

International Conversation Café

Is Faith Relevant to My Life?

Restoring Relationships

All of us have a need to have healthy relationships with people. We want to be loved and accepted by others and recognized as unique. We have seen how we can have this kind of relationship with God, but relationships with people sometimes seem to be more difficult. What are some things that get in the way of healthy relationships?

Of course, there are many answers: greed, selfishness, envy, dishonesty, jealousy are but a few of the root causes. Often, we end up hurting others and are hurt by them.

*Why do you think relationships between people are so difficult?
What are some of the steps do you take to restore a friendship?*

When it comes to restoring relationships, the first word that comes to mind is confession. This is when we admit to another person how we have wronged them. It is the first step toward restoring a relationship.

So, confess your sins to one another. Pray for one another so that you might be healed. The prayer of a godly person is powerful. Things happen because of it. ~James 5:16

*What is the main idea of this Scripture?
Tell a story about how a relationship was restored when you apologized.*

When someone confesses and apologizes to you, then you have a choice. The choice is whether or not you will forgive them. Forgiveness means to not punish someone for the harm they have done to you. Of course, this is easier said than done. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean that you can or should trust them.

There is a helpful story in the Bible about a young man, Joseph, who suffered because of the way his brothers treated him. Because of his faith in God, Joseph had the wisdom and strength to forgive his brothers. Consider the following story.

Joseph (1905-1805 BC) was the favorite son of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham. Joseph's ten older brothers hated Joseph because their father treated Joseph better than them. One day, Jacob sent Joseph on an errand to find his brothers who were herding sheep, to see how they were getting along. When the older brothers saw him approach in the distance they said, "Here comes the dreamer. Come, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say a ferocious animal devoured him."
~Genesis 37:19

That is exactly what they did. However, as Joseph languished in the cistern, a caravan of traders came by, on their way to Egypt. Instead of murdering Joseph, they sold him as a slave. This was the first bad thing that happened to Joseph.

In Egypt, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, an official to Pharaoh, king of Egypt. "The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered. Potiphar put him in charge of his household and he entrusted to his care, everything that he owned." However, Potiphar's wife was attracted to Joseph. When Joseph refused

her sexual advances, she made up a story that Joseph tried to rape her. That enraged Potiphar and he put Joseph in prison. This was the second bad thing that happened to Joseph. ~Genesis 39

Retell the story up to this point.

While Joseph was in prison the Lord was kind to him. The man in charge of the prison put him in charge of the prison. While Joseph was in prison he correctly interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's wine taster and baker, who found themselves in prison. The wine taster was restored to his position in Pharaoh's household but forgot to recommend Joseph to Pharaoh.

Retell the three bad things that happened to Joseph at this point.

Joseph spent two more years in prison. Then Pharaoh had a dream that no one could interpret. However, the wine taster remembered Joseph. Joseph interpreted the dream and Pharaoh not only rescued Joseph from prison but made him second in command. This was a change in Joseph's fortune.

About this time a great famine came to Egypt and the surrounding countries. Jacob, Joseph's father sent his 10 sons to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph oversaw the grain supply and storage. Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. Joseph tested them to see if their attitudes toward their younger brother and father had changed. Genesis 42 - 45 tells a fascinating story. When Joseph was satisfied that his brothers were sorry over how they treated him and that they truly cared about their father and youngest brother, he sent all the Egyptians out of the room and revealed his identity to his brothers.

So there wasn't anyone with Joseph when he told his brothers who he was.² He sobbed so loudly that the Egyptians heard him. Everyone in Pharaoh's house heard about it.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?"

But his brothers weren't able to answer him. They were too afraid of him.

⁴ Joseph said to his brothers "Come close to me." So they did." ~Genesis 45

Why were Joseph's brothers afraid?

How do you think Joseph felt about his brothers?

Then he said, "I am your brother Joseph. I'm the one you sold into Egypt.⁵ But don't be upset. And don't be angry with yourselves because you sold me here. God sent me ahead of you to save many lives." ~Genesis 45

What was God's purpose in allowing Joseph to suffer?

What do you think helped Joseph to forgive his brothers?

After Jacob died, the brothers once again became fearful that Joseph would pay them back for the evil they had done to him. But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Do you think I'm God?²⁰ You planned to harm me. But God planned it for good. He planned to do what is now being done. He wanted to save many lives." ~Genesis 50

How do you think faith in God could help you forgive others?

Look for a few moments at the painting and answer these questions.

1. Describe what you see in the painting; what do you notice?
2. What questions would you like to ask the artist?
3. How does the painting help you to understand the story?



Peter von Cornelius. Joseph Reveals Himself to His Brothers. C.1816 or 1817. Tempera on Fresco. 236 cm x 290 cm. Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin