

*“Taking Care of Our Most Important Relationships”*  
*“Learning to Forgive Our Family, Friends, and Enemies”*

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Key Text: Genesis 50:15-21

## **I. Introduction: Forgiveness is Hard Work!**

I would venture to guess that there is no more difficult thing in life to do than to forgive someone who intentionally harmed you. Like so many other of life's issues there are so many levels of forgiveness. Sometimes the most minor thing one says, or does, or doesn't do can set another person off. Such as I had a family tell me they stopped coming to church because they saw me in Walmart and I didn't walk over and talk to them. I said, "I'm sorry for that, and when did that happen, I don't recall seeing you." "It happened 3 months ago." All I could say was, "I'm sorry," because I didn't even know.

Then there are deeper hurts and wounds and, while I don't want us to gloss over minor offenses or offenses we are not even aware of, let's dig into the deeper offenses and wounds. Some of these wounds are caused very intentionally. Others less intentional, but they still hurt deeply and are not easy to forgive. And again, the risk in sharing about this is what you may have gone through may not be what I've gone through, or another has gone through. What I think is the same is the overall need to learn to forgive. And that may mean forgiving in a variety of ways.

It will likely begin by us asking God to forgive us for what we do that is wrong. Often for our own sins against God, ourselves, and others. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass, or sin, against us."

So, in our text today forgiveness of an intentional wrong-doing is our key focus.

## **II. The Story of Joseph**

Joseph is Jacob's favorite son. It is evident as he makes and gives Joseph a brightly colored coat. Why is Joseph Jacob's favorite son? Because out of Jacob's 4 wives, he loved Rebekah the most. Remember Jacob was tricked by his father-in-law, Laban, when he thought he was marrying Rebekah, whom he loved, he woke up the next morning with Leah. As Jacob tricked his father out of his brother's, Esau's, birthright, so Jacob was tricked. Crazy how dysfunction gets passed right on down the family line. Keep an eye open for how this unfolds.

So, the 10 brothers, remember Joseph has a younger brother, Benjamin, all feel inferior to Joseph. Why? Because Joseph does come across as somewhat arrogant and prideful when he shares a couple dreams about sheaves of grain and stars and sun and moon bowing down to him. Scripture says, "They hated him for it." (ch 37:5-11)

The story of Joseph is amazing, and for all the times Joseph could have given up, caved in, or rotted away in jail, for some reason Joseph has this deeper understanding of how God is working in his life.

The phrase that stands out is "you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done". (vs 20)

They had wanted to kill Joseph. They would lie to their father that the wild beast killed him. Except, an older brother says, "No let's sell him and good riddance".

## **III. A Slave in Egypt**

Joseph ends up a slave in Egypt. He ends up in Pharaoh's court. He is lied about by the wife of the captain of the guard when he won't lie with her. He is thrown in jail and forgotten about. Until Pharaoh has a dream no one can interpret, then someone remembers the "Dreamer". Joseph comes out of jail and interprets Pharaoh's dream which was about 7 years of plenty and 7 years of severe famine. Pharaoh believes this interpretation, sees God in Joseph and sets Joseph in charge of making sure the Egyptian Kingdom survives. Food is stored for 7 years and in the 7 years of

famine all are fed. During the 7 years of famine who shows up in Egypt? Joseph's brothers. They just don't know it's their brother, Joseph, who is in charge, yet!

Now put yourself in Joseph's shoes. What would you do? What would you say? You know these, your brothers, wanted you dead. Now here they are, what are they doing? Asking for food and in our text once they discover it is their brother? They are afraid for their very lives and, ironically, they bow down to him.

#### **IV. How Have I Responded to People Who Have Offended Me?**

Think about ways you have responded to people who have offended you, or sinned against you. They likely deserved your anger and a piece of your mind. Maybe you confronted it, maybe you covered it up, not knowing how to deal with it. The worst part is the unforgiveness you carried or may still carry from that hurt or pain or abuse or mistake that was made.

Joseph's brothers know he has the power to harm them or throw them in prison. They actually approach him and say to him, "we are your slaves". We can learn from them that when we mess up, it is a wise decision to humble ourselves and admit it, to seek forgiveness from those we've hurt as well. People do sin against us; we also sin against others. People often hurt other people because they've been hurt themselves. Joseph could have easily have done this and his brothers knew it.

Now, let's add another word to this mix. Let's add the word, "Grace". Because it seems like Joseph understood this concept. I wonder if, while he sat in jail, he wondered what got him to where he was in the first place. Wonder if he over-thought maybe I should have held onto sharing those dreams a little more. Of course, we'd commend Joseph for his decision to flee the temptation to sleep with Potiphar's wife, something a later Biblical character, David, couldn't do as he took Bathsheba and had her husband, Uriah, put on the front line to be killed.

That sinful act would produce one of the most heartfelt prayers for forgiveness in the Bible in Psalms 51 where David prays, "O God, have mercy upon me according to your unfailing love., wash away my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin" (vs 1-2). "For the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart." (v 17)

And through that God restored David and granted him a willing spirit. "He trusted in the Lord's unfailing love" (Ps 52:8) even when he messed up and Joseph did too, even when he was the one who had, from the world's perspective, every "right" not to forgive.

