



**Pastor Spencer Martin**  
Forgiveness: From Hurting to Healing

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Series: Joseph

Genesis 45-50

**BIG IDEA - WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TO FORGIVE AS FORGIVEN PEOPLE**

I wish I could stand up here for the next 40 minutes or so and talk to you about nothing other than the Acts 1:8 Project, like you just saw in that video but, unfortunately, they won't let me do that. Here's what I will say. Every student who is a part of the Acts 1:8 Project has a life-changing experience. We are so excited about this project as a church. We're excited about it as a college ministry.

The vision of our college ministry is this: we want to see a Spirit-led, disciple-making movement in Winston-Salem and around the world. So, we want to see four things. We want to see salvation, transformation, multiplication, and mobilization. One of the ways we pursue those things is the Acts 1:8 Project.

So, here is our challenge to every college student. We want every college student to prayerfully consider giving one-half of one of your summers to the Acts 1:8 Project. What we can promise, as a staff, is this will be an experience where you will be invested in, and you will have memories that will last you for a lifetime.

If you're interested in this, you can see more information on our website. I'm going to take a moment to pray for us, pray for our college students, and then we're going to jump into the series on Joseph together. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for the many college students we have in our church. I pray that this semester and this year would be an incredibly fruitful time for them. I pray that we would see a ton of salvations. I pray that we would see our college students grow and transform, and I pray that many of them would be sent out and mobilized.

Father, I pray that our college ministry would be known for being an attractational alternative to what the college campus tends to offer. Father, I pray for each student we have, that as they consider their next steps, whether it be this semester or this summer, you would give them clarity on what you would have for them when it comes to what it looks like for them to be a part of the mission of God. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

C.S. Lewis said, "Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until [they have] something to forgive." You see, most of us want forgiveness for ourselves, but we want justice for everyone else. Right? Here is what we all know is true: you will never find a church or a Community Group or a workplace or a neighborhood or a family where you will not be sinned against.

There are two groups of people in this room, and sometimes you overlap in these groups. One group of people is like Joseph's brothers in this story. You have sinned against others, and you need to be forgiven. Then the second group (this is also many of you in here) is you are in the position of Joseph.

Joseph has been sinned against. Some of you have been sinned against terribly, but all of you have been sinned against in some way. Whenever you're sinned against, you really have two options. Option one: bitterness, resentment, and anger. The other option is forgiveness and reconciliation, which is what we're going to see from Joseph in this passage.

So, if you have your Bibles, you can go ahead and grab those and flip to Genesis, chapter 45. That's where we're going to be today. Over the last couple of weeks, we have seen Joseph go from the pit to Potiphar's to prison to the palace. What we saw last week was there was a famine throughout the entire region of Egypt.

Joseph's brothers are coming to Egypt, looking for food, but what they really are needing is forgiveness. This passage is going to lead us to talk about a handful of things this morning. We're going to have to talk about some hard questions, like...*How do you forgive someone who was supposed to protect you but didn't?*

For some of you, that's your story. Your parents were supposed to protect you, but they didn't. For whatever reason, they were not intentional enough about trying to keep you from having terrible habits when you were in middle school and high school, so by the time you left for college or by the time you left the house, you were far from innocent.

For some of you, your siblings were supposed to protect you, but they didn't. For some of you, your spouse was supposed to protect your marriage, but they didn't. We'll talk about that. We'll talk about what forgiveness is and what forgiveness is not. Maybe the deepest question we're going to talk about today is...*Where is God in all this?*

I'm sure in a room this size, some of you in here right now are suffering, and you might be wondering, "Is God in control? Is God really with me in the mess?" So, we'll talk about that. We don't have much to cover today. All we have to talk about is forgiveness, the sovereignty of God, and suffering.

So, Genesis, chapter 45, is where we're going to be. Just to pick up where we left off... Last week, Judah, who is one of Joseph's brothers, gave a speech of repentance. Now, in this scene, we have all of Joseph's brothers standing before him. This scene we're about to look at is the climax of this entire narrative of Joseph. So, let's see what happens.

