suffice it to say that while Joseph reflects Christ in his story of betrayal and salvation, Judah now reflects Christ in his willingness to substitute himself for his brother. It is at this moment, and not a second sooner, that Joseph is able to make peace with his family. But this moment was only made possible by Joseph’s forgiveness of his brothers and submission to God. If he had not done these things prior, he would have been too eaten up with bitterness to have been able to make peace.

“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”

-Romans 12:17-18

While it is very possible that other people’s sin will make peace impossible, as long as it is up to us we are supposed to make peace when possible. But the only people who can embody this ideal are people like Joseph. Those who have maintained their peace with God and therefore are open to making peace even with those who have hurt them the most. Not in a flippant or naive way, but to actually recognize genuine repentance, and to reconcile in response. This is what it takes to be a true peacemaker.

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance,

character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

-Romans 5:1-5