

# JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS: FAMILY RECONCILIATION

Leader pages on pp. 152-155

**THE POINT:**  
FORGIVENESS CAN LEAD TO FAMILY HEALING AND RESTORATION.

## GENESIS 42:3-5, 21-24A; 45:1-5

<sup>42:3</sup> So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. <sup>4</sup> But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he thought, "Something might happen to him." <sup>5</sup> The sons of Israel were among those who came to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

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<sup>21</sup> Then they said to each other, "Obviously, we are being punished for what we did to our brother. We saw his deep distress when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. That is why this trouble has come to us." <sup>22</sup> But Reuben replied, "Didn't I tell you not to harm the boy? But you wouldn't listen. Now we must account for his blood!" <sup>23</sup> They did not realize that Joseph understood them, since there was an interpreter between them. <sup>24</sup> He turned away from them and wept.

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<sup>45:1</sup> Joseph could no longer keep his composure in front of all his attendants, so he called out, "Send everyone away from me!" No one was with him when he revealed his identity to his brothers. <sup>2</sup> But he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and also Pharaoh's household heard it. <sup>3</sup> Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But they could not answer him because they were terrified in his presence. <sup>4</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please, come near me," and they came near. "I am Joseph, your brother," he said, "the one you sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup> **And now don't be grieved or angry with yourselves for selling me here, because God sent me ahead of you to preserve life.**

### MEMORY VERSE

### KEYWORDS

**Famine (v. 5)**—The term identifies an extreme shortage of food. The most common cause of famines mentioned in the Bible was drought.  
**Terrified (v. 45:3)**—The verb depicts the brothers' initial response when Joseph revealed his identity. The term characteristically expresses the emotion of someone confronted

with something unexpected, disastrous, or threatening  
**Grieved (v. 5)**—The Hebrew verb can express both physical pain and emotional sorrow. Because Joseph recognized that God was in control and had sent him to Egypt to preserve life, he could act compassionately toward his brothers.

# HOW DOES GOD USE EXTERNAL CRISES TO RESOLVE INTERNAL CONFLICTS?

One of the key points from a recent Psychology Today article about revenge says, "Revengeful thoughts and behavior are a temporary distraction from underlying suffering." Ironically, it seems that many of us want to exact revenge because we believe it will make things right, or it will make us feel better about what we've lost. When we experience loss at the hands of others, we may assume that our anger is about injustice, but that is just the label. The true issue is internal pain that we have limited solutions for.

In Joseph's case, his brothers were deserving of all the wrath he could have dealt. They had to be convinced to sell him into slavery as a substitute for murder (Gen. 37:18-28). But instead of dealing out punishment, he pulled them closer. Once he revealed his identity and told them of his plans to care for them and Jacob, he "... kissed each of his brothers as he wept ..." (Gen. 45:15). He focused on his brothers and thought of his father, fixing the internal rejection he experienced prior to being sold (Gen. 37:4-11). Joseph was betrayed, imprisoned, and elevated to prominence but he never sought revenge. Why?

## Prompted by Calamity //

### Genesis 42:3-5

Joseph's time as a slave and the false charges that put him in an Egyptian prison had not been wasted. Those years of confinement gave Joseph the time to master the Egyptian language and customs. We do not glorify or downplay the shameless treatment of Joseph, but as we reflect on Joseph's experiences while he was enslaved, it is apparent that the Lord prepared Joseph to overcome his malicious mistreatment (Gen. 39-41).

Joseph's life teaches us that even though we may feel trapped in our circumstances, the Lord can use our hard conditions as a training ground for a greater purpose that awaits us. The Lord can use our pain to move us toward fulfilling His will. It was the betrayal by Joseph's brothers and Joseph's imprisonment that set into play the events that led him to prominence in Egypt. It was the famine that brought his brothers before him as they sought to purchase grain.

Notice Jacob sent the older ten brothers. The Scripture clarifies "ten of Joseph's brothers" journeyed to Egypt to buy grain. The ten were



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lumped together as the conspiring culprits of hatred against Joseph. Jacob did not send his youngest, Benjamin, because he was afraid something might happen to him.

Again, we see the favoritism Jacob has for one of Rachel's sons and the clear distinction Jacob felt between the ten brothers and his two sons from Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. "But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he thought, 'Something might happen to him'" (Gen. 42:4).

After all these years, we see little has changed in their family dynamics. Referring to Benjamin as "Joseph's brother" is another way of showing continued reverence for the missing, beloved son of Jacob and the full brother of Benjamin. Jacob likely blamed himself for the tragedy and deeply regretted the moment he sent Joseph away to find his brothers on that hillside. Now, he kept Benjamin, "Joseph's brother," nearby to ensure no "coincidences" would be repeated.

