

Genesis 45:1-15 — Forgiveness

November 6, 2016

Welcome to CrossWinds. As a church, on both of our campuses, we are studying our way through the book of Genesis. For the last few week we focused on Joseph and looked at some of the big biblical themes in his life. This morning, we are going to look at another big biblical theme. It is the theme of forgiveness. That is a topic to which all of us can relate. Each of us have people that hurt us. I am not talking minor inconveniences. I am talking deep wounds in our heart that need continual cleaning and bandaging because the memories constantly hurt and won't go away.

Before we jump into this part of Joseph's story, which is one of the most emotional moments in Genesis, let me set the scene. After two years of near starvation, father Jacob finally let Benjamin return with his brothers to Egypt to buy more food. Joseph had told them they wouldn't even see his face without their youngest brother. When they returned to Egypt with Benjamin, Joseph then had them over his house for a great party. During the festivities, Joseph tested them by favoring Benjamin. He wanted to see if they changed. The greatest test was after the party. Joseph had his steward put Joseph's silver cup into the mouth of Benjamin's sack of grain. The next morning, when they left town, Joseph had his police chariot with flashing lights hunt them down and do drug search for the lost cup in his brothers possessions.

The cup was found in Benjamin's sack. The brothers were brought back to Joseph's presence and in what is probably the most impassioned speech in the book of Genesis, Judah, the brother that sold Joseph into Egypt 22 years prior,

steps forward and offers himself to be a slave in his younger brother Benjamin's place.

This was a foretaste of the gospel. Judah is the bloodline from whom Jesus would later be born. By Judah offering himself to save his brother's life, he did in miniature what Jesus later came to do. Just as Judah gave his life for his brother to save him from slavery and death, Jesus gave his life for us, his brothers and sisters, to save us from slavery to sin and the eternal death.

That is where things left off. As we pick up the story, Joseph, the powerful Egyptian official that always has his act together, completely loses it.

Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, "Make everyone go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. Genesis 45:1–3 (ESV)

Joseph literally lost complete control of his emotions. He was balling out loud. The second most powerful man on the planet was wailing uncontrollably. It was so loud the Egyptians down the hall in the next room heard it. As Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, everybody heard him losing control.

I love the way Joseph does this. He simply says, "I am Joseph." Up to this point, he was speaking in Egyptian. Now he was speaking in Hebrew. To show his real concern, his next question was not about his brothers. It was about his father. "Is he still alive?" Are you guys telling me the truth about my dad?

I love the response of his brother. It says they could not answer him because they were dismayed at his presence. The Hebrews is a little more graphic. It literally says they were terrified to the point of being speechless. They

stood there with their mouths open and could not say a word. That is the level of shock of this moment. They never saw this coming.

So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Genesis 45:4–8 (ESV)

At this point, his brothers were backing away because they realize the whole 22 year gig was up. Joseph already put Simeon in prison for two years. They were thinking they were about to get hammered big time for their sin. Joseph told them to stop walking away but instead to come close. He says again. I am your brother Joseph. Now that you are close enough, look at me!

He tells them not to be angry or distressed with themselves because they sold Joseph into slavery. I am confident at this point they were feeling distressed. They felt like dead meat.

If you underline your Bible here are four things I want you to underline. This is why Joseph didn't kill them? Why Joseph didn't insist on getting even? How did Joseph find the ability to forgive them?

While they were guilty of great sin, God overruled their sin and used their sin as part of his plan to bring Joseph to Egypt and save many lives. Underline these phrases. The same thing is said four times.

1. God sent me before you to preserve life.

2. God sent me before you to preserve a remnant. God sent me before you to preserve your life.
3. It was not you who sent me here but God.
4. God made me a father to Pharaoh.

If anybody had a right to get even, it was Joseph. Think of all the stuff his brothers did to him. Think of the abuse they dished out. Think of all the suffering he went through because of their decision. He ended up as a slave. He ended up in a dungeon for crimes he didn't commit. Can you imagine the desire for revenge?

