

Main Idea: In Genesis 43, we learn something about God through the actions of His servant Joseph. He is the God who pursues forgiveness, as do His people when they reflect Him rightly. There are two points to this message.

- I. We learn about pursuing forgiveness from the story of Genesis 43.
    - A. We see the dilemma (1-2).
    - B. We see the dialogue (3-10).
    - C. We see the decision (11-14).
    - D. We see the drama (15-34).
      1. The brothers could not comprehend grace.
      2. Many today try to earn what God offers freely.
  - II. We learn about pursuing forgiveness by considering the significance of Genesis 43.
    - A. Pursuing forgiveness involves more than words.
      1. It did for Joseph.
      2. It does for God.
      3. It will for us.
    - B. Pursuing forgiveness involves overcoming evil with good.
- Response: What are you doing with God's offer of forgiveness?
1. Accept it thankfully.
  2. Share it joyfully.

*Scripture Reading: Romans 12:1-2, 9-21*

Ever read Don Richardson's book *Peace Child*? I'd like to read an article I ran across this week which was published in 2012, "*Fifty years later, 'Peace Child' tribe still following Christ.*"

In 1962, Don and his wife Carol moved to West Papua, Indonesia. With their 6-month-old son Steve in their arms, the Richardsons approached the Sawi tribe, not realizing that the very act of carrying their infant was a sign of peace to the 400 Sawi waiting to greet them.

As the Richardsons began to explain Jesus' story to the tribe, they realized that the Sawi were interpreting Jesus' betrayer Judas as the hero of the story. It turned out the Sawi idealized treachery. Sometimes they would even befriend a member of another village for the sole purpose of later betraying him to the death and having a cannibalistic feast.

In time, battles broke out between various villages over who got to be close to the Richardsons. When Don told them they needed to make peace or they would leave, a man brought his baby son to another tribe. The Richardsons were told that in the Sawi community, when one village wanted to make peace, they presented one of their children to another village. For as long as that "peace child" lived, there would be peace between the enemies.

After working hard to explain the Good News, Carol Richardson finally realized that this "peace child" act was a metaphor for the Gospel. A father would give his son to the enemy to restore peace and bring reconciliation.

Mission Network News was recently able to catch up with Don and Carol's son, Steve Richardson. Steve, who was a missionary to Indonesia before becoming president of [Pioneers USA](#), recalls growing up with a tribe growing in their understanding of Christ.

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\*\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> This message is adapted from two series at WBC in 1992 and 2002.

After this "peace child" explanation of the Gospel, says Steve, "There was a breakthrough among the Sawi. They started recognizing that Jesus was God's peace child—the ultimate peace child."

"They began responding to the Gospel, and the Sawi eventually began reaching out in their own missionary efforts to tribes they had previously warred against," Steve adds.

Flash forward to today. This year is the fiftieth year since the Sawi first received and understood the life-changing news of Christ. But has that Good News stuck?

Steve says it's more than stuck: it's expanded. When his parents first went to West Papua, there were few people groups in the islands with the Gospel message. He says now, there are few who do not. The Sawi meanwhile have continued to spread the Truth of Christ to others.

For this jubilee year celebration, Steve, his brothers (who are both on the mission field), and Don are headed back to Indonesia. They are told 2,000 or 3,000 Sawi will greet them as they celebrate the coming of Christ to their community and baptize at least 50 new believers.

Steve says it's all a reminder of what God can do when just two people respond to His call. After the Richardsons left Indonesia, it was not just the Sawi who had been transformed. The Sawi have spread the message to others, for one thing. But their story has transformed hearts around the world through Don's book, *Peace Child*.

"So many people have said 'It's because of that story that I took my step into greater faith and obedience.' It's just fantastic to see the ripple effect of anyone out there who says, 'Yes, God. I'm going to respond, and I'll do what You've challenged me to do.'"<sup>2</sup>

You could make a case that revenge is the most natural response in the world. You hurt me, and I'll hurt you back. Given the opportunity, and enough time, it is coming. We see revenge in families, in the work place, in politics, in sports. If we're honest, we see it in our own hearts, this ferocious desire to do as has been done to us.

It's only natural. What's not natural is *pursuing forgiveness*, and that's what God does, and that's what God enables His people to do. And when He does, people see Him, and see their need for Him.

That's Genesis 43. We learn something about God through the actions of His servant Joseph, that He is the God who pursues forgiveness, as do His people when they reflect Him rightly.