God uses circumstances to bring about His will. Not all things are good, but the Lord will bring about good even when bad things happen. "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Joseph was called by the Lord for a strategic purpose; indeed, he was drafted to fulfill the purposes of God. Having been betrayed by his brothers and imprisoned on false charges in Egypt, the Lord used Joseph's imprisonment to position him for his next strategic encounter. Because of his God-given ability to interpret dreams, Joseph was freed from prison and elevated to a national level of prominence.

### WHEN HAS A CRISIS ACTUALLY TURNED INTO A BLESSING FOR YOU?

## Pushed Toward Correction // Genesis 42:21-24a

The famine throughout the region brought "ten of Joseph's brothers" to be "among those who came to buy grain" (Gen. 42:3-5). People from "every land" (Gen. 41:57) came to Egypt for food. Over twenty years had passed, and Joseph had put away any anger long ago. Joseph recognized his brothers (Gen. 42:7-17).

Now, a portion of Joseph's dream had come true. His brothers bowed before him in servitude. They came, not to bow to their brother, but "to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan" (Gen. 42:5).

Because of Joseph's prominence, he would have been dressed in regal attire as a powerful official. There would be no way for his brothers to recognize him. Even if they heard his voice, a grown man about to turn forty would sound different than the seventeen-year-old they last heard begging for his life as he faded from view



## DIGGING DEEPER JUDAH'S PLEA

In the story of Joseph and his family, total reconciliation hinged on one moment. Of course, he could have killed the brothers when they initially came to Egypt, but Joseph gave them an opportunity for redemption (Gen. 45:18). He raised the stakes by requiring them to return home and bring Benjamin—his only brother born of the same parents (Gen. 46:19). When they did what he wanted and he tested them by almost retaining Benjamin (44:1-17), Judah spoke to him "personally" (v. 18), pleading and revealing that their care for Benjamin reflected their heart toward their father (v. 34). When Joseph saw this, he wept and revealed himself to them, forgave their sin against him, reconciled with them and promised to sustain them all at once (Gen. 45:1-14). This is the perfect picture of how we should communicate wholeheartedly with our loved ones, and how we reflect the merciful heart of our Father, who saw our dire state, forgave our sin and made a path to deliverance through Christ (Rom. 5:8-10).

### Who could you God's show mercy to this week?

in that caravan. If they heard Joseph speak, they would not hear their Hebrew language, they would hear a man speaking a foreign language as an Egyptian noble.

It is both comforting and awe-inspiring to realize that God moves history forward to perform His will.

Joseph asked the ten brothers where they were from. He accused them of being spies and pressed them harder. They let him know they were all brothers from one father. "The youngest is now with our father, and one is no longer living" (Gen. 42:13). Joseph learned the good news that his father and Benjamin were alive. He also realized his father Jacob assumed he was "no longer living." Then, Joseph gave them a taste of their own cruelty by throwing them into prison.

During that time, the brothers would realize God was punishing them for what they did to Joseph years ago. After three days, Joseph called them before him. He changed the terms from sending only one brother home to sending all but one.

As Joseph explained the new terms, he heard his brothers speak to each other in their Hebrew language. Joseph learned that his oldest brother Reuben intended to save him from their cruelty.

"Then they said to each other, 'Obviously, we are being punished for what we did to our brother. We saw his deep distress when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. That is why this trouble has come to us.' But Reuben replied, 'Didn't I tell you not to harm the boy? But you wouldn't listen. Now we must account for his blood!'"

They did not realize that Joseph understood their conversation since an interpreter was between them. To this point, Joseph had not spoken to them directly but through an interpreter to protect his identity. Joseph heard his brothers speak with remorse about how they had treated him. He heard them acknowledge their guilt. Their remorse brought them to the threshold of repentance. Overcome with emotion from hearing his brothers express their remorse, Joseph turned away and wept.

He then decided to spare Reuben the indignity of another day in prison. In place of the oldest brother, Joseph ordered Simeon, the second-

oldest brother, to be bound in front of the rest and put back in prison. He then sent the rest of them home to return with Benjamin if they wished to free Simeon and purchase more grain.

## WHAT OBSTACLES PREVENT US FROM REPENTING?



## Propelled to Reconcile //

### Genesis 45:1-5

When Joseph saw all his brothers again, including Benjamin, he could no longer contain himself. The mighty Egyptian magistrate wept so loudly that the Egyptians outside the room heard it, and those workers in the nearby household of Pharaoh heard it, too. The moment of revelation came after twenty-two years of estrangement, toil, suffering, isolation, and his rise to power. The second-most powerful man in Egypt stood before the brothers and spoke directly to Jacob's eleven sons in their own language.

"I am Joseph!" Imagine the gasps from these eleven brothers. Then, he asked, "Is my father still living?" Joseph called them closer, and he stated the weighty reality again: "I am Joseph, **your brother.**"

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But in his next breath, Joseph said, “And now don’t be grieved or angry with yourselves for selling me here.” In their moment of shock, Joseph’s words of comfort pointed out how God turned around their treachery for good. There was a purpose in it all.

