

How To Forgive

You will remember from the previous weeks, what Joseph's brothers did to him and how that played out for Joseph

... slavery, potiphar's house, potiphar's wife trying to seduce Joseph to sin, and when he refused she falsely accused him, 12 years of prison ...

... Last week we saw that Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream and as a result he was elevated to 2nd in all the kingdom of Egypt.

The last part of Joseph's story begins 9 years later.

... two years into the famine Joseph's family down in Canaan were running out of food ... because the famine was in all the land ... not just Egypt.

... of course word had gotten around that there was food in Egypt that could be purchased.

... so Jacob (Joseph's father) tells his other sons to go to Egypt.

When they get there they find themselves standing before Joseph

... they don't recognize him ... but he knows exactly who they are.

However, instead of revealing himself he disguises himself, treats them harshly and speaks to them in the Egyptian language, using an interpreter.

After asking them about themselves and where they are from

... they tell him about their father and brother back home

... suddenly Joseph turns on them and accuses them of being spies.

... they tell him they are not and they beg him to let them buy grain for their family.

... Joseph tells them to prove they are not lying by going back to Canaan and bringing their brother to Egypt.

... they are reluctant and so initially Joseph throws them into prison for 3 days.

On the third day, he lets them out of prison and commands them to go home and bring back their brother Benjamin.

At this point the brothers don't know that this Egyptian ruler is Joseph so they began to have a conversation among themselves in their Hebrew language.

21 Then they said to one another, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us." 22 Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not tell you, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood." 23 They did not know, however, that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them. (Gen. 42:21-23)

It is at this point in the story we begin to see Joseph's heart ... his feelings ... toward his brothers who had so grievously wronged him.

24 He turned away from them and wept. But when he returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. (Gen. 42:24)

Three times in this story we find Joseph crying.

We will see his brother's scared ... regretful ... anxious ... maybe even a bit repentant but never **WEEPING**.

The second time we find Joseph crying is when his brothers come back to Egypt for the 2nd time and they bring his brother Benjamin with them.

29 As he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, he said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me?" And he said, "May God be gracious to you, my son." 30 Joseph hurried out for he was deeply stirred over his brother, and he sought a place to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there. (Gen. 43:29-30)

Now here is where the story becomes even more interesting.

The brothers purchased grain and prepared to return home to Canaan.

Joseph secretly commanded his servants, not only to put his brother's money back into the sacks of grain (as he had done the first time)

... this time Joseph also tells them to put his royal silver cup into Benjamin's bag.

... Then he waited until the brothers were just outside the city to send his soldiers to stop them and search their bags.

... of course the brothers were shocked when the money was discovered in their bags and even more distraught when the silver cup was found in Benjamin's bag.

When they are brought back to Joseph (whom they still do not recognize) he tells them that the one who had the cup (Benjamin) would become his slave

... at this point Judah breaks down and begs for Benjamin

"If we don't bring Benjamin back home it will kill our father, he has already lost one son."

... *"If you will let Benjamin go back home I will be your slave and servant."*

It is here that we find Joseph weeping for the 3rd time.

Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me." So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ² He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. (Gen. 45:1-2)

Joseph is weeping because he loves his brothers.

... Regardless of how cruelly his brothers treated him Joseph had long since forgiven them.

- Why was the Spirit of God with Joseph?

- How is it that Joseph always maintained the quality of his relationship with God through every terrible situation?
- How was it that God was able to use Joseph so mightily in every situation?

I believe the answer is simply this ...

... Because Joseph understood that at the conclusion of all things ...

... regardless of what things looked like in the moment

... in the end God promises will be kept down to the last detail, God will never abandon His people, God's children will be blessed.

... if that is true (and it is) every hardship is ultimately incidental.

... if you know this, then when someone hurts you (and trust me you will get hurt from time to time) it will be much easier to forgive.

One of the things Jesus taught us was that:

Unforgiveness in your heart will create distance between you and the Lord

I am convinced that many Christians struggle in their prayer lives and in their relationship with God because of feelings rooted in past experiences.

Bitterness, anger, resentment, unforgiveness because of something that happened weeks, months, or even years ago.

... and if these things go unchecked and unresolved they will become hindrances in your walk with God.

Look at what Jesus said in the sermon on the Mount.

²³ "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your offering there before the altar and

go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. (Matt. 5:23-24)

In the previous verse Jesus spoke about anger ...