Genesis 45:1: ***"Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, 'Make everyone go out from me.' So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud..."*** Joseph is ugly crying here. ***"...so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. And Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence."***

You read that they are dismayed at his presence, and you think to yourself, "Oh, yeah. For sure. That's probably putting it mildly." I want you to put yourself in the position of the brothers. In this moment, they realize two things. The first thing they realize is that Joseph is alive.

Twenty-two years ago, they sold him into slavery, so when they see that he's alive, they're probably thinking this is their worst nightmare. So, they realize he's alive. The second thing they realize is not only is he alive; he is lord of all Egypt. What that means is no one can make them pay like Joseph can make them pay. So, that's what the brothers are feeling.

Now I want you to put yourself in the position of Joseph. What is Joseph feeling in this moment? We have to understand Joseph is a real man with real emotions. Joseph is not just a cartoon character with a colorful coat you learned about in Sunday school. He's a real guy, and he's really hurting in this moment.

Why is Joseph hurting? He's probably hurting for a wide variety of reasons, but probably the main reason Joseph is feeling pain here is he has had something taken from him that he can never get back. For many of you, forgiveness is challenging because you have had things taken from you that you can never get back. Maybe it was your childhood. Maybe it was your innocence. Maybe it was a relationship you lost.

A couple of weeks ago, I was talking with a friend of mine about forgiveness. He's a godly man. Years ago, he was married, and his wife at the time committed adultery. To this day, she is still unrepentant. They have split custody of their kids, and he told me the

most challenging part of his forgiveness journey is having to come home after work a lot of days, and his kids are not there. What's happening is he is being robbed of time with his kids, and his kids are being robbed of time with him. This makes forgiveness so hard. Joseph is hurting.

The second thing we have to ask is...*What are Joseph's options here?* He has numerous options. I'll give you four. As I walk through these, I want you to think about this. Which option of these would you choose if you were Joseph?

Option one for Joseph is he could have just put his brothers in prison or sold them into slavery. He could have called Potiphar up and been like, "Hey, man. I know we didn't end on the greatest terms, but I have some new slaves for you. Congratulations." That was one option. He could have certainly sold them into slavery.

Option two is Joseph could have had them killed. He was a very powerful guy. He would have certainly been able to do this. This would not have been that uncommon back then. The third option is he could have sent his brothers home and let them starve to death. He could have just said, "Hey, tough luck to you guys. The one guy who can give you food is the guy you sold into slavery 22 years ago." But that's not what he does.

The fourth option he has (we're going to see this) is that he forgives his brothers, and he brings them close. By the way, did you notice what happened in verse 3? It says Joseph had everyone leave except his brothers. Why did he do that? Well, we're not told explicitly. He may have just wanted some privacy. That's certainly possible.

But I think the principle we see here is there's something about true forgiveness that doesn't want to flaunt other people's sins. There's something about true forgiveness that doesn't want to bring people into what happened unnecessarily. Helpful principle. All right. Let's keep going.

## 01 WHAT FORGIVENESS IS NOT

Verse 4: ***"So Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come near to me, please.'" He's being so gentle with them. "And they came near. And he said, 'I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.'"***

I want to stop here, because as Joseph is forgiving his brothers, what we need to pay close attention to is what he is *not* doing. There are four things I'm going to tell you that forgiveness is not. You may want to write these down.

First, *forgiveness is not forgetting*. Notice Joseph says in verse 4 and in verse 5, "You sold me," so he's clearly not forgetting that these things happened. He's not pretending all of this never happened in his past. He has not forgotten. There are a couple of things we should stop saying totally. I'll give you two of them.

Something we should stop saying is "You should forgive and forget." We should stop saying that. Do you know what you forget? You forget your passwords. You forget to water your plants. You forget where you put your car keys. You forget to move the laundry from the washer to the dryer. Those are the kinds of things you forget.

You don't forget it when someone sins against you. That's not how it works. You may say, "Well, doesn't it say in Jeremiah that God will remember our sins no more?" Yes, it does say that. Basically, what that means (and we heard this a couple of weeks ago) is when God looks at you, he is not going to hold your sin in between his relationship with you. So, forgiveness is not forgetting.

Something else we should stop saying is this. Whenever someone is sinned against, we should stop saying, "You should just get over it." Do you know what you get over? You get over a cold. You get over a stomach bug. You don't just get over it when someone sins against you. So, forgiveness is not forgetting.

