

What Is REAL Forgiveness?, Week 3 of “Forgiveness” Series

Presented By Rev. Kristen Lowe On 04-29-18
At Cossroads United Methodist Church
Waunakee, WI

Scripture: Genesis 45 (select verses)

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, “Have everyone leave my presence!” So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him.

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 slavery in Egypt! And now, do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.

You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.’

Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them.



This week I ran across a website called thepayback.com. This paragraph on the home page of that site describes its purpose: Thepayback.com is your home for all of your revenge needs. So you never had a chance to get revenge on your ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend? Your current spouse lied to you when he said that he would never cheat on you? Well, you know the saying “don’t get mad, get even”. On that same page you can also find this testimonial:

“Just wanted to thank you guys for providing such great service. I wish I could have seen my ex’s face when he got that box of dead roses! You guys really made my day. I’m glad I got even with that jerk. More people need to know about this service, so I’m telling my girlfriends because I’m pretty sure they know some jerks too. Most guys are anyway.” --Jessica

We really shouldn’t be surprised that a service like this exists in a culture which embraces the familiar adage that we find on the website: “don’t get mad, get even.” But I also think that most people, even those who would consider using such a service, would admit that it’s not the way to foster authentic relationships.

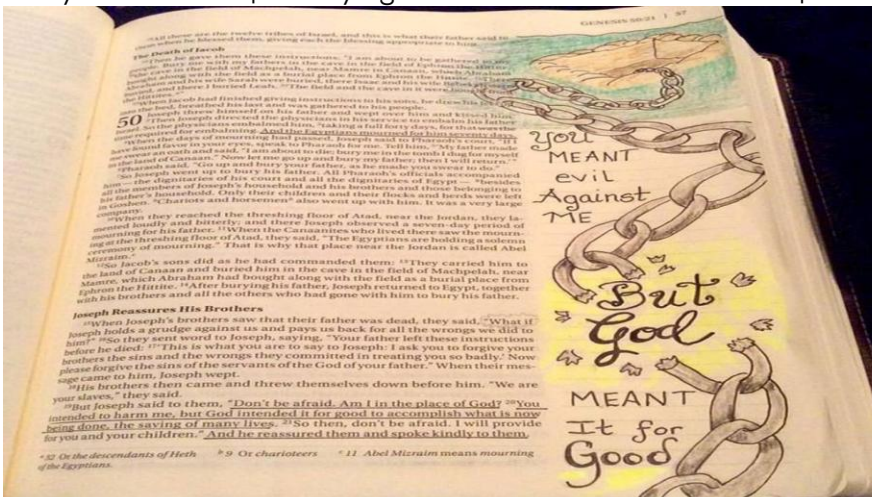
What Is REAL Forgiveness?, Week 3 of "Forgiveness" Series



You may know the story of Joseph through the creative retelling of his life in Joseph and the amazing Technicolor dream coat. Our scripture picks up with Joseph forgiving his brothers. But, let's review the significant events in Joseph's life that lead us up to this point.



We start in genesis 37. Joseph is given a beautiful coat by his father because he was the favorite. His brothers despised his arrogant attitude. On top of that, Joseph tells them about dreams he's been having where they all bow down to him. When Joseph goes out to bring them some food in the field, they throw him in a cistern and later sell him as a slave. They rip his coat, soak it in blood and tell their dad that something really awful has happened to Joseph. The midianites then sell him to Potiphar, an officer of pharaoh in Egypt. When Potiphar's wife falsely accuses Joseph of trying to accost her, he is thrown into prison



¹⁰ Or the descendants of Heth ¹¹ Or charioters ¹² Abel Mizraim means mourning of the Egyptians

What Is REAL Forgiveness?, Week 3 of “Forgiveness” Series

While in prison, Joseph correctly interprets the dreams his cellmates. Two years later when pharaoh had a dream he could not interpret, and Joseph and he was called to interpret pharaoh’s dreams (genesis 41). Pharaoh then makes Joseph his second in command to prepare for the upcoming famine. Joseph’s brothers come to get grain during the famine and don’t recognize Joseph. Joseph finally reveals himself to his brothers



Jacob, their father dies 17 years later.

Now, here’s where it gets really interesting in regards to forgiveness.

So, now Joseph has forgiven his brothers. But then, in verse 50, we find the brothers going back to revisit this. “Dad’s dead! What if Joseph gets revenge on us now that dad’s gone! He’s got the power and the means!” So the brothers, who didn’t learn the lesson from the last time they lied, tell Joseph that before dad died, he said that Joseph was to completely forgive his brothers. Joseph’s heart was broken! He said, “why are you afraid?! Promised I would care for you and your families. That’s what I intend to do!

Joseph understood biblical forgiveness. He had been hurt greatly by his brothers. And now he was in a position where he not only had the right to get even, but he was also in a position to carry out his revenge. Now, if I were one of the brothers, I might get a little freaked out over that dynamic.

