


# LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION

- 1 What have you learned about facing your past through Joseph's life?
- 2 Is there a specific person that God wants you to resolve past issues with? How does forgiveness factor into your healing process?

## WE DO LIFE TOGETHER!

If you haven't been involved in a LIFE Group yet, send us a message us thru Fb, and we will get you connected to a small group.

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### CONTACT US

(032) 254 8934  
0916 276 1067  
0942 174 4296

[wwcfcebu.org](http://wwcfcebu.org)  
[cebuwwcf@gmail.com](mailto:cebuwwcf@gmail.com)

### ADDRESS

369-L Juana Osmena Ext.,  
Camputhaw, Cebu City 6000

### SERVICES

Sundays  
10AM

### OFFICE HOURS

Mon to Sat (except Tue)  
8am - 12pm, 1-5pm

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# SUNDAY WORD

JULY 16, 2023

## FROM ORDINARY TO EXTRAORDINARY! PART 4 FACING YOUR PAST

You can't go back to the past. You can't go back to live in the past, and you can't go back to change the past. But sooner or later, you do have to face your past. The Bible has much to say about retribution or payback time. Exodus 21:23-24 says: "23 But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." (NIV) or Galatians 6:7 - "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows."

### THE HIDDEN AGENDA

Some people are bothered that Joseph does not immediately identify himself to his brothers. They feel that tricking them was painful. Why didn't he just give them the food and send them on their way? Here could be the reasons: First, Joseph wasn't interested only in their physical needs. He wanted true reconciliation. Through all the years in Egypt and during the years of his rise to power, he never forgot his father, he never stopped thinking of his brothers, and he never disowned the family of his birth. Down deep in his heart, Joseph was no Egyptian. He was still a Hebrew, the son of Jacob, still part of a family he longed to see again. If he just gave them food and sent them on their way, there could be no reconciliation. Second, Joseph wanted to see the family restored. But that required a change of heart from his brothers. He had to get some questions answered: Do they still hate me? Will they own up to their betrayal? Have they truly repented? Do they even want me in the family again?

### THE AWAKENING

To own up to their betrayal, a series of awakenings have to happen. Genesis chapters 42 and 43 are a series of tests God uses to awaken the guilty conscience of the brothers. Here's a list that will help us see them clearly: First, famine hit Jacob's family so they were forced to go to Egypt. Second, Joseph hid his identity from his brothers and treated his brothers harshly.

Third, Joseph sent his brother to prison. Fourth is the breaking up of the family as Simeon is left behind in Egypt. Fifth, there is the demand to bring Benjamin, his younger brother, to Egypt. Sixth, there is the strange case of the returned money.

Trouble has a way of stripping us of our self-confidence. Troubles in life often compel us to introspect and evaluate whether we have sinned against God. Egypt was the last place they wanted to go because that's where they sent Joseph many years ago. I'm sure they said to each other, "We will never go to Egypt!" But to get the food they need to stay alive, they have to go to Egypt! And to be healed from their guilty past, they must go to Egypt!

The loss of everything stripped them of their self-sufficiency. The harsh treatment reminds them of how they treated Joseph. The three days in jail mirror the pit into which they threw Joseph. Keeping Simeon in Egypt reminds them of how the family was divided by their betrayal. The demand to bring Benjamin tests their honesty after years of lying about their sin. The returned money forces them to admit their guilt to each other. All these things have to happen in order to arrive at a turning point.

THE TURNING POINT OF FACING YOUR PAST

1. Confession of Sin

The first turning point comes after the brothers spend three days in an Egyptian prison. Genesis 42:21 - "They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us (NIV).” During the three days they spent in prison, the Holy Spirit shook their memory so they would connect what happened in the past (casting their brother into a pit) with their current situation (in prison in Egypt). His cries were engraved in their memory so that two decades later, it all comes back to them.

Though painful, this was necessary. The Holy Spirit has connected their past sin with their present suffering. If you want to face your past and get better, the first step is always to stop blaming others and start saying, "I was wrong." If we are humble enough to admit our mistakes, no relationship will remain broken.