Here He is making the point that before we can fully and freely worship God we must deal with these issues.

... being right with God INCLUDES being right with each other.

...Worshiping the one **who forgives** requires us to also **forgive**.

... this is also true if you hope to fully be used by God.

Joseph was a forgiving person, and we will talk more about this in the next few weeks.

As I have prayed, studied, and prepared for today it has become obvious that I am not going to be able to fully cover (in one sermon) the topic of HOW TO FORGIVE ..

... there is just too much.

... So here is what I am going to do today.

I want to talk to you about 3 things regarding what forgiveness is and then I am going to give you 4 thing about HOW TO FORGIVE..

... Next week I will teach you, from the Word of God, about those 4 things.

... but before you can forgive you must first know what Biblical forgiveness actually is.

... most people and most Christians are confused about what forgiveness actually is.

If you are going to be a forgiving person you need to know ...

1. Know Who Is Helped By Forgiveness

It had been 22 years since Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery.

... they are still living under the cloud of that sin ... Joseph, however, because he had forgiven them, had moved on.

In reality, **unforgiveness is a chain that binds us to those to whom we are unwilling to forgive.**

There is a story told in 2 Samuel where King David's oldest son, Amnon rapes his sister Tamar.

King David hears what has happened and is angry, but he does nothing.

Absalom, also a son of King David also hears what Amnon had done and is also angry.

... but unlike his father he has a plan.

Absalom waits for 2 years waiting to the opportune moment and he kills Amnon for the crime of raping Tamar.

... but this isn't the end of the story because Absalom had unforgiveness in his heart toward his father King David ... because his father knew about the crime and did nothing.

... later Absalom begins to start a revolt against his father and steal the throne ...

... for 4 years Absalom would go to the gate of the city, those who were coming and going into Jerusalem seeking justice ...

Moreover, Absalom would say, "Oh that one would appoint me judge in the land, then every man who has any suit or cause could come to me and I would give him justice." (2 Sam. 15:4)

... and eventually Absalom's revolt was successful and he captured the throne.

... but in a short time King David regained his troops, they took back control of Jerusalem and the throne, and Absalom was killed in battle.

Absalom's unforgiveness toward Amnon and King David resulted in his humiliating death.

Bitterness, hatred, anger, resentment, these are all poisons we drink expecting someone else to die.

... that's not how it works.

Unforgiveness is a chain that binds us to those to whom we are unwilling to forgive and if we are not careful their destruction will become our destruction as well.

Unforgiveness is a poison we drink hoping that it will sicken the other person.

There are four levels of supposed forgiveness that I have seen in my life.

Indifferent Forgiveness – As time passes you think about it less, you don't obsess about what was done, but no forgiveness is actually given.

In this you may not hate the person who has wronged you ... but that individual becomes a non-person to you.

... you may consider them a representation of evil (like a bad car accident or cancer) but not a person. Their life, or loss of life, really has no meaning to you.

... you feel no sorrow over any tragedy or pain that might befall them.

Passive Aggressive Forgiveness – This is where frenemies come from.

The relationship is maintained but at a lower level, with undertones of bitterness and dislike.

This is when you try to play, *fake it till you make it*, with forgiveness.

Unanswered Forgiveness – The offender is forgiven, all residual feelings of dislike, regret or bitterness remain but the relationship is not restored.

We *are not called to reconciliation* with every one (as we see in Matthew 18 in church discipline the last step you treat them like an unbeliever and not be unequally yoked) but we are called to forgive everyone. [Be reconciled when possible]

Full Forgiveness – The relationship is restored, and no residual feelings of dislike, regret or bitterness remain.

Forgiveness helps you because:

- It frees you by unchaining you from the person who you feel wronged you.
- It allows the Holy Spirit to be free to work through you
- It allows peace to once again permeate your spirit.

So why don't we forgive ... why do we hold on to past grievances?

... One reason we don't forgive is because are confused about what forgiveness is and is not.

2. Recognize What Forgiveness is Not

- **Forgiveness is not approval of** what was done.

When God forgives you of your sin he is **not approving** of what you have done he is **removing** what you have done.

When Jesus was on the cross he said "*Father forgive them for they know not what they do*"

... Jesus wasn't approving of their actions.

... In fact in Acts 2, Peter condemned the Jews for their crucifixion of Jesus.

- **Is not excusing what they did.**

Just because you forgive someone it doesn't remove their responsibility to God to make it right.