Eventually, Joseph reunited the entire family of Israel in Egypt. After Jacob passed away, the ten brothers worried that Joseph might take revenge on them for the evil they had conspired against him in the past. “But Joseph said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people’” (Gen. 50:19-20).

When we trust the Lord as Joseph did, we can face our relational pain, our betrayals, our losses, and all other challenges and stresses, relying on the truth of Romans 8:28, “We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

### WHAT’S ONE STEP YOU CAN TAKE THIS WEEK TO IMPROVE A RELATIONSHIP WITHIN YOUR FAMILY?

### DID YOU KNOW?

In 1993 Nelson Mandela was given the Nobel Peace Prize along with Frederik Willem de Klerk for their work in ending Apartheid—the system of institutionalized racial segregation that existed in South Africa and South West Africa from 1948 to the early 1990s. He said this regarding reconciliation on the heels of victory “. . . *reconciliation and nation-building would remain pious words if they were not premised on a concerted effort to remove the real roots of past conflict and injustice.*”<sup>20</sup> This is also the case with family. “So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23-24). We cannot move forward, even figuratively, without addressing the truths of our past misdeeds and legitimately making amends.

**Biblical Truth:** “Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

### What steps can you take to resolve a wrong against you?

## LIVE IT

### What steps can you take to foster forgiveness in your relationships?

Forgiving takes practice. The flesh would like nothing more than to make things “right” by carrying out justice. Jesus taught a new standard of righteousness recorded in the New Testament. He said, “I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you . . .” (Matt. 5:44). To love your enemies means to forgive them, much like Christ forgave those who persecuted and crucified Him. We must make it our practice to act as Christ would, modeling His character in all of our relationships, especially our closest ones.

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- **Make reminders.** Search for scriptures on forgiveness. Write one on a sticky note and place it on your mirror as remembrance to always choose forgiveness over bitterness.
- **Mention records.** Share a personal story of forgiveness with a family member or friend.
- **Minister reconciliation.** Who do you need to forgive today? Ask God to lead you as you seek reconciliation and forgiveness this week. Be the initiator of the process this week.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. A PRICE TO PAY // GENESIS 42:17

Society's standards allow people to prosper despite the methods used, but there is always a price to pay. As racial injustice raged, Malcolm X described the assassination of President Kennedy as "a case of chickens coming home to roost"<sup>21</sup>. Galatians 6:7 states that "God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap." For Jacob's sons the payment began when their father told them to go to Egypt for grain (Gen. 42:1-4) and they recalled selling their brother. Once they faced Joseph, his initial payback was to incarcerate them (Gen. 42:17). Like Jacob's sons, we are faced with sin's penalty.

**Praise God that Jesus paid the price for our sins.**

## 2. IDENTITY REVEAL // GENESIS 45:1-4

Everyone has their own unique identity. Amazingly, God designed each of us with characteristics that specifically belong to the individual. Life may bring situations that alter our physical being in various ways: thinner, taller, grayer, etc. Yet our unique distinctions remain with us. Joseph had grown up from the teen placed into the pit to "father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household, and ruler over all the land of Egypt" (Gen. 45:8b). Consequently, Joseph's brothers did not recognize him until his identity was revealed (Gen. 45:1-4). Joseph understood that part of his unique identity was being the eleventh child of Jacob. Believers have the unique identity of being redeemed brothers and sisters of Christ.

**Our charge is to reveal our identity to the world.**

## 3. GOOD TRIUMPHS // GENESIS 50:20

Good triumphs in the end. We do not know what God has planned for our lives. Situations may come that seem so unfair to us in that moment. As the elderly would say "just keep on living" which reminds us that we will understand more of God's plan as time moves on. This was true in the life of Joseph. Reflecting on his life, he probably had his

"why me moments." However, Joseph came to understand that God indeed had a plan. In Genesis 50:20, Joseph told his brothers "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people." Our lives are also in God's plan (Jer. 29:11).