If you are struggling with forgiveness, prepare to see what God can do.

God devoted only two chapters in the book of Genesis to tell us how the universe got here. Only two. Yet He gave us some 39 chapters to tell us how the nation of Israel came into existence. And of those, thirteen chapters are a story featuring Joseph (37-50).

Why is that? Who wrote Genesis? Moses. When? 1400 BC. Why? God gave the first five books of the Bible to the Israelites after He redeemed them from Egypt, and before they entered the promised land. He gave them the Torah, His Law.

For what reason? So they would know how to live for Him once they reached the land flowing with milk and honey. That wouldn't be easy. Why not? The Canaanites

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<sup>2</sup> PUBLISHED ON 21 June, 2012 BY davidvranish; <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/fifty-years-later-peace-child-tribe-still-following-christ/>

lived there, the corrupt, pagan, polytheistic Canaanites. The Canaanites had many, false gods.

But of course, God was and is not like those false gods. He could have told His people that (which He later did). But in Genesis He did something even more memorable. He used a story to show them what He is like, the story of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and his eleven brothers.

We're going to learn about pursuing forgiveness today, first, from the *story* of Genesis 43; and secondly, by considering the *significance* of Genesis 43.

### I. We learn about pursuing forgiveness from the story of Genesis 43.

The story of Joseph begins back in Genesis 37 when Joseph was a 17 year old teenager. His father, Jacob, spoiled him with favoritism. His brothers hated him for it, and when they had their chance, they sold him to a caravan of gypsey-like traders heading to Egypt, and then deceived their dad into thinking he'd been mauled by an animal.

Things seemed to go from bad to worse in Egypt for Joseph. "But the LORD was with Joseph," says 39:2. That's the key verse in the story. The key to Joseph is God.

Eventually, God executed His sovereign plan, and promoted Joseph to the number two position in Egypt, next to Pharaoh. Why? To prepare the world for a coming famine. And to prepare a family for a dramatic reunion.

There are four scenes to the story in Genesis 43.

**A. We see the dilemma (1-2).** "Now the famine was still severe in the land. <sup>2</sup> So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, 'Go back and buy us a little more food.'"

Here's the dilemma. The food is gone. But the famine is still severe. The Scriptures don't tell us how much time elapsed between 42:38 and 43:1, up to two years according to 45:6.

Now once again Jacob addresses his sons, "Go get some more food."

Easier said than done! Why? The brothers didn't leave Egypt on too good of terms the last time. Judah speaks up, and reminds his dad that in scene 2...

**B. We see the dialogue (3-10).** Verse 3, "But Judah said to him, 'The man warned us solemnly, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.'"

Remember what happened? When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but not vice versa. He accused them of being spies, a charge they denied. So Joseph devised a test. He kept one brother, Simeon, and told the rest to return home with the food and bring their youngest brother back.

Judah continues in verses 4-5, "If you will send our brother along with us, we will go down and buy food for you. <sup>5</sup> But if you will not send him, we will not go down, because the man said to us, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.'"

Those words didn't sit well with dad. Verse 6, "Israel asked, 'Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother?'"

Verse 7, "They replied, 'The man questioned us closely about ourselves and our family. 'Is your father still living?' he asked us. 'Do you have another brother?' We simply answered his questions. How were we to know he would say, 'Bring your brother down here?'" In short, we had no way of knowing, dad!

With the tension mounting, Judah spoke again and proposed a solution in verses 8-10, "Then Judah said to Israel his father, 'Send the boy along with me and we will go at

once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die. <sup>9</sup> I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life. <sup>10</sup> As it is, if we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice.”

Don't miss the irony that twenty-five years earlier, this same Judah proposed another solution. That solution also involved a son of his step-mother Rachel. But not Benjamin, as in this situation, but Joseph, who was in a pit at the time.

“What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? <sup>27</sup> Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites (37:26-27).”

The KJV uses the word “surety,” which in the verb form means “to give or to take in pledge; to exchange.” As a noun, it represents a “pledge” or “token.” Judah says, “You have my word on it. If I don't bring Benjamin back home, I will take full responsibility. My life for his. *I will bear the blame.*”

Eighteen centuries later, a descendant of Judah would enter the world as a “surety,” a “pledge,” a “token.” He would indeed bear the blame. He of course was the Lion of Judah, Jesus the Messiah.

But there's a big difference. Judah made a promise he couldn't fulfill. It was out of his control. Not so with Jesus, for He made a pledge He could keep and did.

