

The Upward Spiral of Forgiveness Part One

Good morning! I want to begin by sharing some great news. Grace Community Church is reopen for services as of this morning! If you're interested in finding out more about Grace, you can go to our website at gracecornering.org.

Over the next two Sundays we're gonna be wrapping up the Spiraling Upward series by looking at the power of forgiveness to give our lives upward lift even when the things people do would want to drag us down.

Forgiveness. For the Christian there is no sweeter word. Our Christian faith is built on the forgiveness of sin. Jesus died to purchase our forgiveness. Our relationship with God is only possible because we have been forgiven. Heaven's gates are open to us through forgiveness.

Joseph is an Old Testament picture of Christ and once again we see Christ as Joseph reunites with his brothers and forgives them for all the ways they wronged him.

Last we saw that Joseph tests his brothers first by showing extravagant favoritism to his younger brother Benjamin to see if they will envy Benjamin the way they envied him. Then he frames Benjamin and makes it easy for his brothers abandon and betray Benjamin the way 17 years ago they sold Joseph as a slave and abandoned him.

But his brothers aren't the same men they were 17 years earlier as powerfully demonstrated when Judah steps forward and says to Joseph, let Benjamin go and take me instead. Judah highlights his father's special love for Benjamin without a hint of envy, and wants to guard that love even at the cost of his life.

That's all Joseph needed to see. Let's pick up the story in Gen. 45:1

45 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.^[a]

⁸ "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. Gen 45:1-8a

So there's this great reunion and Joseph has them move closer and everything is great, until a few years later their father Jacob dies.

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" ¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷ 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask

you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

¹⁸ His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. Gen. 50:15-21

The brothers are so aware that they had really wronged Joseph. They had talked about killing him right in front of him, they threw him in a pit with the intention of letting him die of thirst, and then they decided to profit off of his pain by selling him as a slave to a traveling caravan. Not only all of that, but they stole from Joseph 17 years with his father and brother that he would never, ever get back. There is no question the hurt they had inflicted on Joseph was very real.

People are going to hurt you. You're going to hurt people too, but that's a subject for another message. We can't get through life without being hurt. A lot of it will be the bumps and bruises of life, but sometimes someone will say or do something that really hurts or offends us.

No question the hurt is real. The debt is real. The question is, what do we do with the hurt? What do we do with the debt?

And we all know the right Christian answer: we should forgive. But forgiveness is easier said than done when we've been wronged in some way. *C.S. Lewis put it this way, **Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea... until he has something to forgive.***

I find that to be true, forgiveness is a beautiful thing...until someone messes with me! Then it's like, forget about forgiveness, I want payback! But working to forgiveness is a fight worth fighting. Cause people can't destroy our lives, not really. I'll explain that in a moment but people can hurt us, and mess us up some, but they don't have the power to destroy the believer's life. But unforgiveness can.

If we allow unforgiveness to get a foothold in our heart, it will slowly but surely change us from the inside out and not for the better. Our hearts will ice over like an early winter and go from warm, loving, and joyful to angry, bitter, and cynical. And it won't just be limited...

So fighting for forgiveness is a fight worth having. But how do we do it? We see that Joseph forgave his brothers, but this series is about life lessons we learn from Joseph's story. It's not enough to know he did it, how did he do it?

Over the next two Sundays I want to share two things that Joseph did that were huge in his process of forgiving. This first thing he did positioned him for forgiveness, the second thing he did flowed from being positioned to forgive. Let me share the two things and then we'll look at the first thing in more detail this morning.

1. Joseph entrusted himself to God, not man
2. Joseph moved towards restoration, not retaliation

The Process of Forgiveness: Two Things Joseph Did

I. Joseph entrusted his life to God, not man

To entrust means to give something over to another. Joseph entrusted himself, or gave himself over to, the care of God. When men plotted evil against him, he entrusted himself to the good plan of God.

You know who else did that? Jesus.

