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In Forgiveness...God's Hand Genesis 45

When is it toughest for you to forgive? When someone who should have known better didn't care for you? A parent that abandoned you? Abused you? Selfishly failed to care for you? A child who ungratefully took and took and then rebelled and left? When is it toughest for you to forgive? When you get swindled by a business partner? When people refuse to pay then you see them buying expensive toys? Maybe you have been the target of slanderous gossip. What about when that person divorced you. What about that one who took advantage of you? That teacher who failed you. That pastor that abused his power. That friend who stabbed you in the back and turned others against you. When is it toughest for you forgive?

I'm not sure what goes on underneath your skin. I don't know all the memories that haunt you. I don't know all the hurt you have experienced because someone has damaged you. But I know that most of us here have been mistreated by someone and when that happens its very easy to become bitter, angry, cynical, vindictive, touchy, vengeful, cold. Its also very tough to forgive and extend mercy and acceptance and love. It is toughest to forgive when the pain done to you has been great. Its toughest to forgive when there is very little indication of any acknowledgement of damage or repentance on the other persons part. Its tough to forgive when we have never heard the words, "I'm sorry". Its tough to forgive when you know there is no way possible for them to be able to "make-up" for the pain and damage they have inflicted against you and those you love.

This morning we are going to look at the life of Joseph and more specifically the forgiveness he extended toward his brothers. I think this

is one of the most powerful lessons we can learn from Joseph's life. To forgive. It is amazing to me that Joseph was able to fully forgive his brothers after all they had done to him. This morning we are going to see the perspective that Joseph had that helped him take the faith-filled steps of forgiveness. I trust these same steps will help us forgive those who have terribly wronged us as well.

Turn in your Bibles to the book of Genesis. It is the first book in the Bible. Turn to Genesis chapter 45. Joseph has had an up and down life. He was the favorite son of his father's favorite wife. God had given him dreams that he would be great and even his family would honor him. But his brothers hated him, beat him up, wanted to kill him, but instead decided to sell him as a slave to Egypt. In Egypt he found himself working at the home of the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard. He worked himself up to the position as manager of the entire household. Then he is first militantly pursued and seduced by the captain's wife and then falsely accused of rape and thrown into prison. In prison he correctly interprets dreams of the future of both the king's cupbearer and baker, but he is left in prison, forgotten. Finally at just the right time, Pharaoh himself has a dream that no one can interpret. Joseph is remembered and is called on to interpret the dream. This vaults him into a position as second in command in Egypt. He is a national hero having planned for and provided for the nation during seven years of drought. The whole rest of the region begins to starve without food. Joseph's life is filled with dramatic ups and downs, good times and bad. Not so unlike our own lives with perhaps less dramatic shifts. Life is like that good times and bad and yet all through it, through pain and privilege we see God's hand at work.

Eventually even Joseph's brothers come to Egypt for food. Joseph runs them through a series of tests to see whether or not they had changed. I believe Joseph had already forgiven the brothers long ago, the tests he gave them were designed not to punish and hope they fail, but

help them repent and see God behind the events of life. Joseph wanted his brothers to learn the same lessons he had learned in seeing the hand of God in the daily events of life, especially in the things that appear to be blatantly unfair. Joseph wanted to see if they had truly changed and were ready to restore the relationship.

Genesis 45 finds His brothers were standing before Joseph in the courtroom, still thinking Joseph was some strange high-ranking Egyptian leader. Judah had just finished making an impassioned plea offering his own life for his brother Benjamin. Judah had acknowledged his guilt before God and his love for his father Jacob. Joseph realized the brothers had changed, had repented and were ready for restoration. Let me pick up the story reading from Genesis 45 and as I read see if you can begin to pick up the perspective that motivated Joseph to forgive his brothers. Genesis 45: 1-10 (READ)

This is a hugely emotional moment for Joseph. This was family time, not a time for the Egyptian officials to be around. He sends them all out of the room. He can't control himself. The tears just flow. Just a note. Tears are a window to the soul. I'm not a big tear guy but when I start talking about people who really matter to me, I really can get choked up. Joseph was a man's man, a leader and yet he wept when he knew he would be restored to his family he hadn't hugged in years. When Jesus good friend died the shortest verse in the Bible says, "Jesus wept". If the Messiah modeled tears, it certainly is fine for us to weep when we need to. There is no shame in tears. Weeping can be a sign of great strength, not weakness. Weeping is a window to the soul that can open up opportunity for communication and restoration. Joseph here says, "It's me. I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold to Egypt."