Secondly, *forgiveness is not minimizing*. Notice here that Joseph is not minimizing what his brothers have done. He's not looking to his brothers and being like, "Guys, this is not that big of a deal. These last 22 years have just flown by. In fact, I love the weather in Egypt better anyway. On top of all that, I get to wear this cool headdress with snakes on it. This is great."

That's not what happened. He says, "You sold me." Then we're going to see in a minute, in chapter 50, he's going to say, "What you did to me was evil." So, he is not minimizing what his brothers have done. The principle here is that some of you may need to stop minimizing what was done to you.

Part of how we cope when we are sinned against is we try to minimize what was done to us. We try to tell ourselves it's not a big deal even if it is. So, this might be you saying something like, "Well, he was drunk when he said that." "She was drunk when she did that to me." Or you might say, "Well, everybody's family is this dysfunctional." It's minimizing what's going on.

If you minimize what was done to you, what normally happens is, even if you've convinced yourself it's not affecting you, the people who are around you who know you and love you can tell it's affecting you. They can tell. My wonderful mom, about a year

ago, was having some trouble with her shoulder. I wanted her to get it looked at, but she continued to minimize her shoulder problems.

I was like, "Mom, I want you to lift up your shoulder for me like *this*." Mom was like, "I can do that." I was like, "Mom, lift it up." She was like, "Oof." I was like, "Mom, you're clearly minimizing what's going on here." Part of the healing process when you have been sinned against is you have to be real about what is going on. You have to just call it what it is. You can't sugarcoat it. So, forgiveness is not minimizing.

Thirdly, *forgiveness is not trusting the other person*. We're going to see this in just a second. Later in this chapter, Joseph is going to send his brothers back to his father Jacob, and what he's going to tell them is, "Do not quarrel on the way." What that tells us is even though Joseph has forgiven his brothers, he has not forgotten their character. He has not forgotten their history.

He's basically saying, "Hey, guys. I can remember what it was like 22 years ago when you guys were traveling alone. You sold me into slavery. So, maybe, on your way home back to Dad, you shouldn't sell Benjamin. That would be a good idea." Forgiveness is not the same thing as trusting.

A couple of weeks ago, we took my 2-year-old daughter Emma to a gymnastics museum. She loves it. She just runs around and plays and has a great time. Well, she was having a great time, and some 3-year-old little boy walks up to Emma and, for no apparent reason, just shoves her. Emma is so innocent. She's like, "What is happening right now?" She has no idea what's going on.

The boy's mom comes over, and she's like, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry." We're like, "Oh, it's fine." Now, can we forgive the little boy for shoving Emma? Yes. Hey, maybe not. Well, in that moment I was feeling gracious, so in that moment, I was able to forgive this little 3-year-old boy, but in that moment, am I going to trust that boy enough for him to play with Emma again? No.

It's like, "You go over there. Emma is going to play over here. You stay over there." So, forgiveness is not synonymous with trusting. Now, again, we believe in the grace of God. We believe trust can be built over time, but just because you forgive someone doesn't mean you automatically trust them again. So, forgiveness is not trusting.

Lastly, *your forgiveness is not God's forgiveness*. Here's an interesting question to think about. Even though Joseph forgives his brothers, are all of Joseph's brothers ultimately forgiven by God? We don't know because we're not told explicitly. We think probably. They probably were forgiven. We're told in Genesis, chapter 49, that Jacob blesses all of his sons. We also know that from those brothers come the 12 tribes of Israel.

The principle here is you can extend horizontal forgiveness to someone, but they might still need vertical forgiveness from God. Just because you forgive your brother doesn't mean they don't still need to be forgiven by God. Here's another way to think about it: you can extend earthly forgiveness, and what God has to offer is eternal forgiveness. So, your forgiveness is not God's forgiveness.

