

Heartbreaking Forgiveness
Genesis 50:15-21

Picture 1 - Liliastrotter (1858-1928) was an English aristocrat who surrendered a promising career as one of England's premier female artists in the late 19th century to serve Christ in the African country of Algiers. Years ago, Stephanie read her biography and is giving her 5th daughter her first name, Isabella Liliastrotter.

See: www.liliastrotter.com/about

Picture 2 – *Lily: The Girl Who Could See*

On July 23, 1922, she wrote a diary entry that was later published as a pamphlet titled, "Focussed." In that diary entry, she wrote

*"Turn full your soul's vision to Jesus, and look and look at Him,
and a strange dimness will come over all that is apart from Him."*

Helen Limmel (1863-1961), the author of more than 500 hymns, read that sentence and wrote,

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

1 – The fall insures heartache

2 – God uses heartache for redemptive good

3 – Looking to Jesus helps us reinterpret heartache

4 – Forgiveness is essential to our own healing

Genesis 50:15-21

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." ¹⁶ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: ¹⁷ '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. ¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ 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. ²¹ So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

It may very well be that your heartbreak has been caused by someone. This adds a second layer of heartache to your heartbreak. You are not only suffering but suffering at the hands of someone. You not only have to endure the heartbreak you feel but also navigate through the relationship that hurt you. If this is true of your suffering, both Joseph provides you with a template for forgiveness.

After the death of their father, Joseph's brothers feared his kindness toward them might end and cautiously approached him (50:15-18). Joseph wept over their concern and responded, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?" (50:19).

First: God's Sovereignty Enabled Joseph to Forgive His Brothers

You may think I am emphasizing this portion of Joseph's perspective too much but, it is Joseph's perspective on God's redemptive good of his brothers' evil that enables him to forgive.

For that reason, it bears repeating so that this truth can sink deeply into us.

Genesis 45:5 - And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

Genesis 45:7 - And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.

Genesis 45:8 - 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.

²⁰ 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.

Joseph understood that his brothers sinned against him. This is important. We must acknowledge sin in ourselves and others. This is the divine soil for guilt, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. Read Psalm 51 for that essential healing progression.

Joseph can't undo that sin. He can't change the past. He can't repent for his brothers. But his forgiveness is independent of them. Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers has nothing to do with his brothers. Forgiveness is a reflection of our relationship to his God.

He can and does forgive them because he sees God as bigger than them. He recognizes they were not and are not in control of his life. He believes that a great and good God had omniscient reasons for his heartbreak.

God is too great to do or allow what is unnecessary.

God is too good to be unloving.

God is too wise to make mistakes.

IMP: I know that Joseph saw some of God's reasoning. You don't. That's true. You must apply faith where Joseph had sight. But God gave us the Bible to repeatedly reveal himself so that we can and will trust him because we see him, get to know him, love him and learn to trust him.

1 Peter 4:19 - Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Trusting his faithful God enabled Joseph to do good, a part of which was forgiving his brothers.

Your route to you, the you that you are today, may indeed be a heartbreaking road.

(Rascal Flatts)

*I set out on a narrow way many years ago
Hoping I would find true love along the broken road
But I got lost a time or two
Wiped my brow and kept pushing through
I couldn't see how every sign pointed straight to you*

*I think about the years I spent just passing through
I'd like to have the time I lost and give it back to you
But you just smile and take my hand
You've been there you understand
It's all part of a grander plan that is coming true*

*Every long lost dream led me to where you are
Others who broke my heart they were like northern stars
Pointing me on my way into your loving arms
This much I know is true
That God blessed the broken road
That led me straight to you*

Bless the Broken Road

Songwriters: Jeff Hanna, Marcus Hummon, Robert E. Boyd

Can you bless the broken road? You can forgive those whom God used as northern lights to point you to Him who is "*altogether lovely*" (SOS 5:16).

IMP: Heartbrokenness leads us to the Healer of hearts making the heartbreak "grow strangely dim" and enabling us to forgive those who led us to him.

