

Father Knows Best
(based on GENESIS 45:1-8)
August 20, 2023

Sometimes it's better not to know so much.

In France, in the 1790's, a priest, a lawyer and an engineer were arrested & about to be guillotined. The priest put his head on the block. They pulled the rope and nothing happened. He declared that he'd been saved by divine intervention - so he was set free.

Next the lawyer was put on the block, and again the rope didn't release the blade. He claimed he could not be executed twice for the same crime, so he too was set free.

Lastly, they grabbed the engineer and shoved his head into the guillotine. He looked up at the release mechanism and said, "Wait a minute, I see your problem...."

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Today we're looking at the life of Joseph, observing his journey to forgiveness, to see how we might follow the same path to healing.

Undoubtedly, Joseph had obsessed about the physical harm he'd suffered at the hands of his own brothers. Ps. 105:18 says, "They bruised his feet with shackles; his neck was put in irons."

For many long years Joseph must have relived their hatred, their casting him into the pit, their selling him to the Ishmaelites, the long, painful journey of weeping to Egypt, and his being sold at the slave-market there. How many nights had he cried himself to sleep - homesick, missing his father?

Surely he imagined his brothers at home, feasting and celebrating cherished holidays, eating good food, and living free, while he ate slave's food, either working for a master, or rotting for many years in prison. Many times he must have thought how unfair it all was, & that the tables of justice needed to be turned on them!

On the surface, Joseph seemed like he was doing OK, that the unresolved crisis with his brothers wasn't affecting him. But, when Joseph later had sons of his own, he gave them names which referenced his own trouble and suffering [Manasseh, "God has made me forget my trouble" AND Ephraim, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering"].

Joseph, however, could never shed his feelings of sadness, from the time of his imprisonment through to his wonderful life as Prime Minister of the most powerful

nation on Earth. He married a beautiful wife, had two healthy, happy sons, and enjoyed all the best life had to offer. At some point, it surely occurred to Joseph that he must forgive his brothers, and he pondered that decision.

Is there someone you need to forgive? When we don't forgive, we actually hurt ourselves, not the people with whom we are furious. Allowing hatred toward someone is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.

Dale Carnegie observed: "When we hate our enemies, we give them power over us - power over our sleep, our appetites, our happiness."

In one study where the subjects took "forgiveness training," mental distress dropped by about 40%, and there was a 35% dip in headaches, back pain and insomnia.

Eph. 5:26-27 says, "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." When we allow ourselves to remain bitter and unforgiving, Satan gets a foothold in our lives. It's the tool he needs in order to enslave us.

Jesus said "When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." (Mark 11:25) Now there's food for thought - if **we** don't forgive, we can no longer be forgiven! The person who will not forgive, destroys the bridge over which he himself must cross.

In Matt. 18:15 Jesus says "If your brother sins against you, GO and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother back".

Obviously there were reasons why Joseph opted to forgive. Joseph knew that God had a plan, a greater purpose for both himself and his brothers. And so he thought, 'Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here. It was not you who sent me here, but God.'

It's hard to accept sometimes that God allows for tragic circumstances and trials to come into our lives. Joseph received a revelation that there was a reason for his 13 years of imprisonment and slavery.

There IS a reason why God allows all of our difficulties. We just need to trust that the Great Shepherd of the sheep knows best, and is working all things together for our good! Undoubtedly, Joseph began to understand that his boasting of his dreams and his father's favoritism (which he encouraged) had been the causes of his brothers' hatred. The stumbling blocks in HIS character had caused THEM to stumble.

Many times, our own shortcomings aggravate a situation. When we ascribe negative characteristics such as meanness or hatefulness to another person, do we recognize them because they're in our hearts as well? Like the Lord said, "Let he that is without sin, cast the first stone!"

Paul said in Romans 2:1, "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things." Joseph eventually came to accept that he was partly responsible for what happened.

In the cartoon, Calvin and Hobbes, Calvin told his tiger friend, Hobbes, "I feel badly that I called Susie names & hurt her feelings. I'm sorry I did it."

"Maybe you should apologize to her," Hobbes suggests.

Calvin ponders this for a moment and replies, "I keep hoping there's a less obvious solution."

And doesn't that sound familiar? Joseph knew HE had changed, but He wasn't sure if his brothers were still evil and treacherous or if THEY had changed. If they were still wicked, then they still needed punishment. So, Joseph set up a series of tests, including keeping Simeon until they brought Benjamin (Joseph's only full brother), and then pretending to keep Benjamin as his slave, to see if his brothers would lie to their father again.

Their tearful response, concerned about their father Jacob, and Judah's willingness to become Joseph's slave-for-life in place of Benjamin, confirmed to Joseph that they had repented and changed. They were men who had made a terrible mistake and they knew it.

We too must forgive our offenders, even if they don't repent...that is what's **best** for US. To not 'move-on', keeps us the victim.

Joseph, after the tests, completely forgave his brothers, and gave them a full restoration to his life and resources. He never brought up the subject again!

Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, was reminded one day of a vicious attack that someone had made on her years before. She acted as if she hadn't even heard of it.

"Don't you remember it?" her friend asked.

"No," came Barton's reply, "I distinctly remember forgetting it." She made the choice to forgive and so must we!

In 1492, two Irish nobles were having a bitter feud. Sir James Butler and his followers took refuge in part of St. Patrick's cathedral, bolting themselves in.

As the siege wore on, his opponent, Sir Fitzgerald decided the feuding was foolish...they attended the same church and were part of the same country, yet were trying to kill each other! So, Fitzgerald called to Sir James for a truce, and, proving that there would be no deception, he cut a plank out of the cathedral door, and stuck his own arm inside, as a pledge of trust. Fitzgerald's noble gesture became the expression "chancing one's arm." Give peace a chance!

Pastor Paul Cho was pastor in Korea, in the world's largest church. He pledged to "go anywhere to preach the gospel—except Japan." WHY? He hated the Japanese with a deep loathing, because of what Japanese troops had done to the Korean people and to members of Cho's own family, during WWII.

Over time, he was convicted of his statement & challenged from other leaders to preach in Japan. He agreed to lead a pastor's conference—1,000 Japanese pastors would be in attendance. When Cho stood up to speak, what came out of his mouth was this: "I hate you. I hate you. I hate you." And then he broke down and wept. He was both brimming and desolate with hatred.

At first one, then two, then all 1,000 pastors stood up. One by one, they walked up to Pastor Cho, knelt at his feet, and asked forgiveness for what they, and their people, had done to him and his people. As this went on, God changed Paul Cho. The Lord put a single message in his heart and mouth: "I love you. I love you. I love you." Cho became a changed man toward his former enemies.

It all starts with the decision to forgive, because forgiveness is a choice.

Forgive whoever has entered your thoughts this very minute.

Forgive them, for YOUR sake!

AMEN