## 02 WHAT FORGIVENESS IS

So, we've talked about what forgiveness is not. Now let's look and see what forgiveness is. We're going to pick up in verse 6. Joseph says this: ***"For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors."*** Now we're going to see one of the most amazing verses in Genesis. ***"So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt."***

We're going to talk more about the sovereignty of God in a second, but what you need to see here is Joseph is saying to his brothers, "You sold me, but God sent me." He's saying, "God sent me here to ultimately preserve life for this region, which would ultimately result in the people of Israel being preserved." Joseph continues. Verse 9:

***"Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.'"***

***And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.' Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him."***

What we see here in this powerful moment is that Joseph's brothers are realizing not only is Joseph alive, not only is Joseph lord of all Egypt, but in this moment they are realizing they are forgiven. We need to talk about what forgiveness is. If you look to the New Testament, the definition of *forgiveness* seems to be something close to the canceling of a debt someone owes you. Forgiveness is canceling a debt that is owed to you.

So, if you are here, and you are still holding out hope that the government is going to forgive your student loans that you voluntarily took out, what you are hoping for is that the debt you owe is canceled. We see a picture of that in this story, but what we also see in this story is Joseph seems to be extending both mercy and grace to his brothers. There is a component of mercy and grace when it comes to forgiveness.

With forgiveness, mercy, grace, and justice are very closely connected. So, I'm going to define each of them. *Justice* is giving someone the punishment they deserve. *Mercy* is not giving someone the punishment they deserve. Then *grace* is giving someone something good they don't deserve.

So, let's say you go downtown, and you park in a parking spot where there's a big sign right there that says, "Unauthorized vehicles will be towed at the owner's expense." If you park there and come back and your car is being towed, that's justice. If you come back, and the tow truck driver is there, and he's saying, "Hey, I'm in a really great mood today. I don't think I'm going to tow your car," that is him showing you mercy.

If you come back and the tow truck driver has a tank of gas and is filling up your car with gas, that is him showing grace to you. So, in this passage when Joseph says, "You shall be near me," he is showing his brothers mercy. Then when he says, "I will provide for you," he is showing them grace. So, forgiveness is canceling a debt. Forgiveness is extending mercy and grace.

By the way, do you notice what's happening in this narrative? It's almost as if Joseph is being resurrected from the dead, which is resulting in life for his brothers. If you're a Christian here, that should sound very familiar, because the center of the Christian faith is that Jesus Christ, after he died the death we deserve on the cross, rose from the dead, which is going to result in life for anyone who repents and believes. We'll come back to this later. Let's keep going.

### **03 HOW TO FORGIVE**

So, we've talked about what forgiveness is not. We've talked about what forgiveness is. Now we're going to see how to forgive. We're going to pick up in verse 24. It says this: **"Then he [Joseph] sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, 'Do not quarrel on the way.'" See? He hasn't forgotten their history.**

***"So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. And they told him, 'Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.' And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. But when they told him all the***



***words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. And Israel [Jacob] said, 'It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.'***"

There's a quick truth we see here about forgiveness. When you forgive someone, it affects more than just that person. There is a downstream effect to forgiveness. When Joseph forgives his brothers, his father Jacob is going to benefit from it as well. So, the principle is there's more at stake than just the relationship between you and the person you need to forgive. There are a lot more people who can benefit from it.

So, that ends chapter 45, and then in chapters 46-49, Jacob is going to be the main character of the story. Basically, what happens is Jacob and his family come to Egypt. They reunite with Joseph. It's wonderful. Joseph and Pharaoh and Egypt prosper. Then in chapters 48 and 49, Jacob is going to bless Joseph's sons and all 12 of his sons, and then Jacob is going to die in chapter 49.

***"When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people."*** After Jacob dies, what's going to happen is very interesting. What we're about to see is that once Jacob dies, his sons are going to start to doubt Joseph's forgiveness of them. They're going to look to each other and basically be like, "Hey, now that Dad is gone, maybe Joseph is going to finally pay us back."

What we find out is, for the last 17 years, they have been doubting Joseph's forgiveness of them, which is where we're going to pick up in Genesis 50:15. ***"When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, 'It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back...'"*** See, they understand their sin incurred a debt to Joseph.

***"'It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.' So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this command before he died: 'Say to Joseph, 'Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.' Joseph wept when they spoke to him."***

He's crying again. ***"His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, 'Behold, we are your servants.'"*** Again, Joseph forgave his brothers 17 years earlier, and we find out, for the entire time, they were doubting his forgiveness. We're not told exactly why they doubt his forgiveness in this passage, but it's either one of two reasons, probably.