2. Recognition of God's Hand

This happens on the way back home when they discover the silver in their sacks. This was the silver they had taken to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph gave them the grain they wanted and secretly put the silver back in their sacks, giving the appearance that they had stolen the grain. No wonder the brothers were so afraid. Genesis 42:28 records, "Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, "What is this that God has done to us?" (NIV)

This is the first time the brothers ever mentioned God's name. In all the evil they did in the past, God was pushed to the edge so they wouldn't have to think about Him. Now, they have to admit the truth. God's Spirit never left them alone, even during the long years in Canaan when they thought Joseph was dead. They remembered what they did to their little brother: How they hated him; how they envied him; how they plotted against him; how they callously ignored his cries for help; how they lied to their father.

The wound must be cleaned before healing can begin. True repentance always involves coming clean. And coming clean means owning up to the whole pattern of wrongdoing, not just to the thing you happened to get caught doing. It's very hard for us to come to this place of total honesty with God and with others. For most of us, it's a continual battle to be transparent in all our dealings, especially when we have sinned because it's so easy to cover up.

THE CONFESSION

For 20 years the brothers had covered up their sins and suppressed their guilty conscience. But now God is using Joseph to awaken them to what they did. To fix the

mistake, they have to take Benjamin to Egypt. But when they reach Egypt with Benjamin, everything becomes confusing. They arrived to find a fancy dinner ready. And then, Simeon is freed from jail.

Now, Joseph enters the banquet hall. Genesis 43:29-31 - "29 As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son, he asked, "Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?" And he said, "God be gracious to you, my son." 30 Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there. 31 After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said, "Serve the food."” (NIV)

As the banquet begins, the brothers notice something strange. They were seated around the table in their exact birth order. No Egyptian could know a thing like that. Then one final detail. When the food is brought out, Benjamin receives five times as much as his brothers because he was Joseph's only full brother. But that too was a test. Will they allow God to bless others more than them? This goes back to the problem of envy that started the whole deadly cycle. Back then, envy caused them to turn against Joseph. But now they rejoice because they are reunited with each other, it doesn't matter if Benjamin receives more.

THE REALIZATION

If we stand back and look at the story, we can ask "How does God begin to awaken a guilty conscience?" How does God force us little by little to face the consequences of the past? That is never easy. And for the most part, it's always painful. Anything that brings us to our senses must be for our good.

But why so long? Why did it have to take 20 years to realize the wrong thing they've done? As we ponder Joseph's story, we may wonder why it took so long for the brothers to come to their senses. We can answer that question in two ways. At first, God arranged things so that Joseph was in the right place at the right time. Even if the brothers had realized their mistake while Joseph was in prison, it wouldn't have mattered. Joseph needed to be the prime minister when the famine struck and the brothers came so that everything could happen as planned. When the right moment came, the brothers heard their brother's voice again, reminding them of what they had done, and they couldn't avoid facing the consequences.

Next, the brothers weren't ready until now to face the consequences of their wrongdoings. Sometimes, when we try to help others, we may interfere too early. It happens. We might believe that someone has reached their lowest point, but they could still be figuring out how to overcome their problems. Things and even repentance cannot be predicted or forced.

FACE YOUR PAST

When we have a difficult past, we tend to carry the pain in silence. We tell others that we are doing fine when in reality we are struggling. Don't waste your time and energy pretending to be happy. With time this will only be harmful to your overall well-being. Confess to God your pain. Find the courage to admit to God that you are struggling with sin and that you need His help. Have a long chat with God or some fellow believers you can trust about your sadness and what you want to change in order to make things a little better. Through this, you will be able to get started on the healing process.

The healing process is one that takes time. It will be very hard to do without the Lord's help. If your pain was caused by someone else sinning against you, admit to God that you need to forgive the person who hurt you, and ask God to empower you to do so. I want you to reflect on this when you get home: What if, like Joseph, you have been the victim of mistreatment at the hands of others? What if you too have been betrayed? What if you have been abused? What if you have been falsely accused? What if you have spent years in the dark while others passed you by? How can you awaken the guilty conscience of your tormentors? Well, you can't. Only God can do that.