

*Read also 2 Corinthians 4:7-9, 15-18. Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).*

This story is about a stepfamily. You might not think of it that way. But there's one man and four mothers who produced a total of twelve sons. Yours, mine, and ours. In this household there was jealousy, abuse, resentment, and rage—not just among the sons, but between parents and children, too. All this resulted in guilt, grief, and vengeance.

This was not the Brady Bunch. Not only stepfamilies deal with such problems; other families face these matters, too. The eleven brothers sold Joseph. They convince their father he's dead. Joseph did well in Egypt as a servant in Potiphar's house, but then he was betrayed by the man's wife and sent to prison. Thirteen years later he was released and made governor of the land. He led Egypt through seven years of prosperity and now it is two years into a severe famine. Joseph is 39 years old when his brothers arrive in Egypt to buy food. When Joseph recognizes them, it's payback time.

He's ruthless and calculating. He throws one of the brothers into the dungeon. He demands that his younger brother—the only one with the same mother as him—be brought back to Egypt, or else Joseph will not give them food.

Can this family be transformed? Considering this history of poor interrelationships is there hope?

Yes, there will be a transformation in this family. Remember that, when you get into tough circumstances in your own families. Again, these struggles of turmoil between siblings, parental grief, guilt, and hard hearts take place now, in 2014, as they did then, in a stepfamily or any family.

Let's hear the story. READ Genesis 43

This is a family of faith, even though they have problems. We want to explore what they do, and how we might behave should we encounter similar problems.

The crisis that connected the brothers is hunger. They have no food, and the cost of getting food is taking Benjamin to Egypt. Joseph set the cost. This exacerbates the guilt of the brothers and increases the grief of Jacob. You can hear it in Jacob's words, "*Why did you tell him you have another brother? Why are you so cruel to me?*"

Boy, talk about pressure! It's like when your parent or spouse puts the whole blame on you when somebody dented your car in a parking lot.

"Why did you park where someone could run into your car?" "Gee, I don't know. I felt the parking lot was better than leaving my car in the street!"

But then, during the discussion Jacob changed his mind. He said, "Okay, go! Go and take gifts; take double the money to pay back for the money in your sacks. And take your brother."

In dealing with their situation, first, Jacob was honest. He sent the money that was found in their sacks back, even though it was not his mistake.

When someone gives you too much change, do you give it back, even if it is due to someone else's mistake? Or, do you keep it? Are you honest only when someone else is watching? Do you only say something when someone shortchanges you?

If you hand back that extra money, that's truly being an honest man or woman.

Secondly, Jacob was generous; he sent gifts of appreciation.

Are you generous? Generosity is a habit which goes a long way in fostering good relationships. Other words for generosity are bigheartedness, liberality, open-handedness. Do you want a bigger heart and more compassion? Give freely. It will change you, and God will bless you.

Joseph had been generous toward his brothers by putting the money they paid for grain in their sacks. So Jacob was generous, and Joseph received gifts back. If you are generous, it will come back to you. You will always see God providing for you.

Have you experienced it? Try it. It is a fundamental truth. If you give, you will find that God rewards you.

Thirdly, Jacob let Benjamin go. Remember, he had been clinging to Benjamin because of his grief over having lost Joseph. He wouldn't let him go anywhere. But now he let him go. Letting Benjamin go means Jacob let go of his fear of yet another loss.

Grief no longer controlled his actions.

How did he do it? He simply put Benjamin in God's hands: "May God Almighty give you mercy as you go before the man, so that he will release Simeon and let Benjamin return." That's a risk of faith. He risked that God would be good to him.

A woman's husband had an affair after twenty-five years of marriage and left her. She was devastated and thought she would never marry again. She dealt with the grief by going to a Bible study, listening to teaching and praise music, and keeping a journal where she "poured out her soul to the Lord." Those journals are treasures now of how the Lord walked her forward.

She made a list of God's promises and at the top of the list was the Scripture "It is impossible for God to lie." She writes, "I guarded my heart because I didn't want to hurt the Lord in any way. I knew how I felt when I was betrayed and did not want to cause the Lord that same kind of hurt." She felt He would be her husband.

After eight years she met another man, and they became friends. They never had a date; they only met in groups. She began praying and fasting as this grace of God "knocked at her door." A year later they were married. Their first kiss was at the wedding. She writes, "I could have missed it... "were it not for grace.""

Grace happened when the brothers arrived in Egypt. Joseph's house manager was most gracious, as he said, "Relax. Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, must have put this treasure into your sacks. I know I received your payment." Then he released Simeon and brought him out to them (Gen 43:23).

That's grace. And it's unraveling their guilt.

The only way that Joseph's Egyptian household manager could have known about faith in their God was through Joseph. Joseph was still a man of faith, even though he had hard feelings about what his brothers did to him—feeling vengeful one moment, weeping the next. But he acts according to God's principles.

When life gives you a challenge, do you cling to God's ways and depend on Him for guidance? Or do you give in, abandon your principles, thinking God has forgotten you?

Tricia Roos is a three-time state champion girls' volleyball coach at Bishop Lynch HS in East Dallas. She and her husband have a healthy three-year-old son, but her second pregnancy is different. Prenatal tests reveal their unborn daughter has a chromosomal defect that is often fatal. Doctors recommended termination. But she's a Christian, and despite the suffering, she decided to keep her baby and "see out whatever life the little girl might have." She said, "This isn't a mistake. There's a higher purpose for this."

She clings to God, even though there are many possible heartbreaking outcomes. Her decision is making a difference to her team, who tell her, "You have 14 other daughters on this team who are there for you."<sup>1</sup>

What's most important? Most healing? Is it preventing or avoiding suffering? No one wants to suffer, but if we can get to the place where we can say what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians, we will find great meaning through our faith:

We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are persecuted, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. (2 Cor 4:8-9)

Perhaps this is what Jesus meant when He said, "If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it" (Mat 10:39).

Do you see a way through your own grief? Do you see a way out of your own guilt? Would you like a renewed, softer heart? Through each chapter of Joseph's story is the weaving of the dream, evident when the brothers bow before Joseph. The dream means hope, food, and a positive future of life.

Did you notice that the Holy Spirit CAN'T WAIT for them to learn that it's Joseph? He's giving them clues. Joseph told each one of them where to sit and he arranged them by age, and they

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<sup>1</sup>Megan Ryan, "Coach's Courage Despite Baby's Defect Inspires Team," Dallas Morning News, September 24, 2014, Section A, p. 2.

were astonished that he knew that. Joseph filled their plates with good food from his own table, giving Benjamin five times as much.

And the brothers, instead of being jealous, “feasted and drank freely with him.”

How do you unravel guilt, grief, and vengeance? By letting go of your first love, being generous, with a spirit of honesty, and letting God see you through when your problems are devastating.

Are you letting this old story teach you? It is not that different from reality today.

Amen