How did he get around this desire for revenge? He realized that no matter what was done to him, God's plans for his life would not be thwarted. God's purposes for his life could not be destroyed by his brother's sin. God was so much bigger than sin. God could take their sin and twist it and use it for his good purposes. That didn't excuse their sin. It simply means God's purposes for Joseph's life could not be thwarted by their sin.

God used his brother's sin as part of his master plan to save many lives including the lives of his brothers.

God's ability to overrule sin and even use it for his good purposes was not just true in Joseph's life but we see it throughout the Bible. The greatest example of this is the life of Jesus. God used the sin of the Jews and their decision to crucify Jesus to be the very means by which he saved them from their sin and he saved us from our sin. The sin of the crucifixion did not frustrate God's plans but he overruled it and used it as part of his plan.

This is not just true of Joseph and of Jesus but it is true of our lives as well. Nobody can sin against us so they ruin God's good plans for our life. Will sin against us hurt? Yes. Someone else's sin can not destroy God's good plans in your life and mine. None of us can say that we would someone's sin against us ruined our life. God will overrule that sin and use it for his good purposes in our life as his children. This is incredibly encouraging. It gives us the ability to forgive others. It gives us the ability to move on from the sin of others. Let me say it again. Someone sin against you can not ruin God's good plans for you. It didn't ruin Joseph's life. It didn't ruin Jesus' life. It won't ruin your life.

Let's finish this part of the story.

Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, **God has made me lord of all Egypt**. Come down to me; do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.' And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." **Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.** Genesis 45:9-15 (ESV)

Only after Joseph gave all of his explanations could his brothers finally bring themselves to the point of speaking. This is one of the greatest moments of forgiveness and reconciliation in all of the Bible.

Joseph, who was sinned against mightily, forgave his brothers and provided for them instead of getting even with them.

This topic of forgiveness is so important, and it is so often misunderstood, that I want to take the balance of our time together to look at forgiveness and

reconciliation. We will see the way biblical forgiveness is misunderstood and what it actually looks like.

What does biblical forgiveness NOT look like?

Biblical forgiveness is overlooking a minor offense.

Sometimes we take the idea of forgiveness to such a low level we devalue it. We use the word forgiveness for ignoring offenses we should overlook in the first place. Have you ever picked up a young child and been struck in the face? Sometimes kids, just because they are kids, hit us in the face. They innocently swing their heads around like a wrecking ball and pop us in the nose. Sometimes they watch too much WWF at home and they actually punch you in the face because they learned it on television.

If you are like me, the moment you get slapped or struck in the face, you can feel the hair on the back of your neck stand up. You want to put that little brat in place. What am I going to do with my anger? Am I going to hit the little kid? Of course not! Hitting the kid back doesn't prove my manliness. It doesn't teach the kid a lesson. It doesn't do any good. It would probably land me in jail. A kid is a kid. That is what happens with little kids. When they hit you, you suck it up. You ignore it. You overlook the minor offense.

The problem is this doesn't just happen with little kids. It happens with teenagers and adults. With teenagers, this sometimes happens with upper class man and freshmen. A 100 pound zit-faced hormonal freshman will do something dorky and insulting to a 200 pound senior that has chest hair and a full beard. As an upperclassman, how are you going to hand it? Are you going to be filled with pride and ego and get upset over it so that you stuff the freshman in a locker so

he learns to never irritate you again? Here is the problem, a 200 pound upperclassman whacking around a 100 pound freshman doesn't show that senior's manliness. It shows his immaturity. True maturity would be overlooking that freshman's minor offense. Maturity is being above the insult not freaking out over the insult.

As adults, sometimes we help out in a school sport program. When the sporting event takes place and they have a program that has the names of all the families that helped and your name isn't in the program, how do you handle it? Do you start telling your friends in the stands how upset you are they forgot your name? Do you go to the person who printed the program and let them know you are upset? Be mature about it. Get over it. Overlook the offense.

Here is why. How many times have we said or done something foolish or stupid? How many times have we forgotten to mention a name in a program or forgotten to give proper thanks? If you are like me, it is many times. You know the people I love? It is the people that handle it like water off a duck's back. To them it is no big deal. They are mature. The people that drive me crazy are the ones who dig their nails into my arms and won't let me forget the minor or unintentional offense.

