

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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FORGIVENESS

Genesis 50:15-21

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There are three points in today's lesson:

- Guilty consciences do not just go away.
- Bad habits are hard to break.
- Forgiveness is not a feeling.

As a reminder, we are studying the life of Joseph. Joseph's parents were Jacob and Rachel. Joseph's grandparents were Isaac and Rebekah, and Joseph's great-grandparents were Abraham and Sarah. Joseph had eleven brothers, the youngest was named Benjamin. He also had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

In our series on the life of Joseph, we've covered:

- Some of his family lineage and sins that passed from one generation to the next, such as deception, jealousy, and extreme favoritism.
- Joseph's brothers hated him and sold him into slavery in Egypt.
- Joseph was Potiphar's trusted servant. He avoided temptation but was still thrown into jail.
- In jail, he interpreted a baker and a cupbearer's dreams.
- The baker was put to death by the king, but the cupbearer was let out of jail.
- The cupbearer did not immediately remember Joseph or help him get out of jail.
- But later, Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams and predicted a 7-year famine.
- As a result, he was freed and became Pharaoh's second-in-command.
- Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to secure grain during the famine, but Joseph did not reveal himself to his brothers.
- Instead, he devised an elaborate scheme to determine if their hearts had softened.
- When Joseph's brothers returned a second time with their youngest brother, Benjamin, Joseph honored them with a dinner but still did not reveal himself.

- He tested them again to see how they would treat Benjamin.
- After they passed all the tests, Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers.
- Jacob learned that Joseph was alive and, at the request of Joseph and with the blessing of God, moved the family to Egypt.
- Joseph introduced his family to Pharaoh.
- The Egyptian people traded everything they had, including their freedom, in order to obtain grain from Joseph.
- Jacob took Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh as his own, and blessed them. He bucked tradition and gave the younger the greater blessing.
- Jacob blessed all his sons but gave Joseph the choicest blessing.
- Jacob died, and Joseph and his brothers buried him in Canaan.

1-GUILTY CONSCIENCES DO NOT JUST GO AWAY

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 50:15

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?"

EXPLANATION: About 30 years had passed since the brothers threw Joseph into a pit and then sold him into slavery. They had lived in Egypt alongside him for 17 years. You would think that this issue had been resolved. Joseph had tested their hearts when they came to Egypt to purchase grain. He had revealed himself and acknowledged God's alternative plan for their evil schemes. He had proven himself to be a loving and loyal brother. Still, they doubted. They imagined that all of Joseph's kindness was on behalf of their father. Maybe he had been biding his time, waiting for their father's death. Maybe now, he would feel free to pay them back for their wrongdoing.

ILLUSTRATION: Have you ever had an opportunity to be like Joseph and show mercy and grace to someone who has done you wrong? How did they respond? Ann and Tammy were coworkers. Although Tammy didn't understand why, Ann found fault with everything she did. Ann even went so far as to yell at Tammy from across the office, embarrassing her in front of the team. After working together for some time, the women both found themselves interviewing for the same promotion. They were required to each prepare a presentation as part of the process. Their boss

provided Ann with substantial help; Tammy had none. Tammy was out of the office when Ann was awarded the promotion. She was understandably disappointed and frustrated by the experience, but she spent the weekend praying about it. When she went in on Monday, she approached Ann and sincerely congratulated her on her success and wished her the best. Ann was taken aback, but today she respects Tammy more because of that one conversation. (By the way, several months later, the Lord gave Tammy a different promotion.)

APPLICATION: Forgiveness and undeserved kindness often unnerve people. This may be a result of a number of things:

- They may not want to accept forgiveness because in order to be forgiven, they have to admit their guilt.
- They may not want to accept forgiveness because the idea is foreign to them. They would not ask for forgiveness.
- They may not want to accept forgiveness because they don't feel like they deserve to be forgiven.
- They may not want to accept forgiveness because they don't believe someone could forgive what they had done.

A fundamental tenet of the Christian faith is the acknowledgment of one's sins. We cannot be saved until we acknowledge that we are lost. When we understand how offensive our sin is to God, it should lead to remorse. The question then becomes what to do with those bad feelings. Sometimes in our human pride, it is easier to deal with punishment or retaliation for our sins than to accept forgiveness.

- But guilty consciences do not just go away.

2-BAD HABITS ARE HARD TO BREAK

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 50:16-18

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.