#### **V. Joseph Responds to His Brothers**

It is important to hear what Joseph's response is as we learn to forgive family, friends and yes, even our enemies, maybe even to forgive ourselves. As Pastor Lauren said last week, we need to learn to truly love ourselves, It's not enough to know about the importance of forgiveness, or why we should forgive, or how many times we should forgive, what does Jesus say to his disciples about that? 7 times is Peter's thought. To which Jesus says, "No, 70 X 7!"

How we respond is important. Even if we don't feel like forgiving someone, we will begin to realize we are carrying the heaviness of that unforgiveness on our own shoulders. Only unforgiveness works it's way like a cancer throughout our whole system. It impacts us emotionally, physically, spiritually. Make no mistake, when we are baptized, share in communion, and respond accordingly seeking forgiveness, we believe the words, "In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven" have a deep impact on each person no matter what you need forgiveness for or from.

But you don't get it, Pastor. God could never forgive me for what I've done. Or God could never love me because of what was done to me. Oh Yes God Can! With humans so much seems impossible, but with God all things are possible.

Don't miss this—Joseph gets what we need to get to learn to truly forgive and to be forgiven.

He says to his brothers, now on the ground in humility bowing to him.

"Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?" Are you or I in the place of God when it comes to forgiveness?

## VI. What About Holding a Grudge?

Let's back up a moment. The brothers wonder if Joseph will hold a grudge against them. A grudge is "a persistent feeling of ill will or resentment resulting from a past insult or injury". So in learning to forgive, do a self-check. Ask yourself, "Am I holding a grudge or resentment toward anyone? Family, friend, or enemy?" Living with resentment clouds our perceptions. Sometimes if we see a trait in someone because of a past offense from someone else, we will project those feelings and the person we are projecting those feelings onto may not even realize it. They just wonder, "What did I do to upset that person?"

Gandhi once said, "Forgiveness is an attribute of the strong." What does that say about David? What does it say about Joseph? What does it say about Jesus? "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." Or, to the woman caught in adultery where Jesus asks those without sin to cast the first stone in? "Woman where are your accusers?" Everyone had dropped their stones and gone home. "Neither do I accuse you, now go and sin no more." Grace is what helps us overcome our grudges. And it is what begins to overcome dysfunction in our families.

It takes so much courage to move on from painful experiences. Forgiving others will reduce your stress, help you sleep better, help you physically in every way, forgiveness will make your relationships stronger.

## VII. A Father's Request

Here's a part easy to skip in our text today. The brothers share with Joseph instruction his father left them before he died." This is what you are to say to Joseph, "I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins of the servants of the God of your father." (vs16-17) It's like Jacob knew the only way his family could move forward is through forgiveness.

Jacob made this request of his son on behalf of his other sons. Sometimes we need to be challenged to forgive others, to forgive God, to forgive ourselves. Oh yes, a lot of people don't want anything to do with God or church because they carry a grudge against God for not doing something they thought God could have or should have done.

## VIII. Do We See The Good or the Bad?

It's so easy to only see the worst outcomes in bad situations. And, for a time, everything can look and feel dark and bleak. We can't imagine all Joseph went through mentally, physically, emotionally or spiritually to get him to this point.

Notice his very first response to his brothers when they present their father's request? Joseph wept.

I have had a few of those moments in dealing with mistakes I made, or things done or said to me where anger wanted to come boiling out and unfortunately it has, and, unlike Jesus, it was not righteous anger. But once I get some distance, like Joseph did, I can get a fuller picture. Joseph was able to see God working in the situation and could see how God intended something for good—in this case, "the saving of many lives". (vs 20) Oh, and when we can let the anger go, it is not unusual that we, too, might find ourselves like Joseph, weeping. That doesn't happen too much to me, but when it has it has been the most freeing thing I have ever experienced.

If Joseph had held on to a grudge that grudge could have morphed into a boulder that would have blocked the light of kindness from reaching his heart, and thus would have been an obstacle to the true healing of his heart and hurt.

## IX. What Really Heals the Hurt?

Don't miss this connection. The path to freedom from a grudge is not just through the forgiveness of the "other", though that is needed, it also comes through loving our own self. To bring our own loving presence to the suffering that crystallized into the grudge, the pain that was caused by the "other" is what ultimately heals the suffering and allows the grudge to melt. What happened when Joseph wept, whatever grudge he might have carried, dropped away. His heart was right within him which helped his heart be right with God and yes even his brothers whom he may

have even seen as his enemies. “He promised to provide for them and their children. He reassured them and spoke kindly to them.” (v 21)

This was a sure indicator Joseph learned how to forgive.

If we are to care for our most important relationships trust me, we will need to forgive and be forgiven over and over again. Because we all sin and come up short. Yet God’s grace and compassion is always reaching out to us to give us fresh new starts.

From time to time it may well be our most important relationships need that same grace and compassion to give us fresh new starts. As we prepare to come to The Lord’s Table, God offers us just that.

## **X. Closing Prayer**

Let us Pray:

Loving, Gracious, Forgiving God—It is almost too hard to imagine how Joseph could forgive his brothers and sometimes how Jesus can forgive us. Forgiveness is so hard, yet so necessary for us to be able to live into being who you designed us and want us to be. So, God forgive us of our wrongs, help us forgive others, and to let go of any grudges we might be carrying. Renew our heart, our relationships, our homes, our fellowship and in it all be able to see what we think is so wrong or bad to be working out for our good. It’s not always easy to understand, but give us eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart and mind to understand.

In Jesus’ Name,

Amen.