Remember what Jesus said about Himself in John 10? “I am the good shepherd; the shepherd gives His life FOR the sheep (11).” “I lay down My life FOR the sheep (15). “I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and take it up (18).”

So Judah told his dad, “I'll take the blame.” But how could he? There were too many factors out of his control.

But there were no factors outside of Jesus' control. He possessed all authority, and used that authority to accomplish the plan His Father designed. So He too said, “I will take the blame,” and He did. He gave His life as the peace child in order to bring sinners back home to the Father.

We've seen the dilemma and the dialogue. In scene 3...

**C. We see the decision (11-14).** Dad responds in verses 11-13, “Then their father Israel<sup>3</sup> said to them, ‘If it must be, then do this: Put some of the best products of the land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift—a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds. <sup>12</sup> Take double the amount of silver with you, for you must return the silver that was put back into the mouths of your sacks. Perhaps it was a mistake. <sup>13</sup> Take your brother also and go back to the man at once.’”

Jacob knew he had no choice. Judah was right. If he didn't send Benjamin, the others couldn't go get more food. And if they didn't get more food, they'd all die anyway.

Look at the instructions Jacob gave his sons. Take along the following.

First, the best fruits (11), a grocery list that includes delicacies not available in Egypt. **Balm**--a produce of the storax, which grew in northern Israel, used for medicinal purposes (like “the balm of Gilead” Jer 8:22). **Honey**--another popular export from the land of Canaan. **Myrrh**--a clear substance derived from the leaves and branches of a type of rose plant; used both in perfume and for medicinal purposes. **Pistachio** nuts and **almonds**--produced in Palestine.

Second, take double money this time (12). “Maybe there's been a mistake!”

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<sup>3</sup> Moses uses Jacob's God-given name, Israel, in verses 6 and 11.

Third, take Benjamin (13). How old is Benjamin at this point? Twenty-three, according to Old Testament scholar Deilitsch. I find it interesting that Benjamin apparently has *no* say in this decision.

And one final thing. Before they left, Jacob offered a halfhearted prayer of blessing. I say half-hearted because of his fatalistic attitude following the prayer.

Verse 14, “And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.”

What name of God did Jacob use in his prayer? *God Almighty*. El Shaddai.

Is that significant? Indeed. This is the name God used when He appeared to Abraham in Genesis 17:1, “I am the Almighty God...And I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.” It’s the name He used in Genesis 17:7, “And I will establish my cov’t between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting cov’t...”

This is the name that signifies God’s promise, God’s unfailing commitment to the covenant He established with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants.

So in his darkest hour, in the deepest valley of decision, what did Jacob do? He clung to the unchanging character of the God who makes and keeps His promises.

So must we. This is the key to joy in life. Hebrews 11:6, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

E.g.—

Take a good look at Jacob. He’s one of the ancient pillars of the faith. Yet he struggled. He had walked with God for decades. Yet he worried. He was anxious. He was so overwhelmed by his fear he didn’t seem to comprehend the wisdom in his advice to his sons.

But at least he looked for help in the right place! At least he looked to God!

That’s what makes great men and women of God in the Bible great. Not that they didn’t struggle. They did. But when they were down, they looked to the Lord God Almighty.

That’s scene 3. Jacob made a decision. He looked to God, and acted.

**D. We see the drama (15-34).** Last week, we talked about the brothers’ guilt. We saw in Genesis 42 how Joseph tried to help his brothers come to grips with their sin and its consequent guilt. They’d been playing coverup for more than two decades and perhaps thought they were succeeding.

But in a mysterious turn of events, they started feeling the pressure of God’s hand. Joseph asked them to do something that forced them to experience the reality of Numbers 32:23, “Be sure your sins will find you out.”

And the guilt feelings began to return. And that’s a good thing, because guilt is a good thing, a gift from God that tells us we got off track and need to do a 180.

Watch the drama develop. Notice verses 15-17, “So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph. <sup>16</sup>When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, ‘Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare dinner; they are to eat with me at noon.’ <sup>17</sup>The man did as Joseph told him and took the men to Joseph’s house.”

What caught Joseph’s attention when he saw his brothers? Benjamin. When he saw Benjamin, he knew his brothers had passed the test. They’d been honest with him.

So what does he do? He invites them to a meal at his house. What a kind gesture on Joseph's part! Right?

The brothers didn't think so. Verse 18, "Now the men were frightened when they were taken to his house. They thought, 'We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys.'"