EXPLANATION: Unfortunately, the family heritage of deception had not been broken. Scripture does not indicate that Jacob made these statements. Wracked with guilt over their past sins and worried again about saving their own skins, the brothers seem to have concocted this story in an attempt to gain Joseph's favor. I doubt Joseph was deceived. He had spoken with his father before his death. If Jacob had wanted Joseph to receive a message like this, then Jacob would have delivered it himself. Joseph recognized the message for what it was, and it grieved his heart. His brothers had not changed as much as he had hoped. They were still looking out for themselves. They still doubted his heart. They did not believe in his goodness. He wept at their unbelief.

It's interesting to me that scripture does not record an apology from Joseph's brothers. Even here, they ask forgiveness in a second-hand way—putting the words in their father's mouth when they could have easily said, "Joseph, we wronged you. We're sorry. Forgive us." Were they ever truly repentant, or were they just afraid of reaping the consequences of their actions?

ILLUSTRATION: It reminds me of a story of two brothers. The boys were fighting with each other. The oldest was responsible because he tormented his younger brother and called him names. The mother made her older son write two pages of, "I will not call my brother names." Years later, the mom was going through her son's papers and found that sheet of paper. On each line, a different word had been written in bold. As she read the bolded words, she saw that the boy had written, "I **will** call my brother names," over and over again. Obviously, the young man was not sorry for his part in the fight.

APPLICATION: Many times today, people act the same way regarding their own sins against God. They want forgiveness, but they don't want to admit their wrongdoing. They want to be pardoned, but they do not want to repent.

- Some people press those feelings of remorse down deep and ignore them, but that does not mean that they have been absolved of their sins.
- Some people think that if they do enough good deeds, they will work off their sin debt, but that's not true either.
- Some people live their entire lives burdened by the guilt that they cannot get rid of and weighed down with fear of judgment.

None of those things are the answer, and, like Joseph, I believe those responses cause God to weep.

- Guilty consciences do not just go away.
- Bad habits are hard to break.

3-FORGIVENESS IS NOT A FEELING

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 50:19-21

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.

EXPLANATION: Joseph, once again, readily acknowledged God’s providence in his life. Through the terrible circumstances of slavery, God had brought Joseph to a time and place for a specific reason. Though he does not use the word, Joseph was, in essence, expressing his forgiveness of his brothers. He acknowledged God’s providence and reassured his brothers that he would continue to provide for them. He expressed forgiveness in words and through his actions.

APPLICATION: God sent his son Jesus to forgive us for our sins. Guilt is a natural first response to conviction of wrongdoing, but God never intended for us to live our lives mired in guilt or fearful of judgment. Jesus paid the price for our sins. When we come to him in repentance, confessing our sins and asking for forgiveness, and then turning from those sins, God forgives us and forgets. He washes us clean. His forgiveness is demonstrated not only in words. When he forgives, he then takes all those negative circumstances and uses them for the good in our lives and in the lives of others. In addition, he promises to provide for our every need.

Joseph’s forgiveness of his brothers is another way in which we see a picture of God’s forgiveness for us. However, it is also a reminder of how we should forgive others. If Joseph forgave his brothers and if God forgives us when we sin so terribly against him, should not we then forgive others? People can do really horrible things to other people, and I know that forgiveness is not always easy, but the Bible says if we do not forgive our brothers, how can God forgive us?

- Our forgiveness of another individual is not a way of absolving them from guilt. Only God can do that. Only God can make them clean.
- Our forgiveness is not saying that what they did was not wrong.
- It's not saying that there will not be consequences.
- Our forgiveness of others is a way in which we free ourselves from the burdens of sins committed against us.

We forgive because God has forgiven us. Forgiveness does not necessarily result in perfect relationships with other humans. That takes time and effort from both parties, but forgiveness does open the door for a deeper relationship with the Father. Forgiveness is imperative in the life of faith.

- Guilty consciences do not just go away.
- Bad habits are hard to break.
- Forgiveness is not a feeling.

INVITATION: Maybe you are suffering from a guilty conscience today. Is the Lord convicting you of your sin? If so, it's time to repent. Ask for forgiveness and allow his mercy and grace to do a work in your heart. Maybe you are like Joseph's brothers, caught in a cycle of guilt and bad habits. If so, it's time to break that cycle.

Jesus did not die so that you would live in fear and condemnation. He died so that you could have life and have it more abundantly. Accept Christ as your Savior, and allow him to free you from your sins. God's forgiveness is redemptive. Christ took the punishment for our sins. All that's left is for you to come to him and allow him to wash you clean and set your feet on the right path. The altar is open. Come forward today.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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