

Study Hints for Thinking Further

International Bible Lessons

Genesis 50:15-26

Sunday, January 22, 2012

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Some Bible study groups or classes can further discussion by asking some or all of the **Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** below. Others may want to send the bulletin size *International Bible Lesson* home with their students for further study in the coming week to encourage continuing Bible study. The *Study Hints for Thinking Further* below are not actually intended to be answers to the discussion questions, but hints a teacher may use to help students think through and discuss the questions in class.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

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

He wept and embraced them. He said he would care for them and their families.

God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die a sacrificial death on the cross for us. God said that whoever believed in His Son would not perish but have eternal life (see John 3:16). God has promised believers that He will care for them for eternity.

Assurance of forgiveness makes a more open relationship possible between the one who sinned and the one who forgave; otherwise, there is a tendency to avoid each other. True repentance and an expression of sorrow on the part of the sinner when asking forgiveness should make forgiveness and the assurance of forgiveness easier for the person forgiving the sinner. The same is true in the repentant sinner's relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

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

Partly through the supposed words of Jacob, they admitted that their actions had been evil and criminal. They admitted they deserved to be punished and told Joseph they were willing to be his slaves. They fulfilled Joseph's dreams, but Joseph chose not to make them his slaves.

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

As a supreme governor of all Egypt, Joseph had a responsibility to interpret and enforce the laws of God and the laws of human government. Joseph needed to clearly define and uphold with justice what was right in order to educate his subjects (and brothers) and

maintain civil government. By law, his brothers had not only committed a crime, but they had intended to commit a premeditated crime. They needed to face this fact and the fact that they deserved just punishment. They needed to know that in spite of what they deserved, Joseph was going to graciously pardon them as a governor and forgive them as a brother. He would not make them suffer as they had made him suffer by selling him as a slave. Since all of the facts in the case were openly discussed and understood by Joseph and his brothers, they no longer needed to carry guilt with them in Joseph's presence or fear being in his presence.

When God forgives repentant sinners, He does so as the Governor of the universe and the Father of His children. Jesus' death on the cross made it possible for God to uphold His law with justice before the universe, while graciously forgiving those who trust in Jesus, His Son, to save them from their sins and the punishment they know they deserve. In love and appreciation for God's gracious gifts, Christians want to serve God the best ways they can according to the Bible. They do not fear being in God's presence or praying to God, because they know God has forgiven them.

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

Seek to escape when they can. If the harm is significant, notify the proper authorities. Take steps to protect yourself. Pray for God's protection and for the person to be stopped by God and others. If wise, seek to reconcile with them before harm is done.

Try to help them understand that they have done what was wrong, if possible. Seek a way to lead them to repent, if wise. Pray for God's guidance in every aspect of dealing with the person, and for God to work upon their heart and your own heart. Pray that they will not harm you or others again. Ask God if and how proper authorities need to be notified so justice can be done and possible future harm to others be prevented. If they repent, forgive them. Prayerfully forgive them before God so you do not carry unforgiveness and resentment in your heart (which will give you heart trouble).

Joseph did not appear to seek justice for himself. He seemed to accept the situations he experienced or the consequences of the harm that was done to him because he was powerless to change his circumstances (only God could change them). Joseph could change his attitude and do his best to serve God and others in spite of his circumstances and in every situation. He trusted the dreams that God had given him, knowing that God had a better plan for his life.

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

Everything God does, God intends for good. Without making others do harm or giving them evil intentions, God knows that many intend to do evil and harmful deeds. God works in every situation to bring about what is good. When I know God's intentions, whenever anything happens to me, I know that God intends it for good and intends to bring good out of every situation in some way—though God may take years to do so, as in Joseph's case. Many things happen to us that we need to judge as good or evil, just or unjust, just as Joseph and his brothers judged his brothers actions to be harmful and their intentions evil. God will take all of these good and bad things and work them together for good—our good and the good of others. God has a good purpose for His children and it is always to achieve what is good for us and others.

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