

The expression, “older and wiser,” is based on the hopeful belief that as time goes on we will benefit from our years of experience and learn from our mistakes – and not repeat our mistakes. . . . Of course it also means that we can choose to deliberately stir the pot because we’ve learned what it takes to do that, even if the results are never guaranteed. . . . When Joseph identified himself to his brothers he went way beyond stirring the pot – he kicked it into next year. When Joseph and his brothers have this meeting in Egypt they are older but not wise enough. They are stuck in an awkward place between knowing what happened in the past – and not yet having the wisdom needed to fully reconcile in the present.

Joseph cleared the room in an attempt to at least keep all this awkwardness in the family – but then he broke down so loudly the Egyptian ears at the door were able to hear everything anyway. For awhile Mr. Big Deal Joseph was an emotional wreck. And his brothers probably would have sobbed with him if they weren’t already in a state of shock and abject terror. I have to imagine that if Benjamin didn’t already know that his brothers had sold Joseph into slavery – well, he did now! And as for the other brothers, they had to be thinking that there was no telling how Joseph would choose to pay them back. Clearly he was in a position of power here and he could certainly make things happen. . . . But then a little glimmer of normalcy seems to set in: Joseph started to humbly brag about how God had set him up here in Egypt to save their lives during this famine; and by the way – Pharaoh thinks the world of him. . . . Oh, yeah, that sounded like the Joseph they remembered. Who else would take the time to repeatedly emphasize how his position was so high and mighty in Egypt? . . . I think the brothers also remembered WHY they had sold Joseph to the slave traders. But at the same time they couldn’t forget that they were in Egypt to buy food for their extended family. And their brother Joseph was the official gate keeper to all the available food supplies. So they were just going to have to sort out how to keep him sympathetic to their needs – even if it meant going home and telling their father Jacob, “Surprise! Your son Joseph is alive and well, and large and in charge in Egypt – and he’d sure like you, and the whole family, to come for an extended visit for the next five years. So why don’t we start to pack?!” . . . I think it is safe to say that Joseph’s brothers were emotional wrecks in their own eleven individual ways AND as a collective as they shared a moment standing there speechless and staring at each other. Then Joseph reached out and hugged Benjamin, and they cried. And then Joseph hugged and cried over everyone else, until they were all a soggy mess.

It was quite a strained reunion for the brothers, yet the value of personal resiliency and the gift of being flexible come to the fore. In this first meeting they clearly couldn’t work

through everything that had come between them. And even though they couldn't erase the past, they had some hope of doing better by each other in the future. They were able to take that first shaky first step toward restoring their relationships and healing a big rift in their family.

That's a huge thing to do, isn't it? To acknowledge that while everyone involved still bore the emotional scars of what happened in the past, they could also see the value in drawing closer together in the future. And while Joseph already had time to consider how God had worked through their difficult past to lead them to a new opportunity for the future, his brothers were just beginning to see how God had brought something good out of all of it. This revelation was quite an unexpected development – and yet it was the answer to their prayers to find a way to live through this time of famine and to preserve their family.

It may be that we are like Joseph's brothers: so intent on just keeping our families alive and getting through this time of pandemic – that we can't see how God has been at work through it all, or how God is already answering our prayers. We don't have the "Joseph view" of it all just yet. But that revelation is coming. . . . At least that's the assurance we've been given, and what the psalmist affirms in Psalm 105:

*Keep your eyes open for GOD, watch for his works; be alert for signs of his presence. Remember the world of wonders he has made, his miracles, and the verdicts he's rendered*

*(Psalm 105:4-5 The Message)*

If we're going to benefit from our years of experience, then this is a great time to remember God's faithfulness throughout all our years; to trust that God will actively be with us in the future; and to praise God NOW, today, in the present! And the psalmist gives us some guidance on how to do that:

*Hallelujah! Thank God! Pray to him by name!*

*Tell everyone you meet what he has done!*

*Sing him songs, belt out hymns, translate his wonders into music!*

*Honor his holy name with Hallelujahs, you who seek GOD.*

*Live a happy life!*

*(Psalm 105:1-3 The Message)*

That seems like a pretty clear course of action, doesn't it? Praise and thank God. Pray to God. Tell everyone you meet what God has done. Sing it out! Honor God with more praise and by living a happy life. Yes, by living a happy life *DESPITE* everything else that is going on. We can still choose to live a happy life because our faith is in God.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.