Overlooking minor offenses is not forgiveness. It is maturity. It is learning to be an adult. It is learning to be thick skinned. Get over it and move on.

Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense. Proverbs 19:11 (ESV)

Just get over it and move on. Be a sensible person. Overlook minor offenses and don't make a big deal out of stuff. Don't call that forgiveness.

Biblical forgiveness does not mean forgetting what happened.

Some people think biblical forgiveness means forgetting what happened after someone hurt us or lies to us. If you think forgiving means forgetting, you will have a hard time with forgiveness because it is hard to forget when people sin against us and hurt us deeply.

One of the reasons people get this wrong is they misunderstand Jeremiah 31:34

...**For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.**” Jeremiah 31:34 (ESV)

Sometimes people misunderstand this verse and they say, “God completely forgives our sins and forgets our sins.” If God forgets my sin, you should forget my sin too. If that meant God literally forgot what happened with our sin, that would mean I know more of the Bible than God because there is a lot of sin in this book.

In the Bible, remembering something means choosing to turn our attention toward something. God’s forgetting sin means he hasn’t forgotten it but he isn’t choosing to turn his attention and wrath toward that sin. In the same way, when we choose to forgive sin that others did against us, it doesn’t mean we forget that sin, it means we choose not to turn our energy, thoughts and focus constantly toward that sin. We are not going to keep focusing on what was done to us. Do we remember it? Yes. Do we let it consume us. No!

Biblical forgiveness does not necessarily mean escaping consequences.

Sometimes we confuse forgiveness with escaping the consequences. If someone lies to you and they ask your forgiveness, will you forgive them? Yes.

That doesn't mean there are no consequences for their dishonesty? No. When you lie to someone, trust is broken. There are consequences. Forgiveness doesn't mean trust is fully and instantly restored.

Think about this in respect to God and his forgiveness of us. When God forgives us of our sin, does that mean all the consequences of our sin are removed? Absolutely not. A few weeks ago, we looked David and Bathsheba. While God forgave David's sin of murder and adultery, he still faced the consequences of that sin. His infant son died.

Some of the consequences of our sin will not go away until Christ returns and makes all things new. This means you can forgive somebody, but you may still need to call the police after what they did because it was a criminal act. There are consequences. You can forgive somebody but you will still need a restraining order. You can forgive somebody but you will not let them around children. You can forgive somebody but that doesn't mean they get a credit card. You can forgive somebody but they don't get a computer with the Internet. Forgiving a criminal does not necessarily mean a criminal does not pay for their crimes. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean there are no consequences.

Biblical forgiveness does not necessarily mean immediate restoration of trust.

In a relationship, when trust is broken, forgiveness means a relationship starts again at neutral point of trust, not the high level of trust you once had. When you break trust in a relationship, the trust quotient goes from a positive factor to a negative factor. Forgiveness means the relationship trust factor goes from negative to neutral, not necessarily from negative back to positive where it

once was before. Trust needs to be rebuilt over time. Forgiveness means you will give people the opportunity to rebuilt trust but it doesn't necessarily mean you will instantly restore full trust.

Biblical forgiveness does not mean letting someone repeatedly hurt you.

That is not biblical forgiveness. That borders on stupidity. The best example of this is an abusive husband. He abuses his wife and when it is over, he asks for her forgiveness. Two days later he starts beating her again and she has a black eye. Every time the man calms down he says, "You are a Christian. Will your forgive me?" His wife says, "Yes." It doesn't take long to see that the husband doesn't want forgiveness. He simply wants an opportunity to beat his wife again. There needs to be safe space put between him and the women he abuses. Biblical forgiveness does not necessarily mean giving people an opportunity to hurt you again and again in that way.

What does biblical forgiveness look like?

Biblical forgiveness is refusing to seek revenge or be consumed by past injustices.

If we forgive someone, we are making a conscious decision to not get even and to not let our mind be continually consumed with how I can get even. It means making a choice to not slander someone behind their back. It means refusing to look for an opportunity for payback or to get even.