Why are the brothers afraid? I get the sense that the brothers are still living under a dark cloud, that they expect God to lower the boom on them at any moment. And why? Because of the sin they had committed twenty-five years before.

They are paranoid<sup>4</sup>. That's what unconfessed sin does to a person. "The wicked flee though no one pursues," says Proverbs 28:1.

Shakespeare once wrote, "Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind."

The brothers thought Joseph was going to ambush them. So they took the defensive posture.

Verses 19-22, "So they went up to Joseph's steward and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. <sup>20</sup> 'Please, sir,' they said, 'we came down here the first time to buy food. <sup>21</sup> But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver—the exact weight—in the mouth of his sack. So we have brought it back with us. <sup>22</sup> We have also brought additional silver with us to buy food. We don't know who put our silver in our sacks.'"

Interesting how they tried to explain their predicament to Joseph's assistant. They rehearsed the situation as they saw it.

The steward responded in verse 23, "'It's all right,' he said. 'Don't be afraid.<sup>5</sup> Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver.' Then he brought Simeon out to them.

Sort of ironic, isn't it? The brothers know and belong to the true and living God, but they looked at their problem from a totally horizontal perspective. This polytheistic Egyptian is the first person to suggest that maybe God had a part in their predicament.

Verses 24-25, "The steward took the men into Joseph's house, gave them water to wash their feet and provided fodder for their donkeys. <sup>25</sup> They prepared their gifts for Joseph's arrival at noon, because they had heard that they were to eat there."

Charles Stanley shares a pertinent experience he had in seminary in his book, *Forgiveness*.<sup>6</sup>

"One of my more memorable seminary professors had a practical way of illustrating to his students the concept of grace. At the end of his evangelism course he would distribute the exam with the caution to read it all the way through before beginning to answer it. This caution was written on the exam as well. As we read the test, it became unquestionably clear to each of us that we had not studied nearly enough. The further we read, the worse it became. About halfway through, audible groans could be heard through out the lecture hall. On the last page, however, was a note that read, "You have a choice. You can either complete the exam as given or sign your name at the bottom and in so doing receive an A for this assignment."

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<sup>4</sup> This comes from the Greek παράνοια (**paranoia**), "madness", and that from παρά (para), "beside, by" and νόος (noos), "mind". Wikipedia

<sup>5</sup> AV, "And he said, Peace be to you, fear not; your God..."

<sup>6</sup> Told by Troy Grambling, <http://blog.potentialchurch.com/takingthetest>

Dr. Stanley goes on to relate how different students responded. Some worked through the whole test...never reading the comment at the end. They toiled for nothing... never realizing what could have been.

Others read the first two pages, got angry because it was so hard, and turned the test in blank...storming out of the room.

One guy read the comment at the end and took the test anyway. He said he didn't want any "free gifts," that he wanted to earn his grade. He got a C+.

Now think about the brothers again.

1. *The brothers could not comprehend grace.* They thought Joseph's gracious offer was too good to be true. And they are not alone.

2. *Many today try to earn what God offers freely.* Perhaps in this room.

Have you ever received God offer of forgiveness through Jesus Christ?

"Oh, I'm interested, but I've got to straighten things up in my life first."

Says who? God says His forgiveness is a gift. You can't earn it. You can't buy it. You can't barter with Him for it. Just acknowledge your need for His forgiveness, and ask Him for it, realizing Christ alone makes it possible.

The brothers discovered their fears were unfounded in verses 26-28, "When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground. <sup>27</sup> He asked them how they were, and then he said, 'How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living?' <sup>28</sup> They replied, 'Your servant our father is still alive and well.' And they bowed low to pay him honor."

There's yet another fulfillment of Joseph's dream back in chapter 37. In fact, the brothers bowed down twice, in verse 26 and in verse 28.

Verses 29-31 are heart-gripping. "As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son, he asked, 'Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?' And he said, 'God be gracious to you, my son.' <sup>30</sup> Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there. After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said, 'Serve the food.'"

Again we see Joseph weeping. Again foreshadowing another who would weep, *Man of sorrows, what a name, for the Son of God who came; ruined sinners to reclaim, Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

I see a little humor in what follows, as Joseph orchestrates a seating arrangement that plays with his brothers' minds.

Verses 32-34, "They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians. <sup>33</sup> The men had been seated before him in the order of their ages, from the firstborn to the youngest; and they looked at each other in astonishment. <sup>34</sup> When portions were served to them from Joseph's table, Benjamin's portion was five times as much as anyone else's. So they feasted and drank freely with him."

