

The God of Heartbreak
Learning to Forgive
Genesis 50:15-20 & Matthew 5:38-48

Intro:

Eugene Peterson - *"We expect to meet minds that are informed and shaped by the great truths and rhythms of scripture and find persons whose intellectual energy is barely sufficient to get them from the comics to the sports page."* We should *"examine and change our expectations."*

My response is "No." The expectation that Christian minds should be "informed and shaped by the great truths and rhythms of Scripture" are biblical and as such, best for all of us. Rather than change our expectations, let's change our minds.

Romans 12:2 - Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Philippians 2:5 - Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

Let's not change our minds about what Scripture demands. Let's change our minds about living nonbiblically. This brings us to thinking biblically about our topic; forgiveness.

What do you need most in life? Is it a friend, a good job, a nice home, popularity, health? If you had the opportunity to choose, what would make your top ten list? I want to suggest that your greatest need is forgiveness; to be forgiven and to forgive. Forgiveness also happens to be the world's greatest need. It's quite possible, like it was in Joseph's world, to have all the bread in the world but die eternally. Forgiveness is such a big part of positively moving forward out of heartbreak that we're going to invest another week discussing this all-important topic.

Think now, because you are already, on that person who hurt you. Walk with him or her through this sermon and see what God will do for you.

Last week:

When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers (46:4) he encouraged them not to be *"distressed or angry"* with themselves because of their sin. He did not deny their sin. He boldly proclaimed *"...you sold me here..."* (46:5). And they confessed, asking for an already secured forgiveness (45:3b, 15b; 50:17b). But Joseph also recognized that God was sovereign in their offense. From the divine perspective, *"God sent me here before you to preserve life."* Joseph also refused to stand in God's place as the judge of his brothers stating, *"Am I in the place of God"* (50:19). Seeing his heartbreak through the eyes of God's sovereignty and judgement enabled Joseph to forgive his brothers. There are other reasons to forgive –

First: Joseph's Forgiveness Prefigures Jesus and You Reflect Jesus by Your Forgiveness

No New Testament author ever makes this connection, so we have to tread carefully but

- a) Joseph was loved by his Father, the favored Son, as Jesus is
- b) Joseph was rejected by his brothers, the hated Son, as Jesus was
- c) After their respective resurrections, neither Joseph nor Jesus was not immediately recognized by their brothers yet just as Joseph was, Jesus will one day be fully recognized (Zech 12:10ff).
- d) God ordained Joseph's rejection, as that of Jesus (Acts 2:23) so that both could save a multitude of people

For a more complete list visit: [How is Joseph like Jesus?](#)

At Calvary, Jesus asked the Father to forgive his persecutors (Luke 23:34) even though they had not asked for it and just like Joseph forgave his brothers before their repentance. Your forgiveness reflects Jesus' forgiveness just like Joseph's forgiveness foreshadowed it.

God's great goal for you is conformity to Jesus, the perfect person.

Matthew 5:48 - *You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

This may be the Spirit's greatest gift to us.

Matthew 5:38-48 - *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

In this context, loving, praying for and doing good to our enemies is synonymous with forgiveness. It is in these things that we should emulate Jesus.

Forgiving others is one of the most painful but also one of the most effective tools God uses to conform you to the image of his Son.

ILL – The marble slab from which Michelangelo cut his statue of David had been rejected by two other famous Italian sculptors and had sat outside in the weather for 40 years. I've heard

two versions of a story about Michelangelo's creation of the great statue David. When asked how he accomplished it, one version relates that he responded,

"I simply cut away everything that didn't look like David."

In the other version, Michelangelo said,

"I saw a man inside trying to get out and I freed him"

I'm not sure either story is true. But both illustrate how God works in your life. He is cutting away everything that does not look like Jesus. He is also freeing you from the burden and slavery of unforgiveness. Simply put, forgiveness is a large part of God's divine makeover for you.

With the Bible, that Paul calls "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17), God is cutting away everything that does not look like Jesus. He is also freeing you from the burden and slavery of unforgiveness.

- God commands it and he enables it because he loves you.
- God did not create you to carry the emotional weight of unforgiveness.
- He put eyes in front of your head, not the back, because he created you to look forward to the eternity of joy he has created for you.
- Forgiveness does not delete a memory, but it does change the way you perceive it.
- Only the Christian dead experience no heartache. Heartbreak proves you are alive and since alive, assured of a future.

Second: Forgiveness Costs You but Frees You from God's Judgement

Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers cost him the opportunity for revenge. But it gave him a life of freedom from the tyranny of vengeance and hatred; sins that can consume our hearts.

Instead, Joseph trusted **God's sovereignty** – "It was not you but God who sent me here"
And **God's judgement** – "Am I in the place of God?"

It cost him to forgive his brothers, but it also freed him from trying to act as God which is a sin.

You may think that forgiveness allows the person who sinned against you to get away with sin. But no one gets by with wrongdoing.

When the two tribes of Reuben and Gad tried not to cross the Jordan river but live on the other side, Moses told them they could live there but still had to cross the river to help Israel drive out their enemies from the Promised Land. The two tribes then promised to help Israel fight.

