

**GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 34 (49:1-50:26): Some Summary Thoughts:**

The metaphor of “journey” has provided our framework for moving through God’s creation, His “call” of Abram and Abram’s descendants as He re-creates a faithful creation, and His images of forgiveness, grace, and reconciliation found in the person of the former slave, Joseph. As we close, Scripture reveals that Joseph’s brothers suffer one more anxiety attack. Once again, we have to be struck at the maturity found in Joseph’s life and his response. The brothers acknowledge their crimes against Joseph and beg forgiveness, masterfully framing their remorse in words that are intended to have the greatest impact on Joseph. They begin their appeal, not with their own confession of sin, but with an appeal to their father and a common faith. Interestingly the terms, sin and wrongs, occur four times in the short space of seven verses. Again, Joseph weeps (reminding us of his reaction in chapter 45 and also the tears of reconciliation as Jacob and Esau embraced in 33:4). The Scripture states:

*15 When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, ‘What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?’ 16 So they sent word to Joseph, saying, ‘Your father left these instructions before he died: 17 ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.’ When their message came to him, Joseph wept. 18 His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. ‘We are your slaves,’ they said. 19 But Joseph said to them, ‘**Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. 21 So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.**’*

So Joseph reveals his own complete transformation from arrogance to reconciler, from potential antagonist to protector. The final picture we are left with is one showing the children of Jacob living in reconciled relationship in Egypt. And, as we noted in the lesson, the final comments of Joseph to his brothers return us to the beginning of Genesis. We began our own “journey” with the serpent challenging Adam and Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In so eating they would take the place of God and determine for themselves good and evil. We now close with the wise Joseph responding, ‘*Am I in the place of God? Though you planned evil against me, God meant it for good.*’ Instead of seeking to supplant God, Joseph demonstrates for us a life lived wisely in a right relationship with God, a life given to reconciliation rather than revenge, forgiveness rather than faultfinding, and compassion rather than cruelty.

**Reconciliation:** One interesting lesson that can be drawn from these texts is that reconciliation is possible even when one party holds all the power and all possible trump cards. Joseph explicitly rejects a Divine role for himself (even though his position could demand it), manifesting instead divine graciousness to his anxious brothers through his speech (“do not be afraid”) and by his reassurance of his intent to do good for them as God has done for him. One could argue that the Joseph story powerfully reminds us that genuine reconciliation can occur when both parties willingly make themselves vulnerable and choose a common stance of equality before God. At that point, true community can result. What a powerful lesson for the church!