

“Beyond Forgiveness”

Genesis 50:15–21

Far from living by the principle of “an eye for an eye,” Joseph generously offered total forgiveness to his brothers. When he was younger they had threatened to kill him and then decided to sell him into slavery instead (37:18–28). Yet when they moved to Egypt during a famine, he welcomed their families and provided for them as the nation’s governor. But after their father died the fear again rose up that Joseph would seek revenge. Perhaps he had only treated them kindly to spare their father’s feelings while he was still alive. So to protect themselves from this imagined danger they sent a representative to beg for their lives, hoping Joseph would merely enslave them rather than kill them. But in his reply to their plea Joseph revealed three powerful attitudes which had totally released him from bitterness. Few people have had a greater right to be bitter than Joseph, yet, obviously, he had somehow discovered an antidote for the toxic poison of unforgiveness. Though his brothers believed he would never forgive their betrayal, the truth was he did. He emotionally released it and moved on. We would all do well to learn how he did this, and thankfully he revealed his secret. Now we too can follow in his footsteps if we’ll let these same attitudes be in us.

FORGIVENESS: The decision to release someone from judgement.

- In practice we may forgive hundreds, and even thousands, of times while our emotions remain unhealed.
- This is made worse when offenses continue.
- We often question whether we have really forgiven because the feelings of anger or hurt return over and over again. It becomes a tiresome treadmill to forgive every time the feelings arise.

TRUST: Being confident of a person’s integrity. I believe you would not hurt me or others if you had the opportunity.

- We can forgive people we don’t trust. These are two different actions.
- Forgiveness does not mean I must expose myself or others to injury if the person is not trustworthy.
- Trust is earned, forgiveness is a gift.

Joseph had clearly moved beyond this wearisome pattern of forgiving. He appears free of the past and no longer needed to address it, though it’s likely he did not yet trust all his brothers. He moved beyond forgiveness by keeping his faith focused on God. This allowed his emotions to heal because his attention was focused on the future, not the past.

THREE PRINCIPLES OF FAITH at work in Joseph:

- #1: He left moral judgement in the hands of God (v 19)
 - It wasn’t his job to examine their hearts or pay them back. That was God’s business.
 - Romans 12:19
 - If punishment was deserved, God would provide that. God is a just judge who could be relied upon to administer justice when necessary.
- #2: He believed God would cause all things to work for his good (v 20) (Ro 8:28)
 - God could use even evil attacks against him for good.
 - God is so powerful and so smart, nothing you can do to me can stop Him from blessing me and guiding my life.
 - I wonder how God will use this to bless me?



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- #3: He chose to do spiritual warfare by overcoming evil with good.
 - Romans 12:20, 21
 - “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
 - Matthew 5:38–48
 - He refused to let the devil divide them by refusing to respond in the same spirit. Instead, he sought to win them back to God by exemplifying mercy.
 - The real issue was that the devil was trying to divide the family so that the nation God was planning wouldn’t come about but would dissolve in strife.
 - We often take attacks personally and react emotionally rather than seeing the larger spiritual issues at stake.
 - We need to stop and ask: 1) “What’s the devil really after here?” 2) “What are the promises God wishes to fulfill?” 3) “What must I do to allow God to win?”
 - For Joseph: 1) The devil was trying to prevent Jesus Christ from coming to earth. 2) God had promised Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Ge 22:17, 18). 3) He refused to let bitterness divide his family so they could grow into the nation of Israel.

Conclusion: We too can move beyond the cycle of forgiveness by putting our faith in God as Joseph did. This will allow our emotions to heal more quickly because our attention will be focused on the future, not the past.

Discussion Questions:

1) Are you trapped in a “cycle of forgiveness,” having to repeatedly forgive someone again and again? Which of the three principle of faith would help the most to free you? 2) Explain the difference between forgiving and trusting a person. What must happen for trust to be reestablished?