

A Study of the life of Joseph (4)
What does it mean to forgive?
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Introduction: One of the real tests of faith is ones willingness to forgive another.

- A. While this may not seem like a trial, it showed much about the character of Joseph.
 - 1. Joseph was now the second most powerful man in Egypt.
 - 2. His brothers through famine were now at his mercy. What was he to do?
- B. God exhorts everyone to be like Him. Our God majors in forgiveness! (**Ex 34:6-7**)
 - 1. Anyone who wishes to please God must learn to forgive. (**Mt 6:11-15**)
 - 2. Forgiveness does not come naturally. We must be taught by God!

I. God now comes to test Joseph's brothers

- A. They had time to think about what they had done. (**Gen 42:18-22**)
 - 1. The conscience if not destroyed can bring changes in time.
 - 2. Satan's lies of quick revenge and reward can be seen for what it is in time.
 - 3. God's word taught by example and word by a godly father would also have its effect. (**Rom 6:20-21**)
- B. God now brings a series of calamities upon Joseph's family.
 - 1. He first brings drought and famine that drives the brothers to Egypt. (**Gen 42:1-5**)
 - 2. He then makes the brothers leave one behind. (**Gen 42:8-17, 24**)
 - a. The rash, selfish action of the past is now replaced by a painful choice to serve and help.
 - b. Where the life of one brother was disregarded in the past now every family member is important. (**Gen 42:35-38**)
 - c. God is also working a plan to provide!
 - 3. He then drives the entire family into Egypt because of the famine. (**Gen 43:1-14**)
 - 4. The brothers are put through one more major test.
 - a. Circumstances are created to make it appear that Benjamin is in danger. (**Gen 44:1-5,14-15**)
 - b. A true attitude of selfless sacrifice in now shown. (**Gen 44:16-34**)
- C. Joseph reveals himself to his family and now a new test begins. (**Gen 45:1-8**)
 - 1. Will Joseph forgive his brothers?
 - 2. Will Joseph's brothers accept his forgiveness?

II. What is forgiveness?

- A. What does it mean for God to forgive?
 - 1. **He blots out our sins!** (**Acts 3:19; Isa 43:25**)
 - a. God hates sin, but He loves us.
 - b. If I can live and die in this forgiveness then all is well.
 - 2. **God does not remember our sins any more.** (**Heb 8:12**)
 - a. He is described as casting them into the sea. (**Mic 7:18-19**)

"When God buries our sins in the deepest sea, He posts a sign which reads: No Fishing!"

b. When God forgives our sin is long gone! Do you believe this?
"Everyone has an irrevocable past. What is done is done. It can never be changed or recalled. Lord Byron, the English poet, once wrote, "No hand can make the clock strike for me the hours that are past." - Author Unknown

3. God receives us back to a full fellowship. (Lk 15:20-24)

- a. There is no grudge holding with God.
- b. Our biggest problem is in believing this.

B. Why is forgiveness hard?

- 1. In real forgiveness you take the loss or hurt and write it off.
 - a. We are a people who do not want to be cheated! It is with the utmost difficulty that we let go of a real debt!
 - b. Before you try to justify your holy war over your hurts ask this question: "What if God treated my debt to Him as I am treating others?"
(Mt 18:23-35)
 - c. Notice the great emphasis of the scriptures here. **(Mt 6:14-15, 18:35)**
- 2. Humility is a must for one to truly forgive. **(Col 3:12-13)**
 - a. A proud person will pursue the one who injured him for as long as it takes!
 - b. In humility we recognize who we really are. Let go!

C. How does one find the strength to forgive?

- 1. You learn about God's forgiveness of your own sins! **(Lk 7:36-50; Mt 18:22-35)**
- 2. This issue was settled years ago by Joseph.
 - a. If bitterness had set in over the years, it would be very difficult to deal with it now.
 - b. This is key to a victorious life. Put away your anger quickly!
(Eph 4:26-27)
- 3. Look at the contrast between Joseph and his brothers. One had a clear conscience while the others did not. **(Gen 50:15-21)**

D. Self-deception is very strong when it comes to forgiveness. (Jas 1:26)

- 1. We can say we "forgive" while at the same time harbor bitterness in our hearts.
- 2. Even though we say the right words, it is plain to others that we have a vendetta.