First: God's Sovereignty enabled Joseph to forgive his brothers

Second: God's Judgement enabled Joseph to forgive his brothers

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?"

Looking beyond his brothers to God, enabled Joseph to forgive his brothers by refusing to stand in God's place. Joseph saw vengeance and wrath as God's divine prerogatives. He focused on God and refused to limit his faith-horizon to his brothers or what they had done.

Seeing God as the ultimate and faithful Judge provides another rationale for Joseph's forgiveness. He turned his mind and heart to God and as a result, his brothers and their sin grew "strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace." Joseph acknowledged the uniqueness of God, refused to be him and that perspective enabled him to forgive his brothers.

Jesus did the same thing. Jesus because he is our supreme model of forgiveness. Interestingly, he, a person and not a plan, is also the means whereby you can forgive.

On the cross, Jesus forgave his executioners (Luke 23:34) and then, with his last breath committed himself to his Father (23:46). But we know that Jesus had committed himself to the Father long before the cross.

Psalm 42:7 reveals Jesus' eternal heart-attitude to be **"I delight to do your will, O my God."**

The prophetic became actual when Jesus committed himself to his Father just before the cross and prayed, **"Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done"** (22:42).

Jesus' forgiveness is the heart of the gospel. We are forgiven because Jesus knew the Father loved him (John 3:35) and trusted the Father to act as the just Judge (Genesis 18:25).

The cross proves the Father's love for you. Trust him. He cared for Jesus with resurrecting power. He will do no less for you.

Relinquish judgement to him, freeing you to forgive anyone who has hurt you. Don't put yourself in the place of God; that is sin. Jesus forgave those who committed the most unrighteous, heinous act in human history. Let him serve as your model for forgiveness, while his Spirit within you, enables you to forgive others.

IMP: Be careful: unforgiveness is detrimental to your own wellbeing. Either love or hatred can turn into idol worship, contesting for place that God alone deserves. Both qualify as worship and, for good or bad, we become what we worship.

Unforgiveness is really self-love in disguise; enthroning yourself as God with a vengeful reaction (50:19; Ro 12:19).

Romans 12:19 - Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it [give place] to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

We are not, in anger, vengefully asking God to judge. Rather, we are committing judgement to God. The difference is both revealing and consequential.

Such hatred not only makes you like the person who hurt you but also liable to God's judgement. Trying to be God was Satan's great sin and also that of Adam and Eve. Unforgiveness also diminishes your ability to live in the present and joyfully, positively steward the important relationships God has given you. But turning your eyes to Jesus; seeing his wonderful face, glory and grace, will diminish your heartbreak by helping you see those who hurt you as sinners, like you, in need of the forgiveness God graciously grants to all repentant sinners.

Will this be easy? No. Does it mean your heartache will end? No.

Matthew 18:21-22 - Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Jesus teaches us that forgiveness is greater than our own ability to imagine or accomplish it (21) and repetitive (22) – every time you think about the offender or offense.

Forgiveness, like manna is a daily exercise.

But in one way, it all comes down to loving Jesus more than yourself or others.

- Not focusing on the harm you have endured. That will devour you
- Not feeding your desire for vengeance. That will consume you.

Listen to Lilius Trotter –

"Turn full your soul's vision to Jesus, and look and look at Him, and a strange dimness will come over all that is apart from Him."

Constantly turn your eyes on him and everything else will fall into its divinely ordained place. The Father cared for Jesus with resurrecting power. He will do no less for you.

CONCLUSION:

I am not trying to undervalue your heartbreak. It is unique to you. Only you have endured it and only you have felt its pain. Everyone who loves you is fiercely, protectively grieved that someone hurt you. We all "know a guy" who can fix it for you. (Or at least, Kathy White does!)

There are many ways to approach forgiveness. God's sovereignty and God's judgement are just two of them that are particular to this text. But they can serve as the Lord's seraphs and wing you to his throne.

Let's take a few moments to do just that...sit before the Lord's sovereignty and judgement.