Imagine what it would have been like to have been in the palace that day when Joseph forgave his brothers. This powerful man – second only behind Pharoah – weeping so loudly that he could be heard throughout the palace. Imagine all those years of pent-up emotion released at this moment. Joseph lets himself be vulnerable, allows himself to forgive.

Imagine how Joseph felt after this release. I expect he felt many pounds lighter without that extra weight of carrying a grudge. Perhaps he felt that he could skip to the moon. Despite having the responsibility for feeding a large part of the ancient world during a famine, Joseph felt suddenly free.

Forgiving others will do that to us. Forgiving those who’ve done wrong to us actually frees us. Forgiving others actually heals us.

A study published in Psychology Today found that patients who’d just undergone coronary surgery that also received forgiveness therapy had better blood flow to their hearts than those who had just received the same surgery but no forgiveness therapy.[[1]](#endnote-1)

A study in Frontiers in Human Neuroscience and Science Magazine[[2]](#endnote-2) showed that holding onto past hurts negatively affects our brain in several ways.

* It causes despair that can be severe enough to require therapy and drugs.
* It causes the body’s fight or flight response to overwork, meaning you have trouble thinking rationally or creatively.
* By rehashing old hurts over and over, you flood your brain with cortisol, which means you have trouble recalling anything else.
* Rehashing old hurts also heightens your sensitivity and means you will get hurt more easily in the future.

On the flip side, separate studies using MRIs found that when the brain achieves forgiveness, the frontal cortex is activated. This leads to:

* More rational thinking, especially the ability to see other points of view
* More integrity and moral behavior because the frontal cortex is the morality center of the brain
* Less pain and suffering; in fact, scientists believe that forgiveness evolved in humans as a way for the body to heal itself[[3]](#endnote-3)

So with all the benefits of forgiveness, we are all waiting in line to forgive everyone, right?

Forgiveness is hard. We have been treated wrongly, and for some reason, we tend to dwell on it. The injustice of it all. The betrayal. We want revenge so that the person who hurt us will feel the hurt we feel. We know we should forgive, and we decide that others may be able to forgive because the wrongs done to them weren’t as bad as what was done to us.

Joseph, as we heard last week, was beaten, thrown into a pit and sold into slavery by his brothers. Our lectionary skipped his adventures in Egypt, but the Bible tells us a decent master named Potiphar bought him. Joseph had a pretty good gig as slavery goes until Potiphar’s wife falsely accused him of raping her. Then he went to jail, where he stayed a long time until his ability to interpret dreams got him an appointment with Pharoah, who pardoned him and put him in the position he has now. Joseph had to forgive the betrayal of his brothers and the lies told by Potiphar’s wife. People did some terrible things to Joseph, but he forgave.

As Christians, we follow Jesus the Christ. Jesus was sold out to the Romans and Jewish leadership by one of his closest friends. In a kangaroo court, he was convicted of a trumped-up charge and executed as a common criminal in an excruciating way. Yet, as he died, he said, “Father forgive them.”

We’ve all had bad things done to us –many of them done by family or friends, but we probably can’t top what friends and family did to Jesus or even to Joseph. Yet they forgave.

Some cool things happened with Joseph when he forgave. He saw where God was at work in the world. He saw where God had used the bad things that happened to him to help others. He saw where God had turned evil into good and how God expected Him – Joseph – to be part of that good.

No wonder, Joseph cried. He’d no doubt struggled to forgive the big hurt from being sold into slavery. Then as he started to forgive, that act opened up his heart and brain to see how God had turned that evil around and used it to save much of the ancient world. Joseph saw how he was at the center of God’s vision and how much good he could do for others out of this hurt to him. In this moment of weeping, Joseph let go of all that hurt and embraced the good God had called him to do out of that hurt. At that moment, Joseph was healed.

Forgive. Join God at work. Be healed.

1. # Working Women: How Forgiveness Benefits Your Health: Forgiving Wrongdoers Can Expand Physical Fitness, <https://www.medicaldaily.com/how-forgiveness-benefits-your-health-forgiving-wrongdoers-can-expand-physical-fitness-316902>

   [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. # U.S National Library of Medicine, NIH, How the brain heals emotional wounds: the functional neuroanatomy of forgiveness, originally found in Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3856773/>

   [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Science: The Neurochemistry of Forgiving and Forgetting, <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2008/05/neurochemistry-forgiving-and-forgetting> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)