His brothers probably either don't realize enough how forgiving Joseph is or they are too fixated on their sin against Joseph. I have seen so many people over the years fail to receive God's forgiveness for those exact same reasons. They are either too fixated on

their own personal sin, and they think they are so bad God is unable to save them, or they are not aware enough of how much God wants to forgive them.

What you might need to see here is... You need to see the same thing the brothers see, which is if the person in charge says you're forgiven, you're forgiven. If the God of the universe says you're clean...hey, good news: you're clean. You can stop beating yourself up about it. Now let's look at how Joseph responds. Verse 19:

***"But Joseph said to them, 'Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.' Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."***

How can you tell if you've forgiven somebody? Well, your words will usually reveal it. It says Joseph spoke kindly to them. Jesus would say in the Gospels, ***"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."*** So, if you are wondering whether or not you've forgiven someone, just think about how you have been speaking about them lately.

If your words are more consistent with bitterness, resentment, revenge, and anger, then that is a way your heart is telling you that you actually haven't forgiven that person. What we are seeing here is Joseph forgiving his brothers, and we need to talk about how to forgive. If you are going to forgive, two things have to be true. It may be more than this, but it certainly can't be less than this.

The first thing that must be true if you want to forgive is *you must have a theology of suffering*. Joseph clearly has a theology of suffering here. He says, "What you intended for evil, God meant for good." The reason Joseph was able to forgive his brothers was he understood God had a purpose in all of his unjust suffering.

Joseph understood, when he looked back on the previous 22 years of his life, that even though he was suffering unjustly, what God was doing was preparing and positioning him. You see, a theological truth that can be hard for us to understand is that God, even though he is unable to commit evil, will sometimes allow it.

How many of you in this room can look back on a season of suffering in your life and say now with confidence that what God was doing was preparing and positioning you? It's what he was doing. Maybe it was a terrible breakup you experienced. Maybe it was being misunderstood at work. Maybe someone betrayed you. Maybe it was something painful in your childhood. What God was doing, in some way that's hard to understand, was he was preparing and positioning you.

A big difference between believers and nonbelievers is believers have a theology of suffering and nonbelievers typically do not. Nonbelievers will look at passages like this and will say something like, "Well, if God were infinitely loving, he would not want Joseph to suffer unjustly."

Then they would say, "If God were infinitely powerful, he would be able to stop Joseph from suffering unjustly. So, since Joseph is suffering unjustly, that must mean God is either not fully loving or fully powerful; therefore, this story proves that the Christian loving, powerful God must not exist."

I can remember hearing in college... My pastor at the time was talking about this idea, and he said what Christians understand is that if God is infinite in love, and if he is infinite in power, he is also going to be infinite in wisdom. Something I love to do is to think about the gap between God's power and my power.

Think about that. God creates the universe. He raises Jesus from the dead. He creates the complexities of the world. This past week, I got an Expo marker on my favorite shirt, and I still have not been able to get it out. It's not even a permanent marker, but it's still there. Now, that is a pretty big gap between God's power and my power.

What the Christian understands is if the gap between God's power and our power is that big, the gap between God's wisdom and our wisdom is also just as big. What that means is there will be things that happen in your life that you're not going to be able to understand why they happened, and the reason you're not able to is you are not infinite in wisdom.

John Newton was the pastor, author, and hymn writer who wrote the song "Amazing Grace" in the 1700s. He was writing to his friend in a letter, and he was talking about the sovereignty of God, he was talking about God's wisdom, and he was talking about how Christ is a skilled surgeon.

He basically said this: "Faithful are the wounds of our infallible Friend," which is God. "He sometimes cuts deep, but never too deep, nor at the wrong place, nor at the wrong time, and he is near to heal." John Newton had a theology of suffering. He knew that your pain is not pointless. The sovereignty of God does not minimize your pain, but it does give you hope that there can be purpose in your pain.

Some of you might need to hear this today: Your pain has a purpose. It's not accidental. Is it possible that the suffering you're going through right now is a way God is preparing you and positioning you? Joseph understood that's what God was doing. So, the first thing you have to do if you want to forgive is have a theology of suffering.

Secondly, if you want to forgive, *you have to choose to cancel the debt*. Joseph's brothers come to him and say, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin." They're basically saying to Joseph, "Hey, will you cancel our debt?" and Joseph responds by saying, "Am I in the place of God?" He says, "You don't owe me." What Joseph is doing is choosing to cancel the debt of his brothers by welcoming them in and bringing them close.

