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THE POWERFUL DECISION TO FORGIVE – Part 2 (Genesis 45:20-24)

In our study last week (the first of the 2019 session), we continued to look for lessons from the life of Joseph. Here was a man who had experienced severe mistreatment at several stages through his life as well as great mountaintops of success. When we considered his example last time, Joseph was second only to Pharaoh in all of Egypt after years of discouragement and suffering.

You might remember that Joseph's brothers had been the first to treat him badly, mainly because he was the favorite of their father, Jacob. They sold him to some Ishmaelite traders who were headed to Egypt and fabricated a story to tell Jacob. This began years of estrangement from his family in an unfamiliar land. But Joseph worked his way through other difficult circumstances to rise to a high position in Pharaoh's government.

This set the stage for a climactic scene when Joseph's brothers were forced to come to Egypt for food due to a famine in the region. They didn't recognize Joseph, but he immediately knew them.

So, we've recounted some of what Joseph had to endure. I doubt if any of us have been wronged as frequently and as deeply as Joseph, yet I have to wonder if our response would have been the same as his. Even though he had suffered so much he could still see some of God's purposes for it. In fact, when we can sense the bigger picture of God's plan, his purpose in our pain becomes evident. This has always been true.

No words can express how much the world owes to sorrow. Most of the Psalms were born in the wilderness. Most of the Epistles were written in a prison. The greatest thoughts of the greatest thinkers have all passed through fire. The greatest poets have "learned in suffering what they taught in song." In bonds Bunyan lived the allegory that he afterwards wrote, and we may thank Bedford Jail for the Pilgrim's Progress. Take comfort, afflicted

Christian! When God is about to make pre-eminent use of a person, He puts them in the fire.

- George MacDonald -

The Bible has much to say about God's design for our lives and how suffering might play into those plans. Here are just a few.

*1 Peter 2:20, 21 - For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if **when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing** in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because **Christ also suffered for you**, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*

*James 1:2-4 - Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, **that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.***

*Philippians 1:6 - And I am sure of this, that **he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion** at the day of Jesus Christ.*

*Hebrews 12:10, 11 - For they [our earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but **he disciplines us for our good**, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later **it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness** to those who have been trained by it.*

Seeing God's purposes as he has explained them, makes it much easier to forgive those who have hurt us in our past.

When Joseph's brothers knelt before him, he had some clear decisions to make. In our last study, we saw four of these.

The Scripture tells us that he first chose to give undeserved favor in place of revenge when he told them, “...do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here” (Genesis 45:5.)

Joseph also chose to see God’s goodness in the middle of relational conflict. He acknowledged that “it was not you who sent me here, but God” (Genesis 45:8.) Because Joseph had such power in Egypt, he had administered the conservation of food during seven years of good crops so that the nation would survive the famine. That had been God’s plan to preserve Israel in its early years.

Thirdly, Joseph chose to have a heart of mercy instead of bitterness. He wanted his brothers and their families to be near him “so that you do not come to poverty” (Genesis 45:11.)

The final thing we noticed last time was that it was Joseph’s decision and priority to seek restoration over estrangement. Genesis 45:15 says that “he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.” What a conversation that must have been!

As we move through the rest of this passage there are a couple more examples to see. Joseph chose to give blessing instead of cursing.

*Genesis 45:20, 21 – “Have no concern for your goods, for **the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.**” The sons of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the command of Pharaoh.*

To demonstrate forgiveness, words are not enough. By our actions and generosity, we prove our intentions to put a relationship back together.

Lastly, Joseph enjoyed humor rather than sadness.

*Genesis 45:24 - Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, “**Do not quarrel on the way.**”*

This might be conjecture, but when I read this verse, I can almost imagine Joseph giving a little wink. After all the arguments these men must have shared over the years with their strong personalities, it’s as if Joseph now is telling them to follow the generous example he just set and for them to treat each other the same way,

with respect and deference. Choosing some levity can be a good way to alleviate hard feelings of the past and show that there will be a new start.

True forgiveness pursues relationship and restoration. True forgiveness is not satisfied with simply canceling the debt. It longs to love again.

- Sam Storms -

In his book *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, Ken Sande offers four promises that are made when we truly forgive someone from our heart. The four promises are:

I will not **dwel**l on this incident.

I will not **bring up** this incident again and use it against you.

I will not **talk** to others about this incident.

I will not let this incident stand between us or **hinder** our personal relationship.

[True forgiveness means] laying down our right to remain angry and giving up our claim to future repayment of the debt we have suffered.

- Brian J. Dodd -

*Colossians 3:13 - Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. **Forgive as the Lord forgave you.***

*Matthew 6:14,15 - For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father in heaven will not forgive your sins.***

BIBLE STUDY

Legislators and Staff (During Session)
Thursdays, 8:00 a.m.
Room 153, House Office Building