

It had been 22 years since they'd sold him. As he was led away towards a life of slavery, you can imagine the terrified 17-year old's eyes, searching his brothers for any sign of compassion or love. He found none. But now, two decades later, he was looking down at their terrified eyes. To fully understand the emotion of this moment, we have to start from the beginning.

They were the picture of a dysfunctional family. One husband; four different wives, each competing against one another; and twelve sons. The one named Joseph was his father Jacob's favorite. And Jacob didn't try to hide it. The ornate, colorful robe Jacob gave Joseph was just more proof. Add that to Joseph's conceited dreams which predicted that one day, his brothers would all bow down to him, and like a pressure cooker, their hatred grew hotter, waiting to explode.

Then it did. One day, Joseph came to check on his brothers shepherding their flocks. Seeing that gaudy, rainbow robe in the distance, the brothers plotted, "Let's kill him." They eventually decided to sell him into slavery instead, pocketing about \$12 each from the sale of their brother. And 17-year old Joseph was off to Egypt.

Now, Joseph was one of those guys who was good at everything. He quickly won the trust of his master, Potiphar, and soon was in charge of the whole household. But it wasn't just Joseph's abilities that led to his success. The Bible regularly states, "The LORD was with him."

However, a fabricated accusation of assault by Potiphar's angry wife left Joseph locked away in prison. And yet, even in prison, "The LORD was with him," so Joseph ends up in charge of the whole prison. While there, God allowed Joseph to interpret dreams for two of Pharaoh's officials. But he remained forgotten, until one day when God gave Pharaoh two dreams no one could interpret. Suddenly, the official remembered that Joseph guy, and brought him to Pharaoh.

By God's power, Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams. There would soon be 7 years of bountiful harvest, followed by 7 years of unimaginably terrible famine. Joseph wisely suggested, "Appoint someone to store up food during the good years to survive the bad years." And Pharaoh gave Joseph the job. And so, after 13 years of slavery and imprisonment, Joseph became second in command of all Egypt. The LORD was with him indeed!

After the seven good years, the terrible famine began raging, even in Canaan-- where Joseph's family lived. Jacob, afraid of starving, sent his sons to Egypt to buy food from the one man who could sell it to them...Joseph. Joseph immediately recognized his brothers, but they didn't recognize this intimidating Egyptian. So they bowed before him...just like Joseph's dreams had predicted.

Finally, we reach the climactic moment. Joseph is alone with his eleven terrified brothers who sold him into slavery. You couldn't write a better revenge story!

After two decades of pain, fear, and waiting, Joseph finally has all the power and every reason to get his revenge. Would he kill them, like they'd wanted to kill him? Let them rot in prison like he had? Sell them into slavery, like they did to him? How would Joseph make them suffer the pain, fear, and doubt that they'd brought on him?

If this was an action movie, the scene probably ends with the hero slow-motion walking away from a building where his enemies are trapped. With a smile, he presses the detonator, blowing up the building, and bringing vengeance on his enemies.

But this isn't an action movie. It's real life! Instead, ***“Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph! Is my father still living? Come close to me. I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!”*** The brothers must have looked like they'd seen a ghost. But then Joseph says something completely unexpected.

“Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. Amazingly, Joseph doesn't destroy them. Even more amazingly, he doesn't even want them to feel guilty or burdened about their sin! Usually, even if we forgive someone who wronged us, deep down, we still want them to feel some pain and guilt for hurting us.

But not Joseph. Joseph responds in love, not vengeance. He wants happiness, not hurt. Joseph is truly an amazing example of a man who showed **Love for the Undeserving!**

But we can't go home with our main takeaway being, “Wow! I just need to be more like Joseph!” Here's why. If your only takeaway is “Be like Joseph,” you will end up disheartened and despairing. Because we don't naturally produce that kind of counter-cultural love.

By nature, we want to hurt those who have hurt us, not show them love. Watch a toddler rip a toy out of another toddler's hands, and see how quickly snatch it back, or hit, or bite. When a teenager gets their heart broken, don't they try everything to make their ex jealous? When a wife makes a hurtful comment to her husband, how quickly he slings back a biting putdown intended to hurt!

