

# Family unity through forgiveness

by Elizabeth Soto Albrecht

**Genesis 45:5. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. (NRSV) Read Genesis 45:1–15.**

In worship we usually recognize monthly those celebrating a birthday, anniversary, or special event, and pray for them. One Sunday a couple stood up and announced they would be celebrating their 47th wedding anniversary that day. As we applauded for them, the wife quickly mentioned, “I have come to the awareness that part of our success in marriage has been both of us learning to master the art of forgiving.” Those words are profound: in order to have unity, we need to learn how to forgive.

**Today, as we gather around the table we ask: how can unity be nurtured in families? Why do families become fragmented? And how is it that we drift apart from the people we love?** We are reminded of the fragility of relationships in our extended families when we hear of yet another divorce or children taken away from their parents because of abuse or neglect. We cannot take for granted the gift of family, but we must work at the unity within it.

We realize that serious differences produce conflict among family members. Using violence should not be a normal way to resolve these differences in the family. In working with conflict mediation, we soon recognize that conflict is a normal human reaction because we are social human beings. What is not normal is how we choose to bring about resolution to those differences. We need to learn to live with those differences that may not result in the same opinions or ways of doing things.

We are familiar with Joseph’s story found in Genesis 37 to 47. In Genesis 45, we find the famous narrative of the re-encounter of Joseph with the brothers who sold him into slavery.

In biblical interpretation, we treat this story not as a biblical prescription like the Ten Commandments. This story is a description indicating how human beings, even in the Bible, choose negative behaviors that result in negative consequences. This story was preserved, in part, to explain how the Hebrew people arrived in

*This Bible study is an excerpt from the forthcoming Bible Study Guide by Elizabeth Soto, Seek Peace and Pursue It: Women, Faith, and Family Care, which will be available in June from Mennonite Publishing Network.*

*Seek Peace and Pursue It is developed by Mennonite Women USA and Mennonite Women Canada.*

Egypt through a favored brother becoming powerful, and were later enslaved by the system, and finally liberated by God.

In many ways the story of Joseph calls us to re-visit the concept of forgiveness. This is a very hard issue when a woman has been sexually violated. No one should prescribe forgiveness: it must be birthed within and arrive in the heart of the one offended, sometimes as a process of repentance from the offender. On other occasions it could appeal as an option to let go of the offense. But we can decide not to hold resentment, because this will turn into hate and hate has been a leading cause of violence.

The clue for transformation is not to allow resentment to make a bed in our hearts and minds. Can we try that? Can you receive

## PONDER

1. Name areas where we need forgiveness in the family.
2. What is needed to find “reconciliation” and to let go in order to forgive?
3. What did Joseph do in order to forgive?

healing from a broken relationship? Can you live in peace even when you feel one of your siblings, parents, relatives or other loved ones has done you wrong? Joseph had every reason to be resentful toward his brothers but he decided not to be led by hate, but rather, by love. Forgiveness is a long journey, a path less traveled, painful and difficult, but God promises to be with us in every step. 📖

**Prayer:** Parent God, may we be one, as you and Jesus and the Holy Spirit are one. Cement our unity in your word, confirm our togetherness by your presence, reassure us through the love of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.