

FREEDOM IN FORGIVENESS

-There is a funny story of a husband and wife who were driving down the road and started arguing over something that had happened in the past that they had never gotten over. As they passed a barnyard of mules and pigs, the husband sarcastically asked, “Relatives of yours?” The wife promptly replied, “Yep! My in-laws!”

-This is a funny joke but when we really think about it, a lot of our arguments tend to come from unforgiveness for things others have said or done to us in the past or the present.

-How many of you have ever been hurt by someone dear to you or someone you were supposed to trust? (...)

-Does the mention of their name make you feel uncomfortable? (...)

-Did this person hurt you so much that the feelings of disappointment, resentment or anger still rise up in your heart when you see them or hear their name?(...)

-If you or someone you know is facing this right now, you or they are not alone. There is a world out there of people filled with hurt, bitterness or a measure of unforgiveness.

-The Bible actually has many stories about giving forgiveness where forgiveness may not be due. Can anyone share with us some people in the Bible that showed forgiveness when they had every right not to give forgiveness? (Jesus did this for all of humanity when He died on the cross for our sins, the apostle Paul offered forgiveness when others beat him and tried to kill him for sharing the message of salvation, King David gave forgiveness when his own son Absalom tried to kill him and take over his throne, etc.)

-We are going to look at one particular person in the Old Testament that shows us a great human example of this before Christ ever came to earth. How many of you know the story of Joseph, one who was given a coat of many colors? (...)

-Can someone briefly share who Joseph’s father was and what his 10 brothers did to him and why? (Gen. 37)

(-He was the son of Jacob and Rachel.

-He had eleven brothers born by Rachel, Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah.

-His brothers were extremely jealous of him because their father showed them that Joseph was his favorite by making him a coat of many colors.

-At 17 years old, his brothers threw him into a pit and then sold him into slavery to a caravan that was headed to the foreign land of Egypt.

-For the next 13 years, Joseph was a slave and a prisoner in the land of Egypt while his father thought he was dead.)

-After hearing this story, do you think Joseph understood what it felt like to be hurt by people he loved and trusted? (...)

-When you hear his story, do you think he had every right to take revenge and not forgive according to the world today? (...)

-Do you think God has the same view as humans do on revenge and forgiveness? Why or why not? (...)

-In our first verse from the book of Luke, God clearly states what His view is on this matter. In this verse, Jesus (God the Son) is talking to His disciples and sharing with them exactly how God feels about those who hurt us. Let's read it together on our Verse Sheet, #1: (Luke 6:27-28 "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, Do good to those who hate you, Bless those who curse you, Pray for those who mistreat you.")

-What are the four things He tells us we should do in this verse? (1-Love our enemies, 2-Do good to those who hate us, 3- Bless those who curse us, 4-Pray for those who mistreat us!)

-Would that seem hard to you in a situation like Joseph found himself in? (...)

-Is that hard for you right now facing the circumstances you may be in?(...)

-Let's look at these two verses closely. *Is He asking* us to do these things or is He actually *commanding* us to do them? (Commanding.)

-God's ways are very different from the world's ways, but His ways bring freedom from bitterness and a trust in His sovereignty.

-Let's go back to Joseph's story and see how he showed this very example before Christ ever spoke these words to His disciples.

-Joseph's parents believed in God and raised him to love God and trust in Him. And even though we may agree that he had every worldly right not to forgive his brothers and those who harmed him while a slave and in prison, God was in his heart, teaching him to forgive others and to love and trust in Him even when others harmed him.

-Let's continue our story. After 13 years of slavery and imprisonment, what position did Pharaoh of Egypt promote Joseph to after he interpreted Pharaoh's dream of the great famine to come? (Prime Minister of Egypt, only 2nd to Pharaoh in all of Egypt. Gen. 41:39-43)

-So here he is, through God's sovereignty, he is now head over all of Egypt and guess who is coming to see him for food? (His brothers)

-So, when Joseph's brothers come to see him because of the famine, what could he have done to his brothers because of His great power? (Practically anything.)

-In our next set of verses, Joseph's brothers are standing before him as the Prime Minister of Egypt for the very first time. They did not recognize him but he definitely recognized them!

-As they were talking to Joseph, they became afraid because he was questioning them intently as if they were spies.

-What Joseph was really trying to find out in his questions was if his father was still alive without them knowing who he was.

-But these brothers are petrified, afraid for their own lives. Something that Joseph understood full well from their very own hands.

