

THE PATH OF FORGIVENESS:
Forgiveness and Family

Genesis 45:1-15

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Neuroscience is teaching us that a psychological wound stimulates the same part of the brain that is stimulated when we experience a physical wound. In other words, the brain processes injuries in the same way. [*The Book of Forgiving*, by Desmond and Mpho Tutu, p. 99]. This morning, we think about forgiveness and families. Families can be a source of great comfort or great pain. I want to remind you of a Bible story about a family, a family soaked in deception, secrets and betrayal.

Joseph was raised in a large family and was his daddy's favorite. His dad made him a special coat. Joseph actually made the issue worse by bragging about his dreams--how he would someday be in power over his brothers. The brothers' rage turned from jealousy to animosity to hatred. One day, they sold their baby brother into slavery and told their father Jacob that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. (Do you hear it? deception, secrets, betrayal). Joseph endured many injustices along the way, but rose to power in Egypt. A famine covered the land and it happened that Joseph was in charge of food distribution. His ten brothers came to Egypt looking for food. They didn't recognize Joseph, but he recognized them! He treated them harshly at first, putting them in prison for three days, accusing them of being foreign spies. Finally, he could stand it no longer. Grace and forgiveness overcame him. Listen to the story's climax. [READ GENESIS 45:1-15 NOW].

Is it possible to forgive too soon? One of the things which fascinates me about this story is that Joseph did not forgive too quickly. Medical doctors will sometimes tell a patient that wound needs to remain open, to heal from the inside out. Notice how Joseph needed time to process his anger. Please note what forgiveness is not: 1) Denying our feelings; 2) Understanding why the other hurt you; 3) Forgetting about it; 4) Returning to the way the relationship was before. It takes time!

Now, having mentioned that we might forgive too quickly, my observation is that most of us err on the other side--holding grudges too long. Think about the phrase, "hold" a grudge. If you're holding it, your hands aren't free to do other things like pray, hug, serve and wave. We carry our grudge around like a ball and chain, introducing it into every other relationship. That person we are angry with still controls us. And we are living in the past, missing all of our right nows. Comedian Lily Tomlin once quipped, "Forgiveness means giving up all hope of a better past." [Tute, p. 88]. Joseph evidently wanted free of all that.

Do you know what I think? I think Joseph grew up in a messed up family (deception, secrets and betrayal) and some of it was his own doing. Do you know what else I think? I think Joseph had

experienced the unconditional love and grace of God in his own life and he saw forgiving family as one way he could participate in God's love and grace, not just be a bystander. Several times in this Joseph story, you will read about God's steadfast love being upon Joseph (Gen. 39:21).

I once pastored a young couple expecting their first child. Complications set in when the baby came three weeks early--toxemia and mom's high blood pressure. And yet, the baby was born weighing seven pounds. The dad explained to me that the stress and pressure actually helped the baby mature faster. When we don't forgive, there is a part of us that does not grow up.

How do we know when we've really forgiven someone? 1) When we stop brooding over it. 2) When we stop talking about it to others. 3) When we stop using it as a weapon/leverage. 4) When we stop letting the hurt define us or the relationship. As Christ followers, we know we can't do this on our own. But the Christ who went to the Cross and prayed, "Father, forgive them..." is the one who is with us and inside us. He forgives us and offers us that power as well.