



Week Five: Joseph's Perspective

Spiritual Discipline: Spiritual Maturity

Genesis 44:14 – 45:28

Consider: Joseph's brothers return to Joseph's home. "They fell before him to the ground" (44:14). Joseph reiterates their "guilt," and Judah acknowledges that they have nothing to say for themselves (44:15-16). Perhaps they are finally learning the discipline of silence. Judah also states, "God has found out the guilt of your servants...." (44:16). Could Judah be speaking of the guilt they carry for what they did to Joseph?

Joseph confirms that he plans to punish Benjamin, and Judah asks for an opportunity to talk to Joseph (44:17-18). Judah recounts their story in detail from beginning to end, noting especially Jacob's attachment to Benjamin and the likelihood that Jacob will die if Benjamin remains in Egypt. Judah informs Joseph that he wants to switch places with Benjamin in order to spare the life of his father (44:19-34).

Joseph can no longer keep up the charade, and he tells everyone except his brothers to leave him (45:1). His emotions are so overwhelming that everyone outside the room can hear him crying. Joseph reveals himself to his family, and his brothers are speechless (45:2-3). Joseph's words are evident of his faith in God:

And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt" (45:4-8).

This image is a perfect presentation of forgiveness. It's as if Joseph has forgotten every harsh treatment he has received, every ill wish, every lie, and every deception. Instead, he credits God's goodness and mercy for placing him in a position to save his family. He sees everything through the lens of God's provision and nothing through the perspective of his own trying experiences. Through his words, he assures his brothers that he has forgiven them, but he goes beyond personal forgiveness. He has seen what their sin has done to them and how they still carry the burden of it (42:21-24; possibly 44:16); he tells them to forgive themselves: "And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves..." (45:5).

Joseph encourages his brothers to go home, tell their father he is alive and in charge in Egypt, gather all their families and belongings, and return to Egypt as quickly as possible so that he can provide for their every need during the remainder of the famine (45:9-13). "Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him" (45:14-15).

Pharaoh is thrilled that Joseph is being reunited with his family, and he facilitates the process of the entire family being able to come to Egypt (45:16-20). He also promises that they will live in "the best of the land of Egypt" (42:18). The brothers follow all of Pharaoh's and Joseph's instructions and return home with the plan to gather everything they need and move to Egypt (45:21-25).

So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. And they told him, "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. And Israel said, "It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die" (45:25-28).

Spiritual Maturity: Dallas Willard says the following of spiritual maturity:

The spiritually mature person is someone who has chosen the Kingdom of God – God's reign over them – as their guide to what is good. And not only that, but the Kingdom is understood as what will enable them to achieve and live for what is good. They have developed the knowledge and habits that keep them constantly turned toward and expectant of God and God's action in their life. This is the primary source of direction and empowerment for all that concerns them and their world. (Willard, "Lectures" in *Renovated*, 20-21)

A picture of Joseph and his words to his brothers should appear in the margin beside Willard's explanation as a prime illustration of spiritual maturity.

Wilder further clarifies Willard's definition of spiritual maturity:

Emotional maturity represents how far we can take maturity using only human models. What God's Spirit and people add to normal maturity, we call spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is not a separate phenomenon but rather emotional maturity plus more. Jesus says that even the pagans can love their neighbors. This is a good deal further than many Christians bother to go. Spiritual maturity is indicated by the ability to love our enemies spontaneously from the heart. (Wilder, *Renovated*, 50)

Wilder again explains, "To love our enemies, we surely need a mutual mind with God." (Wilder, *Renovated*, 50)

We've already established that Joseph experiences mutual mind with God, and today's passage further substantiates this fact. He sees his experiences as a small price to pay for allowing God to use him to save his family.

According to Willard and Wilder, "... spiritual maturity includes all the lesser areas of maturity that we call emotional and relational maturity. Disciples cannot claim spiritual maturity without emotional maturity." (Wilder, *Renovated*, 145) Willard explains, "Now the spiritual disciplines are practices that we use to deal with the habits, if you wish, of wrongdoing that are imbedded in our lives when we come to know Christ." (Willard, "Lectures" in *Renovated*, 134; Richard Foster also says, "The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths. They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm." *Celebration*, 1) The understanding is that spiritual maturity arises from practicing other spiritual disciplines, including the ones we have mentioned in previous weeks.

Both Willard and Wilder share the premise "...that new life in Christ begins immediately at salvation and that character should start changing then, as well. ... New life starts now! New life produces relational maturity as part of spiritual wholeness." (Wilder, *Renovated*, 145) Ideally, then, salvation is the first step to spiritual maturity.

Wilder states, "In Scripture, the words *agape* and *hesed* clearly include attachment love. Attachment love directly changes character. Attachment allows us to think with another and thus become like them." (Wilder, *Renovated*, 147) He goes on to say, "Attachment thus provides the means for all maturity. Without attachment love, Saint Paul reminds us, all kinds of gifts, talents, and activities that appear spiritual are nothing...." (Wilder, *Renovated*, 148) Therefore, allowing ourselves to experience *hesed* with God, as Joseph did, engenders spiritual maturity.

Reliance on the Holy Spirit precipitates mutual mind with God. (Wilder, *Renovated*, 152-153) "When we notice we have lost our peace, mutual mind with God restores us. When we are troubled about the past, thinking about it *with* God restores our joy. When we see others as enemies, mutual mind with God gives us *hesed*." (Wilder, *Renovated*, 152)

Application: So far in this series, we have discussed meditation with imagination, *hesed* and attachment love, mutual mind with God, solitude, and silence, all contributing to spiritual maturity. Pick one of these disciplines to practice this week. If necessary, take a few minutes to review the lesson in which it was discussed. As you practice this particular discipline throughout this week, make some notes on how its practice contributes to your spiritual maturity.