**Remember with God, good will always triumph.**

## 4. PERFECT FAMILY // GENESIS 1:27-28

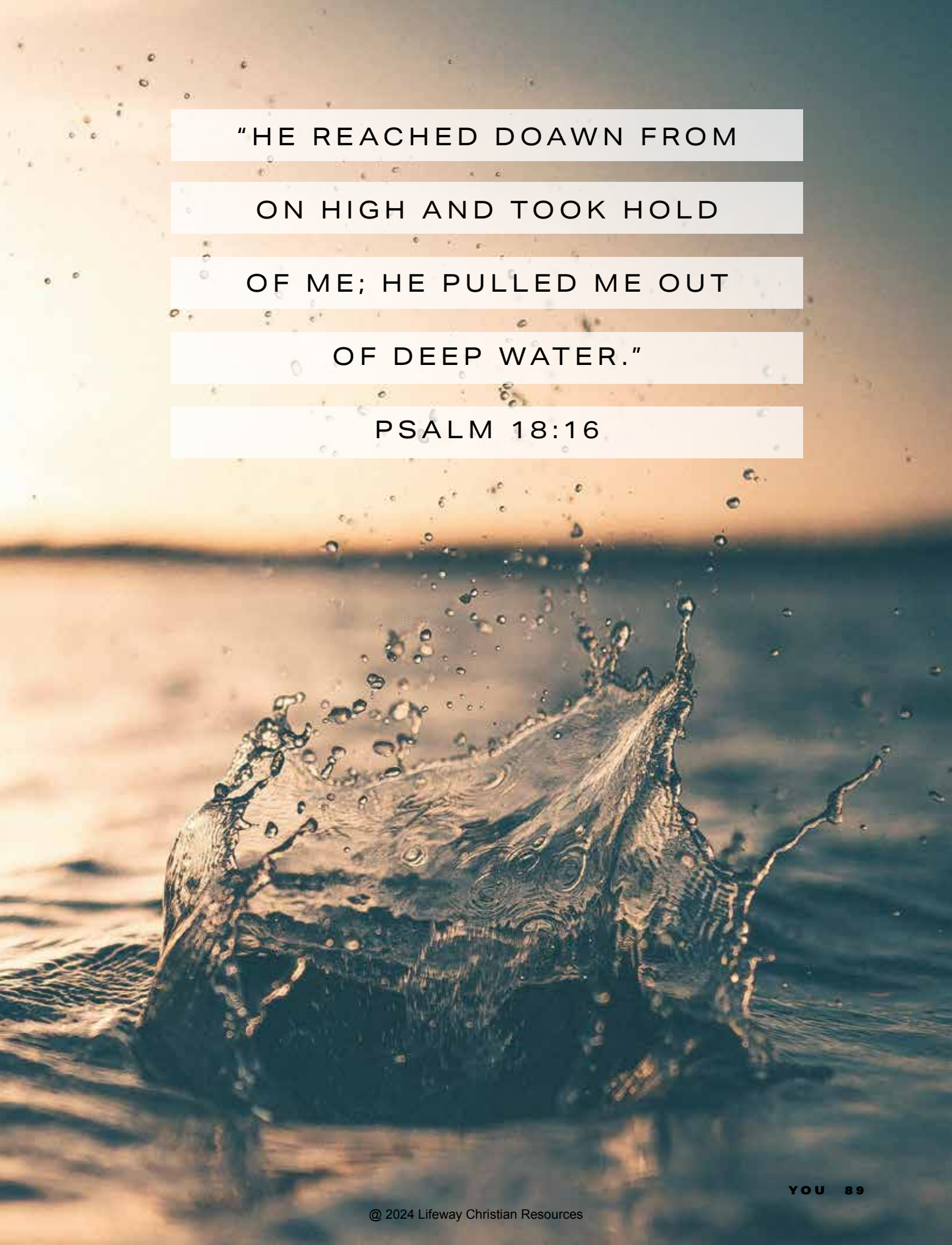
Families are instituted by God. In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve and told them to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (Gen. 1:27-28). Everything was good until sin came into the mix. Since then, confusion and conflicts have existed in families. All types of dysfunctions occur: emotional and physical abuse, drug and sex trafficking, and parents and children against each other. Still, there is hope for families. Love is key. It creates bonds of unity (Col. 3:14), drives out fear (1 John 4:18), and defines the nature of God (1 John 4:16). Viewing family issues through love does not remove the flaws, but how we handle them changes.

**Trust God with the daily concerns and know that He is restoring the perfect family.**

## 5. THROUGH THE AGES // HEBREWS 13:8

Family conflicts have been around since the beginning of time. Stealing, killing, and jealousy are a part of the tapestry of the biblical families and families of today. When our families or those connected to us have problems, be reminded that God was with Adam, Cain, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, Joseph, and the other biblical families. Hold on to the fact that God does not change. He is the "same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8). Gain courage in knowing, He will never leave you or abandon you (Deut. 31:8). He will make all things right in His time. Conflicts continue to impact families, but be grateful for the love, joy, and comfort families bring.

**Stand fast! No conflict has power or authority over God's love.**

A close-up, high-speed photograph of a large splash of water. The water is captured in mid-air, with many individual droplets suspended around the main splash. The background is a soft, warm glow from a sunset or sunrise, with the sun low on the horizon. The overall color palette is dominated by oranges, yellows, and blues.

"HE REACHED DOAWN FROM  
ON HIGH AND TOOK HOLD  
OF ME; HE PULLED ME OUT  
OF DEEP WATER."

PSALM 18:16