In his commentary on Genesis, Henry Morris says there are no less than 39,917,000 different orders in which eleven individuals could have been seated. No wonder the brothers "marveled one to another" (33). They of course have no idea who the powerful host is. But he knows them.

And He's pursuing forgiveness with them. So ends the chapter.

## II. We learn about pursuing forgiveness by considering the significance of Genesis 43.

This story isn't simply about Joseph, or the brothers. In this story we learn about God, the ultimate pursuer of forgiveness. We see God working to bring about the reconciliation of twelve brothers. But that's not all.

He's also working through those brothers to bring reconciliation to a world that is alienated from Him. He's going to turn this chosen family into a chosen nation through which He will send into the world His chosen Messiah. And when Jesus the Messiah comes, He will Himself go to a cross and become an atoning sacrifice sufficient to reconcile condemned sinners back to God.

We learn a couple of practical insights about pursuing forgiveness in Genesis 43.

**A. Pursuing forgiveness involves more than words.**

1. *It did for Joseph.* Look again at Joseph's actions. What did he do for the brothers that had hurt him so badly? I see six positive actions in this chapter.

One, he invited them to his house (16). Two, he returned Simeon (23). Three, he allowed the dusty travelers to wash their feet, and even fed their animals (24). Four, he invited them to eat with him (25, 31). Five, he talked with them and took an interest in "their welfare" (27). And six, he let them enjoy, as the KJV puts it, a "merry" time with him (34).

What does this show? Pursuing forgiveness involved more than empty talk for Joseph. He took concrete and helpful steps to meet the needs of the ones who had hurt him.

The one pursuing forgiveness does not say, "Well I forgave him in my heart. Now I just hope he stays out of my life!"

That's not the heart of one who is pursuing forgiveness. Joseph never forgot what his brothers had done to him, but he purposed to put God on display by his kind actions.

And he did so time and time again. Go to the end of the story in chapter 50. Jacob has died, and the brothers are fearful Joseph will retaliate. So they fabricate a story and send it to Joseph, "Your father left these instructions...I ask you to forgive your brothers...Please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father (50:17)."

How did Joseph respond? He *wept* (17). And then he said to his brothers in verses 19-21, "'Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. <sup>21</sup> So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.' And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them."

Forgiveness involves more than words. It did for Joseph.

2. *It does for God.* The story of the Bible is the story of God *pursuing* forgiveness. This pursuit involved far more than words for the Almighty. It involved action, costly action.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16)."

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)."

"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," said Jesus from the cross in Luke 23:34.

Pursuing forgiveness involves more than words. It did for Joseph. It does for God.

3. *It will for us.* Is there anyone in your life with unresolved sin? Pursuing forgiveness involves action. If you've sinned against that person, the action is to repent, go, and ask for forgiveness. If you've been sinned against, the action is to resolve to treat that person as the Lord has treated you (Ephesians 4:32).

That brings us to a second, related insight.

**B. Pursuing forgiveness involves overcoming evil with good.**

That's the language of Romans 12, which tells us how we must respond if we have experienced God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ, which is what chapters 1-11 are all about.

Verse 9, "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good."

Verse 10, "Be devoted to one another in love."

Verse 14, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."

Verse 17-21, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Juan Marichal hit John Roseboro across the head with a baseball bat. It resulted in one of the nastiest brawls in major league baseball history. You've probably seen the picture. It was on the cover of Sports Illustrated and shows up just about every time the hall of famer's name comes up.

In fact, that picture adorned the program at John Roseboro's funeral in 2002. The place was filled with former Dodger players, but one of the most memorable moments was when a former rival Giant player approached the lecturn and said, "Johnny's forgiving me was one of the best things that happened in my life. I wish I could have had John Roseboro as my catcher."

It was Juan Marichal, who actually served as an honorary pallbearer at Roseboro's funeral. After years of an ugly feud, Roseboro forgave Marichal, and the two became good friends. In fact it was probably Roseboro's public expression of forgiveness that led to Marichal's induction into the Hall of Fame.<sup>7</sup>

Response: What are you doing with God's offer of forgiveness?

We must do two things.

1. *Accept it thankfully.*
2. *Share it joyfully.*

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<sup>7</sup> The title of a recent biography says it all. *The Fight of their Lives: How Juan Marichal and John Roseboro Turned Baseball's Ugliest Brawl into a Story of Forgiveness and Redemption.* John Rosengren, 2014.