Forgiveness isn't saying **"I know what you did and it is OK."**

God forgave Moses for Moses' anger and disobedience in striking the rock, but God didn't excuse his actions.

God still didn't allow Moses to go into the land of Canaan.

God forgave Adam and Eve their sin but the whole human race was still plunged into darkness.

- **It does not justify their actions.**

God forgave Sampson's sin with Delilah but it was still wicked.

... the same is true of David and Bathsheba, Abraham's lies to Abimelech, and Peter's denial.

- **It does not necessarily mean reconciliation.**

It's a wonderful thing if forgiveness can bring about reconciliation in a relationship but that is not always the case.

In first Samuel, after David had killed Goliath, the women chanted "Saul has killed his thousands, but David his 10 thousands.

That made King Saul so jealous that in 1 Samuel 18, Saul tried to kill David with a spear.

David forgave him but were they reconciled.

No! In fact King Saul attempted to kill David **TEN MORE TIMES**

- **It isn't pretending you aren't hurt.**

Forgiveness removes the wrong, but it does not remove the pain.

Joseph forgave his brothers, but the reality of his inward pain is seen in his tears.

The Bible says Joseph wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it.

But let me say this ...

Just because you are hurting it doesn't mean that you can't forgive and just because you forgive, it doesn't mean the pain will go away.

So, if the pain doesn't go away WHY FORGIVE!

... Because forgiveness is spiritually productive.

3. Understand what forgiveness does

“Nathan I would forgive them if they would come to me and ask for forgiveness.”

I need to remind you:

- Joseph's brother's didn't apologize.
- Stephen was being stoned and he cried “father forgive them” but THEY showed no regret for their actions.

Here is what so many people do not understand.

Forgiving someone who has done you wrong is an open invitation for the Holy Spirit to give you **His peace, His joy and the knowledge of His will.**

True forgiveness:

(1) Releases your claim for vengeance.

(In 1 Cor. 13 true love means you keep no record of wrongs and Romans 12 says you leave the right to vengeance with God.)

The Apostle Paul tells the Roman Christians to *never take their own revenge ... don't overcome evil with evil, you overcome evil with good.*

(2) Protects you offender.

(Like Joseph protected Potiphar's wife with his silence.)

In fact we see Joseph doing this with his brothers as well in Genesis 45.

Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me." So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. (Gen. 45:1)

Do you see it?

Joseph's brothers have come to purchase grain from Egypt and they are all in a room with some of the other Egyptian leaders

... Joseph realizes now is the time to reveal to his brother who he really is.

However, instead of just blurting it out Joseph makes everyone else leave the room.

He doesn't want the Egyptians to know what his brothers had done to him in the past.

Again, Joseph gave up his right for public justice and choose to protect the very ones who had wronged him.

(3) Protects you own heart.

The writer of Proverbs (4:23) instructs us to *watch over our hearts with all diligence.*

One of the primary ways we do that is through forgiveness.

Here is the passage Justin read at the first of our worship time.

³⁰ And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: ³² And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:30-32)

If you want to **protect your heart** you must forgive.

... and forgiveness is about protecting and preserving the purity of your heart.

In order to forgive you:

You must be very specific about what it is that you are forgiving. [You can't forgive something that didn't happen to you.]

You must be honest about the damages you have suffered. [You have to stop being in denial of your hurt.]

Being free has to become more important than being right or vindicated. [You will never see the need for forgiveness until the cost of unforgiveness becomes too a price to high to bear.]

Before you can truly forgive you must be forgiven.

Finally the Apostle Paul commands us to *forgive even as God has forgiven us for Christ's sake.*

Forgiveness is available to us because of what Jesus has done ...

Have you accepted/received that forgiveness?

Are you living a life of forgiveness toward others?

God has every right to send every one of us to hell forever—

... but instead He so loved us that He has given his only begotten son.....

Jesus could have allowed the full wrath of the Father to fall upon us—

... but instead HE was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.

Jesus has every right to be angry with us—humanity crucified him—

... but instead he pleads for you today

...Jesus says, come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Don't you want that rest?

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[In the OT the family can't forgive murderers because they were not murdered they can only forgive the anguish, loss, and pain that the loss caused them. VERSE??

You can't forgive your father for leaving your mother, you can only forgive him for how sad, lonely, hurt and angry it made you feel.

Being free has to become more important than being right.

You can't truly forgive unless you have first been forgiven (God is the source of love and justice)