But... what they obviously didn’t understand was that Joseph had already forgiven them long ago. And that forgiveness had allowed him to see that what his brothers had meant for harm, god had used for good.

What is biblical forgiveness?



1. It is giving up my right to seek revenge for the offense...

It is not denying the offense. Joseph does not try to deny, cover up or even minimize the actions of his brothers. But on the other hand, he doesn’t brutally rub it in either. Over the years I’ve found that one of the hardest things about preaching is that it seems god often chooses to test me in the area I am preaching about. When someone offends us, it is important that we don’t just sweep that offense under the rug or excuse it. We certainly see that

What Is REAL Forgiveness?, Week 3 of “Forgiveness” Series

Jesus never excused or overlooked sin, even when he forgave it. He doesn't say, “Don't worry; sin actually is not a big deal. It's just a religious construct.” Forgiving is different than accepting or condoning.



2. It is releasing my right to dispense justice...

It is not releasing the need for justice. Biblical forgiveness never denies the need for justice. It just means that I choose not to dispense that justice myself. After my marriage ended, I had a lot of anger. I wanted justice. I wanted my ex-husband to pay for the ways that he hurt me. There were opportunities. But, I also am a big believer in karma. If I were to raise my daughter with integrity, it meant forgiving her father.



3. It is letting go of bitterness...

It is not forgetting. This is another area where I think we tend to have some misconceptions about forgiveness. How many times do we hear someone urge us to “forgive and forget.” And then we start feeling guilty when we can't seem to forget the offense.

What Is REAL Forgiveness?, Week 3 of “Forgiveness” Series



4. It is dependent on god's grace...

It is not dependent on the other person. I don't know about you, but to me, it would make the job of forgiving so much easier of the offender named their offense and asked my forgiveness. The forgiveness that Joseph extended to his brothers was merely the overflow of the grace that god had extended to him. And that forgiveness freed him up to enjoy that grace and to be a channel for that grace toward those who had wronged him. Forgiveness is not to be granted because the other person deserves it. Instead it is an act of love, mercy and grace on my part.

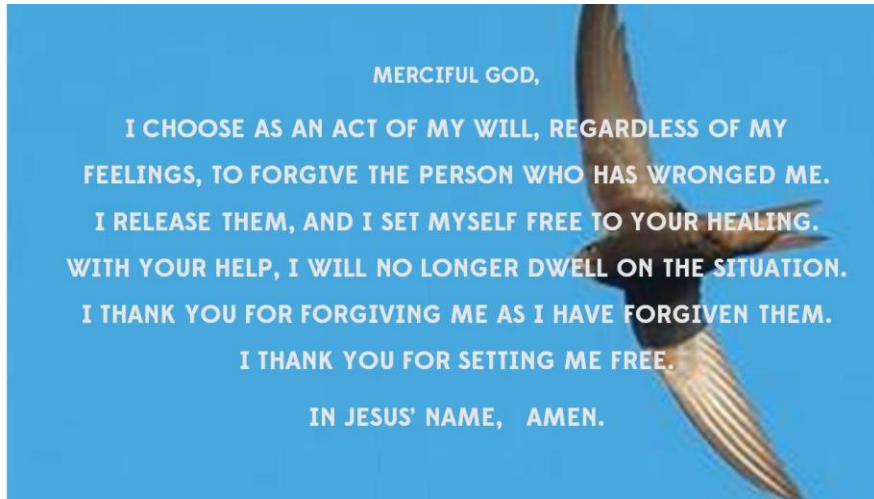


5. It is freedom...

It is not necessarily restoration. Hanging on to bitterness puts our soul into bondage and hinders god's blessing from flowing to us and through us. When we fail to forgive others, it is us, and not the other person who becomes imprisoned. While forgiveness is often a necessary element in restoring a broken relationship with someone else, we must also realize that forgiveness won't necessarily, LEAD to the restoration of trust or even the relationship itself. Sometimes when someone has consistently hurt us, we should forgive them, but it doesn't necessarily mean that the relationship can ever return to what it once was. And sometimes, for our own good, we may even need to end the relationship altogether.

Just because Joseph forgave his brothers doesn't mean that if they asked him to go on a journey alone just to check out the cistern, he should go with them. Forgiveness doesn't automatically equate with trust. If you're ready to free yourself from this bondage, will you think of that person you still need to forgive, and pray with me...

What Is REAL Forgiveness?, Week 3 of “Forgiveness” Series



God
I choose as an act of my will, regardless of my feelings, to forgive the person who has wronged me. I release them, and I set myself free to your healing. With your help, I will no longer dwell on the situation. I thank you for forgiving me as I have forgiven them. I thank you for setting me free.
In Jesus' name,
Amen.