Take a look at verse 5 where we see what has motivated Joseph to forgive his brothers. "don't be grieved because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life." again in v.7 "and God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth." V.8 Now, therefore it was

not you who sent me here, BUT GOD! Joseph was able to forgive his brothers because he believed that God's hand touches every event of life, every person, every circumstance...especially the difficult ones. How can that be we ask? We say, "NO, No NO. that can't be true. If God was loving and able and powerful enough He never ever would have allowed the evil that was horrifically done against me. We typically have no problem giving praise and glory to God for all the good things in life but when anyone dare suggest that God may have allowed difficult things, even horrific things to come down on us...that shatters all we have ever thought about God. We can't imagine God ever allowing anything bad to happen to us. We pray He protect and provide for us. We assume the best thing for us is safety and comfort and peace and rest and absence of conflict. Yet when bad things do happen we think, "That cannot be! A loving God would never allow that to happen."

We want God to be a Santa, but a Santa He refuses to be. He wants to be our Savior. Now a Santa may give us whatever we want and Whatever is on our wish life. But a Savior will give us what we need. A Savoir will allow even hard things to bring us the best things. A Santa may put toys under our tree that he knows we will become quickly bored with and discard in a week. A Savior will allow difficult lessons to come into our lives to bring us to the place we always dreamed we come be. A Savoir will even go so far as to hang his own son on a tree so that we might have life and freedom and salvation.

Believe God's hand touches every difficult person and event

If we are going to be able to forgive others, we must believe that God is sovereign and his hand touches every event, every difficult person, every trying circumstance of our life. Joseph told them about his new perspective on life. "you didn't send me to Egypt, God did." Genesis 50:20, "you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." Joseph sees

difficult people not as the enemy but as a hard tool used by God, a tool that was meant for evil, but God came along and superceded that evil and instead used it for good. God's plan, God's love superceded the cruelty of others, the pain of rejection, the agony of divorce, the hurt of slander. James 1 is very clear that God is never the author of evil, but God does at times allow people to do very evil things and then will use that to accomplish an even better good in people.

Think back on your life for just a minute. Is this not true? Think about some of the more painful times in your life. When you have responded with God's heart toward them did not God use that to build character in you that you would never have otherwise developed. Did not God use that to move you and cause you to make wise choices or avoid terrible choices that you would never have done without the pain? God never wastes a pain. Often He gets double duty out of pain. Both in them and in us. Since God often uses pain for good does that mean we have no responsibility and can sin and hurt and damage people as much as we want. NO! We are responsible for our sin. We pay the consequences for the damage we inflict on others. Divine sovereignty does not cancel out human responsibility. Neither does human responsibility negate divine sovereignty. God is ultimately in control and His purposes will triumph and God will work to bring good even out of evil. This is the Old Testament version of Romans 8:28 "and we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God to those who are called according to His purpose."

God's hand, not mans is controlling the reality in every event and that becomes the basis for our forgiveness. Forgiveness is not just pretending it never happened and never really hurt. No. Forgiveness does not mean we must minimize the offense and say, "well its really no big deal." Forgiveness is not a teeth gripping determination to make it through. Its not a tolerance or excusing of damage done because God happened to make something good come out of it. No

Forgiveness is truly believing that its not up to us to settle the scores. Forgiveness is releasing them from a very real and legitimate debt they do owe us. Yes. Says Joseph you did sell me out as a slave. Yes you did mean it for evil. But I am choosing to forgive because I realize that God allowed your evil as a tool in my life and He will deal and discipline you back to His heart. This new thinking turns difficult people into God's chiseling tools shaping character in my life. I can forgive them because God decided they would be a shaping chisel in my life. When I view people that way, they are no longer my enemy, but a tool in the very hand of God.

Give up the need to be the Enforcer:

How can I forgive difficult people who have hurt me? Not only must I believe that God's hand touches every person and event, I must give up the need to be the Enforcer of justice. Joseph had plenty of power to make his brothers pay for what they had done to him. Joseph could easily have made them sit in a prison for all the years that they stripped from him. I'm sure it was tempting to crush them, but he did not. He refused to be the enforcer. Joseph chose to have the truth of God override his emotions, feelings and hurt. We are able to forgive only when we let God be the Enforcer. That is His job. Romans 12:19 says, "Vengeance is Mine says the Lord I will repay." This is hard for us to give the job of Enforcer back to God because we fear He will go far too easy on them. We fear that God will not let us watch while they squirm and hurt...and we don't want to miss out gloating over their pain. When we refuse to forgive we are really clinging to our rights to get back at the one who has hurt us. We stay bitter and angry. That bitterness is a poison we swallow in the hope that it will harm the other person. God tells us to forgive and let Him do, trust Him to do what he does best, in His time, in His way, whether we ever get to see what looks like justice or not. So

when we forgive and give up our need to be the Enforcer, we forgive more than is logical. We forgive more than is reasonable.