E. Things which men substitute for forgiveness.

- 1. **To ignore both the wrong done and the person who did it.**
 - a. If we can by love cover a fault then all is well. **(1 Pt 4:8)**
 - b. But if we bury a hurt and then snub and avoid another, we are in trouble.
- 2. **To go by the "eye for an eye" approach.** After I get even then all is well!
- 3. **To put the person on probation.**
 - a. I will forgive you but if you do this again...be extra good or else!
 - b. We may think we have forgiven but in truth we have not! What is forgiveness? **(Heb 8:12)**

III. Joseph's brothers face the challenge to receive forgiveness

- A. It is hard to trust a person with forgiveness.

1. Joseph knew their needs in this area and tried to reassure them by both gifts and words. (**Gen 45:21-24**)
 2. Later in life they needed this reassurance again! (**Gen 50:15-21**)
- B. There are many who continue to feel the guilt of their sin after meeting the conditions of forgiveness with God.
1. The example of the woman who thought she should be baptized again.
 2. This is a matter of faith! Do we believe that God will do what He said? (**Jer 31:34; 1 Jn 1:7-9**)
 3. Here is where we need to take God's promises and read them over and over! God is not like a man nor does He hold grudges like a man. (**Num 23:19**)
 4. Please study more about the character of God and there find the comfort of the scriptures. (**Rom 15:4; 5:6-8**)
 5. You may need to also be praying for a lack of faith! Our God knows and understands! (**Mk 9:23-24**)
- C. Some common misunderstandings.
1. You can only repent sincerely of a sin once.
 2. If you repent you will not go out and do the same thing again. (**Acts 8:9-10, 13, 19-20, 22-23**)
 3. "I have committed the unpardonable sin." (**Mt 12:31; Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-30**)
 4. If brethren will not accept me then God must not as well.
- D. We need to draw closer to those who have been forgiven.
1. Imagine the guilt the one publicly marked felt! (**1 Cor 5:1-4**)
 2. It was this very guilt that drove him to repentance. (**2 Cor 2:5-8**)
 3. Now comes the time to "reaffirm *your* love to him."
 4. Here is where Satan wins battles because of our negligence! (**2 Cor 2:10-11**)
- Amputees often experience some sensation of a phantom limb. Somewhere, locked in their brains, a memory lingers of the nonexistent hand or leg. Invisible toes curl, imaginary hands grasp things, a "leg" feels so sturdy a patient may try to stand on it. For a few, the experience includes pain. Doctors watch helplessly, for the part of the body screaming for attention does not exist.
- To me, phantom limb pain provides wonderful insight into the phenomenon of false guilt. Christians can be obsessed by the memory of some sin committed years ago. It never leaves them, crippling their ministry, their devotional life, their relationships with others. They live in fear that someone will discover their past. They work overtime trying to prove to God they're truly repentant. They erect barriers against the enveloping, loving grace of God. Unless they experience the truth in 1 John 3:19-20 that "God is greater than our conscience," they become a pitiful as poor Mr. Barwick, shaking a fist in fury at the pickled leg on the mantle. ---Philip Yancey, *Leadership*, Vol. 5, no. 3.
- E. The one who has been forgiven needs to seek out the company and association of faithful Christians.
1. Often it is this lack of association that helped sin to have a opportunity. (**1 Cor 15:33**)

2. Many times one stops attending or runs out after services! It may be difficult to face others but this is a must to find the healing you need!
 3. You will find in faithful Christians an understanding because they have also have been where you are! **(2 Cor 1:3-4)**
- F. There are some Christians who will not encourage you.
1. Hopefully that will not happen to you. If it does do not let what a few do speak for the others and especially not for God! **(Rom 3:4)**
 2. I have seen some Christians:
 - a. Look indifferently upon one's response.
 - b. Openly say: "They will not make it!"
 - c. Refuse to have much to do with you because of what you did.
 - d. Continue to bring you sin up.
 3. These people are not serving God! They will receive from God as they have treated others! They need to repent. **(Jas 2:13)**
 4. Let us show mercy too and not try to read minds and be sensitive.
- Conclusion:** Are you willing to receive God's forgiveness?