- Reuben (his oldest brother) reminds the other brothers of their sin against Joseph many years before and cried out that this was a consequence of that great sin. They did not know Joseph could understand them as they discussed this.

-Let's read #2 on our Verse Sheet to see what happened: (Genesis 42:22-24a
"Reuben replied, 'Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.' They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. **He turned away from them and began to weep...**")

-Read that last sentence aloud again. ("He turned away from them and began to weep.")

-What kind of heart would weep like this? (A broken and tender heart.)

-What kind of heart do you think Joseph had? (A forgiving, tender heart.)

-He was a man of tender heart and spirit. Through the years he learned to forgive his brothers and have the kind of heart that God wanted him to have, one that God molded through all the years of his suffering and imprisonment. God gave him the kind of heart that could lead a nation in a terrible time of crisis without retribution for those who have hurt him in the past.

-Can we learn something from this? (To let God mold our heart in times of struggle and pain so He may use it for His glory and kingdom.)

-Let's continue to see how this story of love and forgiveness unfolds.

-Does anyone know what happened after they left and went home, still not knowing whom Joseph was? (Gen. 42-43. Joseph kept Simeon there in prison to make sure they would come back. They went home and ran out of food again. This time they had to bring Joseph's youngest brother, Benjamin, back in order to get more food, as that was the promise they made to Joseph. Still not knowing that he was their brother.)

-They again approached Joseph after being away for a while, bringing his youngest brother Benjamin this time. They were fully at Joseph's mercy.

-Let's pause here for a moment, has anyone been fully at your mercy by apologizing to you and you had it in your power to offer forgiveness or unforgiveness? (...)

-What does Christ want us to do? (To offer mercy, grace and forgiveness because He does that for us every day.)

-What if that person never apologizes! Are we still able to do this? (Yes, by the power and blood of Jesus Christ, offering that same mercy and forgiveness He give us to others, frees us from bitterness and resentment.)

-Let's see what Joseph did when his brothers were totally at his mercy. Let's focus on what he said to them in Verse #3 on our Verse Sheet: (Genesis 45:4-5 "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! And now, *do not be distressed and do*

not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save the lives that God sent me ahead of you.”)

-What kind of heart does it take for a man who endured pain and suffering for years to be able to say to the ones who caused it, “do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves”? (A humble and forgiving heart, one that is fully relying on God.)

-There is a powerful verse in Ephesians that was written long after this story but shows exactly what Joseph did. Let’s read it together, #4 on our Verse Sheet: (Ephesians 4:32 “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”)

-According to this verse, what are we to do for each other: (Be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving.)

-At the end of this verse, Who showed us the most perfect example of this? (God in Christ Jesus) **So just as God forgave us, we are to extend that to others in our own lives.**

-Looking back at Joseph, he was doing this for his own brothers before he ever knew what Christ did for Him. God was using his story to show us that forgiveness transcends all time.

-Also, notice in the last part of our previous verse, Genesis 45:5, Joseph said: “because it was to save the lives that God sent me ahead of you.”

-What do you think Joseph finally realized or understood that all his unfair treatment was for? (God used it to save the lives of many, including the future nation of Israel. Joseph understood that God has a plan for our lives that even when others mean it for evil, He uses it for His greater purpose.)

-Do you think that sometimes our stories of unfair and harsh treatment can save or encourage the lives of others? (...)

-Do they hear you proclaim how God moved you through it and gave you victory in forgiveness in the end? (...)

-Are you willing to share your own story of redemption and freedom in forgiving others because Christ forgave you?

-You see, through God sharing Joseph’s story of pain and suffering, to forgiveness for his brothers, to redemption for his family, He is also sharing His own love story for us. He suffered unfair punishment for us in order that we may be redeemed.

-If we forgive others, God redeems our hearts from the prison that unforgiveness keeps us in. When we truly forgive from the depths of our hearts, God restores our hearts and blesses it immeasurably with His love, His joy, His peace and His purpose!

FREEDOM IN FORGIVENESS VERSE SHEET

- 1. Luke 6:27-28 “But I say to you who hear, *Love* your enemies, *Do good* to those who hate you, *Bless* those who curse you, *Pray* for those who mistreat you.”**
- 2. Genesis 42:22-24a “Reuben replied, ‘Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn’t listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.’ They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. *He turned away from them and began to weep...*”**
- 3. Genesis 45:4-5 “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! And now, *do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves* for selling me here, because it was to save the lives that God sent me ahead of you.’”**
- 4. Ephesians 4:32 “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”**