It's not easy is it? Just when we think we've forgiven and given back the job of Enforcer to God, something will happen to trigger our memories, prick our anger. Its tough to forgive. Corrie Ten boom had terrible things done to herself and her family at the hands of the Nazis during WWII. She had forgiven this person, but late at night her mind kept rehashing the incident over and over in her mind and couldn't sleep. When she confessed her struggle to her pastor. He told her this; Up in the church tower there is a bell which is rung by pulling on a rope. If you pull on that rope, the bells swing and ring. Ding, dong, ding dong. They will keep ringing and dinging for a time getting slower and slower and more faint until the final dong and then it stops. The same is true of forgiveness. When we forgive, we choose to stop pulling on the rope. We willfully remove our hand from that rope of revenge, anger, bitterness. If we have been pulling on that rope for a long time. If we have been nursing our grievances for a long time, we must not be surprised if those old angry thoughts keep coming on for a while. They are the left over dings and dongs slowing down from our angry rope pulling. So as we stop and let go of the rope, the anger and bitterness will slow down, and not be quite as intense as last month, last year and eventually if we keep our hand off that rope, they will stop altogether. We can trust God with our forgiveness. We must give up our need to be the Enforcer of justice.

Be overwhelmed by how much we've been forgiven:

How can we forgive other people when its really, really hard? Be overwhelmed by the extent of how much we've been forgiven. We forget that don't we. We enjoy the forgiveness that God has extended to us. I know the depth of sin I have been forgiven. Yet, I forget the amount. It

take God's forgiveness of me for granted and so when it comes time for me to forgive others its more difficult for me to forgive them.

Colossians 3:13 says, "bear with each other and forgive each other whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you." When we fail to forgive others we are really trivializing God's great sacrifice for us when He forgave us. Our failure to forgive others highlights our arrogant denial of God's lavish mercy and forgiveness. Our bitterness and anger has so blinded us we cannot even see the cross. In order to forgive others we must see all the slander, all the injustices, all the swindling, cheating, back-stabbing, rejection, abuse and violations through the beams of the cross of Calvary. That is the perspective we need if we have any hope of forgiving just as God in Christ has forgiven you and me.

Forgiveness paves the way for restores relationships:

Forgiveness and repentance paves the way for restores relationships. Back in Genesis 45 we see two things have happened. Not only has Joseph fully forgiven, the brothers have fully repented. That makes way for them to come near to each other. V.4 Please, come near. V.14-15 and he fell on his brother and wept. There is a unity and restoration of relationship that happens when the offended forgives and then also the offender repents. Then comes peace and unity and restoration. Now the offended one may forgive and he will experience peace even if the offender does not repent. They will not be restored, but the offended one can enjoy God's peace because he has forgiven. So also the one who has offended can repent to God and will experience peace that is promised. The offended one may still not forgive and there will be no restoration between the two, but as long as there is repentance, the one who offended can enjoy the peace of God. Restoration, unity requires both forgiveness and repentance.

Jesus desires restoration of relationship. He has already forgiven us. His claim of sacrificial love spoke loudly with His son Jesus, death on the cross. It is our call to repent. When we repent we not only experience peace with ourselves, we experience peace and restoration with God. Jesus extends an invitation to repent, to admit our sin and to commit to stop doing our hurtful damaging actions and words and enjoy a life of freedom and satisfaction and rest. Perhaps today is the day where you begin to let God be God and let Him do His job.

When is it most difficult to forgive? “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus on the cross, “Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing.” Its most difficult to forgive when they are still difficult. We can only hope to forgive when we believe that God’s hand touches every person and event and circumstance. We can only hope to forgive when we give us our need to be the Enforcer of justice. We can only hope to forgive when we become overwhelmed by the extent of how much we ourselves have been forgiven. Perhaps even today God is paving the way in your heart to forgive as you have been forgiven. What steps, what words will but feet to your decision today. Will it be a note you will write this afternoon? Will it be a phone call. Perhaps you will show up on their door this week and say, “Hey, can we take a walk?” That conversation may just open up a place for peace in your own heart and it may bring restoration.