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:17–21 (ESV)

1. Forgiveness is choosing not to seek revenge. It is choosing to not repay evil for evil. It is choosing to do what is honorable, not what is deserved.

Revenge is out of the question

2. Forgiveness is doing everything we can to live at peace with everyone. I

like the way it says this. It recognizes that everyone does not want to live at peace. As far as you can from your end, you are choosing peace. You are choosing kindness. You are actively choosing peace, not passively hoping for peace.

I had a time once where a man did and said some very hurtful things against me. I remember having my quiet time and God challenging me with verses about loving my enemies. It was Christmas time. I went to the store and bought Christmas cookies from Wal-Mart and put them in a tin then delivered them to his house. I went out of my way to love him and extend peace. Some of you ladies think you have already identified why he didn't like me. How dare I try to pass off store bought cookies in a cookie tin. I should have baked them on my own. The last thing I needed was that guy accusing my wife of being a terrible cook or of trying to poison him with cookies. I wanted to be able to say they came from Wal-Mart, not my kitchen.

3. Forgiveness is leaving revenge in God's hands. Here is the problem with seeking revenge. Nobody ever gets even. Nobody ever says enough is enough. If somebody hurts us, we think we have a right to get even. Once we hurt them. We think things are fine. They think they owe us one. If somebody hurts us we go out of our way to do them good, not to do them ill. We go out of our way not to be

overcome by evil but to overcome evil with good and to let God take care of dishing out the punishment. If you aren't ok with leaving vengeance in God's hands, then you missed the whole point of the Joseph story. God is large and in charge of the universe and our lives. He is fully capable of punishing people for their sin and for how they hurt you. He created the Lake of Fire as a just response to sin. He can handle justice better than we can. Let him handle vengeance on those who hurt you. Even better than God punishing them for their sin is when God brings them to repentance for their sin and turns them into a follower of Christ, just like you and me. If we choose to take revenge, we do not help people come to Jesus.

Biblical forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling.

When it comes to forgiveness, we need to lead with our head before our heart. Forgiveness is making choice after choice to consciously not seek revenge. It is consciously going out of our way to do our enemy good. It is not necessarily deciding to be best friends with our enemy. It may not necessarily involve removing consequences from your enemy but we choose again and again to love the person that hurt us and go out of our way to do them good. Don't look for feelings of forgiveness and reconciliation to lead the way. Feelings may follow but they may not necessarily follow.

Biblical forgiveness is willing to let go of a hurt because we know that no matter what was done to us, it can not frustrate God's plans for us.

This is the big lesson Joseph learned. It is the lesson I want us to land on this morning. When someone sins against us, even though they are still guilty of that sin and need to be forgiven of that sin, their sin against us can not frustrate

God's purposes for us. Their sin against us may lead us into slavery. It may lead us into jail where we are falsely accused, but God's purposes for your life and for my life can not be frustrated by someones sin.

Sometimes, when someone sins against us, it may lead to losing our job, but that may be used by God as his means to bring us to the next place he wants us to be.

All of us have people that treated us like Joseph's brothers treated Joseph. We have people that went out of their way to do us harm. We have people that went of our their way to hurt us and sometimes those things they did to us were life-changing. They were career altering.

It is when we see this biblical truth that no sin done against us can frustrate God's good purposes for us that we can finally forgive and move on. Our God is bigger than their sin. This is why we can let go of revenge. This is why we don't need to get even. God will take care of revenge. God will get us where he wants us to be with our life no matter what is done to us or done against us. Their sin is never bigger than God's plan

Conclusion

This morning, I know there are many of us nursing old wounds. We have people we struggle to forgive. My prayer and challenge is to be encouraged by God's sovereignty. Look at the story of Joseph and how God overruled sin dons against Joseph and used it for good. God took the sin done against Jesus and overruled it for good. God will take the sin done against you and me. While we may suffer because of others sin, God will overrule it for good to get us where he wants us and to achieve his good plan and purposes for our life.



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