23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 1 Pet. 2:23

Now entrusting ourselves to God may sound like it's a passive thing, as if we just lie down, let whatever is going to happen happen, and trust that God will work it out. Nothing could be further from the truth. Peter (who is writing to Christians who are suffering) helps us better understand what entrusting ourselves to God is, and what it isn't, in 1 Peter 4:19

19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit (entrust) themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. 1 Pet. 4:19

We are to entrust ourselves to our faithful Creator...and continue to do good! Entrusting is not trusting and doing nothing, it's trusting and doing good! It's active faith and faithful action. That's precisely what Joseph did.

When his brothers sold him into slavery he entrusted his life to God and did good in Potiphar's home. When Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of assault, he entrusted himself to God and did good in the prison. When he was forgotten in prison by the cupbearer for two years, he entrusted himself to God and did good.

I think the biggest damage unforgiveness does is center us around how we got hurt and who hurt us. It focuses us on our hurt, our pain, the damage done to our lives. Unforgiveness centers us around the person who hurt us so that all we think about is what they did to us. How they hurt us. Maybe we blame them for messing up our lives. Maybe we pull back in order to hurt them back. Maybe we hope for their misfortune. Maybe we think about retaliating. Unforgiveness focuses us on what people have done, or will do, or might do.

Joseph entrusted himself to God. He knew that people could hurt him and mess with his life, but he knew that it was God who was in control of his life. He entrusted himself to God and did good.

We see this "God is in control of my life" perspective after he reveals himself to his brothers. They keep bringing it back to them and what they did, Joseph keeps bringing it back to God. Listen to how he keeps pointing them to God: vs. 5 *God sent me ahead of you.* Vs. 8 - *So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.* 50:20 - *"You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."* He saw what they did, but he was focused on what God was doing.

He entrusted his life to God, not man. This doesn't make Joseph weak, it makes him incredibly strong. Because God is his strength, nothing man can do can destroy his life. His life isn't bouncing off of what someone has done, or is doing, or might do. His life is built on what God has done, is doing, and will do.

David says something similar in Psalm 56, when there are people all around him who are pursuing him ready to attack him. He says O God, they constantly twist my words and scheme my downfall. David isn't superhuman. These constant attacks are getting to him and he's weary and afraid.

But then he lifts his eyes to God. *In God I trust and am not afraid. What can man do to me? Ps. 56:11*

This isn't easy for David, he's wrestling hard to get to that point. So let's not put it in Christian auto-pilot and say, "yeah, I know God is in control of my life." There's knowing and then there's *knowing*. If we're honest it sure *feels* like people can ruin our lives, doesn't it? When someone hurts us deeply it feels like people are in control and God is distant. We have to fight to believe that God is in control when someone spreads gossip about us, or misreads our motives, or accuses us, or betrays us, or rejects us, or steals from us.

Joseph knows what that's about. But his example inspires us to look up and see God, high and lifted up. God alone is sovereign over all creation. God alone is sovereign over all history. God alone is sovereign over the earth.

Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. Isa 40:15

In terms of the power all the nations of the world have, it's like so much dust on the surface of a scale to God. They don't have enough weight to even slightly tip the scales of His sovereignty. The power of the nations (and by extension, any person or group we might encounter) is insignificant compared to God. Doesn't move the scales.

But then God looks at His son or His daughter, and He says that tips the scales. I will move heaven and earth on behalf of My children.

- I will defend them
- I will protect them
- I will be a refuge for them
- I will bless them
- I will be with them
- I will carry them
- I will love them
- I will forgive them
- I will send my beloved Son to die for them

My children, God says, tip the scales of My sovereignty.

Christian, your life isn't built on what man has done to you, or is doing to you, or will do to you. Your life is built on, and found it, what Christ has done for you, is doing for you, and will do for you in the ages to come! And nothing can take that away from you, and nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

When we see entrust our lives to our God, our Creator, our Father, we are not only able to say "what can man do to me?" we are freed up to forgive. We are freed up to love.

That's the upward spiraling power of forgiveness. Next week we'll look at steps we can take to help restore broken relationships. But this morning, let's close by lifting our eyes to God in faith and trust.

Is there someone who has hurt you deeply? Wronged you? Committed an offense against you? Be honest, don't act like it didn't happen. Look honestly at that person who wronged you...and then lift your eyes higher and see God above all. Believe He holds your life in His hands and entrust yourself to Him. And continue to do good. (Pray)