As I read about forgiveness over the last couple of weeks, I learned that everyone seems to say the exact same thing about how to forgive. Maybe everybody is reading each other. They say this: *forgiveness is often granted before it is felt*. That makes sense. You're often going to forgive someone before you actually feel like you've forgiven them. Everybody also says this: *forgiveness is not a feeling but a decision*.

Now, we think feelings are important. Feelings can be an indicator to you about what's going on in your heart. That is very good. The problem with feelings is that instead of feelings being indicators to us, we let them be dictators. What that means is if you wait until you feel like forgiving someone, you're probably never going to actually forgive them, which is why forgiveness has to be a decision to cancel the debt.

Some of you may need to extend to someone the four promises of forgiveness. I heard these years back, and I've found them to be so helpful. The four promises of forgiveness are these. First, "I will not dwell on this incident." Secondly, "I will not bring up this incident in the future and use it against you." Thirdly, "I will not talk to others about this incident." Fourthly, "I will not let this incident stand between us and hinder our personal relationship."

Now, I understand all of these are hard. These are all very challenging. I think the first one may be the most challenging, which is "I will not dwell on this incident." Whenever someone sins against you, the temptation is for you to dwell on it and linger on it and let it create bitterness in you.

I'm sure a lot of you over the years have gotten a speeding ticket. Well, whenever you get a speeding ticket, you actually get a piece of paper. I may or may not know from experience. Once you get this piece of paper, you get to decide what you want to do with it. If you want to, you can take that piece of paper and put it on your refrigerator where you see it every day or you can take that piece of paper and put it in your office or you can take it and put it in the basement.

To not forgive, to withhold forgiveness from someone, is almost like taking that incident, putting it on your refrigerator, and just sticking it there. What happens is you just put the betrayal on the refrigerator. You put whatever terrible thing happened to you years

ago...*Boom!* Right there on the refrigerator. And you're choosing to put it there. The problem with that is you see it every day.

So, to forgive is to decide, to make a conscious choice, to take that incident, put it in a folder, put it in a box, and put it in the basement where you don't see it hardly ever. Now, you're going to know it's there. You haven't forgotten that it happened, but you are not seeing it every day. So, to forgive is to not dwell on the incident, to not talk to others about it, to not bring it up in the future and use it against somebody, and to not let that incident stand between you and the relationship of that person.

## 04 WHY WE FORGIVE

So, we've talked about what forgiveness is, we've talked about what it's not, and we've talked about how to forgive. With the time we have left, we're going to talk about why we forgive. Let's look at how this story ends. The last few verses of Genesis. It says this: ***"So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's house. Joseph lived 110 years."*** So, he gets seven decades with his brothers, which is amazing.

***"And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation. The children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph's own. And Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.'"*** So, Joseph says to his brothers, "God will be with you, and God is going to keep his promises."

Verse 25: ***"Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.' So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt."*** What we see here is that Joseph leaves an incredible legacy of forgiveness. There are so many things we can learn from the life of Joseph, but as we wrap up, I just want to give you two things.

The first thing we learn from the life of Joseph is *God is with you in your suffering*. We're told numerous times throughout this narrative that God was with Joseph. God was with Joseph in the pit. He was with Joseph in Potiphar's. He was with Joseph in the prison. God is with you in your suffering.

Whenever someone goes through suffering, the most common thing they are told is that God is in control. That's true. We are so grateful that God is in control, but what's challenging about that is when you are in the middle of suffering, it normally doesn't feel like God is in control, which is why we need to be told, "Yes, God is in control," but we also need to be told, "God is with you in your suffering."

God is with you when you get the bad diagnosis. God is with you when you get passed over for the job. He's with you when you're betrayed. He's with you when someone gets sick. He is with you in the mess. He's with you when you are misunderstood. He's with you when you are born with a disability. He is with you in your suffering.

Last week, I was talking to Pastor Jordan. He's our Care pastor. He was talking to some of our college students, and he asked this question: "Do we really need to know why God allows us to suffer or is what we really need to know that God is with us when we suffer?" I think it's the latter.