We want to view ourselves as loving, forgiving Josephs. But our sinful nature seeks revenge; to make the person who hurt us hurt even more. So the only way to grasp what this bible account really means for us, is to admit that we're the brothers, not Joseph. And if we're the brothers, then Joseph has to be the one who didn't just say, ***“Love your enemies,”*** but actually did love them-- Jesus!

After hating him enough to sell him into slavery for a few spare coins, the brothers didn't deserve Joseph's love and forgiveness. They deserved retribution! In the same way, we don't deserve Jesus' love and forgiveness either. Every sin is us thinking something is more valuable than God. We've all at times traded away our brother Jesus for a few spare coins; so the the coins of our pet sins, or our self-righteous attitudes, or the desire for revenge rather than love and forgiveness, can jingle in our pockets.

Someday, we'll all stand before God, who has all the power and every reason to destroy us. Will he treat us like we'd expect Joseph to, vengefully crushing those who have wronged him? No. Because our Savior Jesus is the perfect model of counter-cultural love, love for those who have wronged him. As Psalm 103 stated, God ***“does not treat us as our sins deserve.”***

Jesus came in perfect, forgiving love, not because this sinful world deserved his saving love, but precisely because this sinful world couldn't ever do enough to deserve his love.

We see Joseph display undeserved love for his undeserving brothers in that house. We see Jesus display undeserved love for undeserving sinners on the cross, where Jesus went to save those who were destroying him. The cross, where Jesus prayed for his murderers, ***“Father, forgive them,”*** perfectly fulfilling his own directive to ***“pray for those who mistreat you.”***

That kind of gracious love is restorative. At first, when Joseph reveals himself, his brothers were unable to speak, because they knew how fractured that brotherly relationship had been for over two decades. Only when Joseph reveals his love and forgiveness to them do they finally speak. ***And [Joseph] kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.*** It sounds so generic. Just some brothers chatting. But think where they'd come from!

That's what undeserved love does. It mends relationships broken for decades. Jesus' undeserved love repaired the relationship between God and man, fractured since Eden. And enemies return to being brothers and children.

Jesus is the perfect model of love for the undeserving. Jesus is also our motivation to show that same kind of love to others. This account has to focus on Jesus' cross, not just admonish you to "Be more like Joseph." But I think there are two things we can learn from Joseph about showing love to those who've hurt us.

First, Joseph didn't keep hanging on to the hurt of what his brothers did. Think how differently he'd have reacted if he'd allowed his anger against his brothers to boil for two decades! For us to show love and forgiveness to those who have harmed us, we have to be willing to let go of what they did to us too.

That doesn't mean acting like nothing was wrong. But forgiveness means not hold it against that people anymore. Instead of focusing on his brothers' sinful actions, Joseph instead focused on God's grace.

That's the other thing we can learn from Joseph. Trust in God's providence and care, even through hardship that can result from others' sin. Joseph acknowledged, ***"It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you."***

I'm sure Joseph didn't always know what God was doing. Sitting in prison, I'm sure he sometimes doubted that God was working for his good. But eventually, it all clicked. Everything that happened was part of God's perfect plan to save lives. Joseph needed to be in Egypt. He needed to be in the jail, so he could interpret the dreams. He needed to be in charge in Egypt so he could provide his family with the food they needed to survive.

I'm not sure if Joseph knew all the details of God's plan. But he knew the promises God made to great-grandpa Abraham, and grandpa Isaac, and father Jacob: that the Savior would come from their family. As he said, ***"God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance."***

The line of the Savior would have ceased if Jacob's family starved to death. Through twists and turns, ups and downs, the rock bottom moments and mountaintop experiences—Joseph trusted that God was using all of them for his good. And for the good of all people, to ensure that the Savior would come into the world.

Can we trust that God is also working for our good when others hurt or sin against us? That doesn't mean it's never painful. But to acknowledge, like last weekend, that God is able to bless us even through hardships!

I don't know how dysfunctional your family life is. I don't know how much you're feeling like you've hit rock bottom. I don't know how deeply you've been hurt. But I do know this. In Christ, we who are undeserving of love, have received the most amazing love of all. And that means we, who have received undeserved love, can love those who are undeserving. As Jesus says, ***"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."***

When Joseph looked into his brothers' eyes that day, he didn't see their sin. He saw God's love. May God open our eyes to see his undeserved love everywhere we look, even in those who have hurt us. For God's love heals.