



ASSOCIATION
of CHRISTIAN
LIBRARIANS®

Reference Point

May 2017

Don't Quarrel on the Way

Then he [Joseph] sent his brothers away, and as they were leaving he said to them, "Don't quarrel on the way!" (Genesis 45:24 NIV)

It speaks to my weird sense of humor, I guess, but I find this verse very amusing. Joseph, who had been sold into slavery by his brothers, has been placed in a position of authority in Egypt. When the brothers come from Canaan to Egypt to purchase food, Joseph recognizes them and through a series of back and forth moves, convinces them to return home and to return to Egypt again. He tells them their younger brother had better accompany them on the next visit. Finally, he tells them to go home and return with their aged father and their families and settle in Egypt.

I think there are life lessons in the direction Joseph gives his brothers for their journey to Canaan and back to Egypt. First, Joseph is not pretending that the years away from his family have changed who they are. They fought in the past, they will probably fight in the future. He acknowledges their characters. Aren't we like this, too? We try to change, but too often our essential self remains the same. This passage assures us that even though we are not perfect, God still loves us and will take care of us. We can continue to work on those troublesome personality flaws through the remainder of our lives. Alternately, some interpreters of the text believe it means the brothers should not blame each other for Joseph's imprisonment, for their mistreatment of him has been used by God to bring about good.

Our relationships with family and long-term co-workers will often bring out our true, inner selves. Sometimes in long-term relationships we settle into patterns of behavior that are not the best Christian witness, do not support each other, or do not bring about effective work for the kingdom. These relationships can also be the most affirming, priceless relationships. We can be our natural, true selves in these relationships and be loved and accepted in spite of who we are.

If Joseph's brothers had been interested in changing, they might have asked Joseph for some direction on improving their relationships. One commentator parallels this verse with James 4 that begins with "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" This very practical book reminds us that quarrels come out of our emotional center, called in scripture "the heart." James 4 calls on us to "submit to God" and to "resist the devil" (4:7) and to "come near to God" or to pray (4:8). He further asks us to "humble ourselves before the Lord" (4:10). If we do these things it is unlikely we will have to be reminded not to quarrel!



—Terry Kennedy

Terry serves as the Library Director at Providence University College and Seminary in Otterburne, Manitoba. She has been a member of ACL for 34 years.