Recently, I've been giving a lot of thought to the idea that marriage is supposed to give us a picture of how God is with us when we suffer. A couple of months ago, my father-in-law was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. He and my mother-in-law are from Tennessee, but for multiple reasons, they moved here to Winston-Salem, moved into our house, and he is getting chemo treatment at Baptist.

Over the last couple of months, as I have observed my mother-in-law and father-in-law, I have noticed that she is with him constantly. She is with him in the house. She is with him when he goes to the appointments. She was with him this past week when he was in the hospital.

In the same way that marriage is often going to give you a picture of how God is with you, we need to understand that God is with us in our suffering. Jesus promises us the same thing. He promises us in Matthew 28, "I am with you always." So, we learn from Joseph's life that God is with you in your suffering.

The second thing we learn from Joseph's life is *forgiveness is possible*. Joseph was sinned against terribly. He was sold into slavery and lost 22 years with his family, but what his life shows us is that forgiveness is possible. The Christian understands the reason forgiveness is possible is God gives forgiveness to us. The reason we forgive is because of the gospel.

You see, of all of the different narratives in Genesis, Joseph's life probably gives us the clearest picture of Jesus' life. Joseph's life gives us the picture of the gospel, because just like Joseph, Jesus would also be betrayed by those who were supposed to protect him. Just like Joseph, Jesus would be misunderstood.

Instead of being sold into slavery like Joseph, Jesus would be sold for 30 pieces of silver, and then he would die on a cross. Just like Joseph would go from the pit to the palace, Jesus himself would go from the tomb to the throne. Then just like Joseph, Jesus uses his position of authority to offer forgiveness to those who repent. He offers forgiveness freely.

So, I cannot talk about forgiveness without asking these three questions. First...*Are you forgiven?* Do you need to ask someone for horizontal forgiveness? Have you sinned against someone in the past and, for whatever reason, have not asked them for forgiveness? Are you forgiven by God? Do you have vertical forgiveness?

Some of you in here might need to realize the same thing Joseph's brothers realized. They realized that Joseph was alive, he was lord of all Egypt, and they were forgiven. What you might need to hear is that Jesus is alive, Jesus is Lord of everything, and by the grace of God, you can be forgiven. So, are you forgiven?

Secondly...*Who needs to see you forgive?* Some of you have been sinned against terribly, but there are people in your life who need to see you forgive. Your kids need to see you forgive. They need to see you forgive your spouse. They need to see you forgive other people in your family. Your nonbelieving friends need to see you forgive. They need to see, "Wow! This person is so full of grace. They are so forgiving. What is up with them? How do you explain this?"

Lastly...*Who do you need to forgive?* Another way to say it is...*Who is it and what is it?* Maybe you need to forgive a parent. Maybe you need to forgive someone who you don't interact with at all anymore. Maybe it's a brother. Maybe it's a father. Maybe it's a child. I've heard it said before that parenting is to forgive, and then it's to forgive again. It's to keep forgiving.

Some of you here might need to forgive yourself. You did something years ago. Maybe it was intentional. Maybe it was accidental. Whatever it was, you continue to beat yourself up over it. You just dwell on it. It's robbing you of joy. You're struggling to receive God's forgiveness. I've heard it said before that the thing about unforgiveness is that joy and sorrow can coexist, but joy and unforgiveness cannot coexist.

So, in view of what we see in this passage, in view of the life of Joseph, in view of the mercies of God, I want to ask you in this room: Would you choose to cancel the debt? Would you choose to extend mercy and grace? Would you choose to forgive? Let's pray together.

Father, I thank you for the life of Joseph and all that it teaches us. I thank you that we can see that you are in control even in the midst of our suffering and that what you are often doing is preparing us and positioning us. I thank you for the hope we have in Christ, that our pain has a purpose. Father, I just want to pray for those in this room who are filled with unforgiveness. There are many in this room who are hurting.

Father, I pray that you, first, would heal their wounds. Father, I pray that you would give them the grace and the strength to forgive. I've heard it said that to forgive is to release

the prisoner and to realize that prisoner was you. Lord, I pray that by the grace of God, the people in this room would be able to forgive. Help us to believe the promise of Romans 8:28, that for those who love you, everything is working together for our good and for your purpose. I pray all this in Jesus' name, amen.