Numbers 32:23 - But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out.

No one gets away with sin (Numbers 32:23).

Sin has inherent, unavoidable, devastating consequences of the gravest nature (James 1:15; Romans 6:23).

James 1:15 - sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

ILL – How are you at driving out the unforgiveness of your life?

Like Lot, sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay and cost you more than you want to give.

That's one of the reasons you don't want to forgive and by forgiving, not sin against the person who has sinned against you.

Forgiveness is God-focused but, insofar as people are concerned, in forgiveness, you don't focus on the fault but the nature of the person who is faulted. You concentrate your efforts on the nature of the person who sins against you. You pray over their nature

But it is true that forgiveness is not free. It requires that someone pays the debt. At Calvary, Jesus did just that. He did not go free so that we could go free.

1 Peter 3:18 - For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous,

He suffered under God's wrath so that you would not endure God's eternal judgement. In forgiveness, like Jesus, you are assuming the debt and its payment.

You refuse to "make them pay" because your faith is not in your skewed sense of justice but in God's sure justice. Knowing of God's righteousness even moves you to pray for your offender (Luke 6:28). That may seem unimaginable right now, but it will happen.

You may think, "This is unfair," but it is difficult for us to invoke the concept of fairness when God commands us to do something. It was unfair for Jesus to die in our place. It was unfair for Jesus to endure God's wrath at Calvary. On that basis, God is more-than-fair to ask us to obey him.

Third: Forgiveness is Both Immediate and Continual

When Peter approached Jesus about forgiveness, he thought he was being extremely liberal, very spiritual about the matter.

Mt 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?" "Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

BULLETIN NOTES explain the difference between 77 and 490.

Jesus' response of "seventy-seven times" (Matt 18:21-22) is as shocking as seemingly impossible. Of course, Jesus is making a play on the Jewish understanding of the number seven which, in Jewish thinking stood for perfection or completeness.

What Jesus means is that forgiveness is a process. You will have to forgive seventy-seven times, or shall we say, every time you think about it. And you may not know the exact day you have completely, perfectly forgiven the person who hurt you.

This means that forgiveness takes practice. It also means that forgiveness is not a feeling but a commitment to obey God and trust Jesus as you surrender your hurt to the Spirit.

Forgiveness is not a feeling, but it is not without feeling. Only repeated forgiveness can abate and then eliminate your anger, bitterness and hurt. You may not feel forgiving the first time you do it. It may not happen the second time. It requires seventy-seven times, i.e., constant forgiveness.

And over time, although it may seem impossible now, the feeling will accompany the commitment to love and obey God by forgiving someone who has terribly hurt you.

Conclusion:

You have already thought about that person who hurt you. Think about them in the context of forgiving them in Christ-likeness and freeing yourself from God's judgement. In addition, acknowledge that you have forgiven someone, but you need to regularly do so.

Genesis 50:19 - Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? - Trust God's judgement

Genesis 50:20 - you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good – Trust God's sovereignty

Notes:

Two Questions:

1 – Do I forgive even though a person has not asked for forgiveness?

- a) God does not forgive unless a person has repented else everyone would go to heaven. What's the difference between God not forgiving and me forgiving?
- b) God commands me to forgive.
- c) God's forgiveness is redemptive, mine is not
- d) God is a perfect Judge. I am not
- e) God the Creator can and does command his creation to act differently than himself

- f) God, as God, can not forgive with impartiality. I cannot. Unforgiveness causes me to commit other sins.
- g) In our example, Joseph forgave his brothers before they repented
- h) Jesus, on the cross, asked the Father to grant forgiveness to nonrepenters
- i) Forgiveness reminds you that God is God and you are human. It is a matter of trusting God more than ourselves or others.

2. *Is Forgiveness the same as Reconciliation?*

- a) No. Forgiveness is a solo act; reconciliation is a joint venture.
- b) You are commanded to forgive and responsible for it. Reconciliation is a response from another person for which you are not responsible.
- c) Forgiveness is unconditional. Reconciliation is conditional.
- d) Reconciliation looks different in different situations.
- e) Boundaries are essential to ensure an offender does not repeatedly violate Scripture. Boundaries also help insure that you don't create the environment for the violation of Scripture. Boundaries create an environment for another person's wholeness and maturity.
- f) Even divine forgiveness does not erase consequences.

One Thought:

In the King James Version of the Bible, Jesus tells Peter to forgive 490 times. In the ESV (and the NASB & NIV) Jesus tells Peter to forgive 77 times. Why the difference? The ambiguity comes from a difference between the Hebrew Old Testament and the Septuagint (a Greek translation). Jesus is teaching to forgive by reversing the statement of Lamech in Genesis 4.

Gen 4:24 "If Cain is avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold." (ESV)

The ESV follows the Hebrew which has *שִׁבְעִים וְשִׁבְעָה* (*shib'iyim wshib'ah*), which means "seventy-seven."

Instead the Septuagint has *ἑβδομηκοντάκις*, (*hebdomekontakis*), which means "seventy times seven."

If Jesus quoted the Septuagint, then He said "*seventy times seven*." If He quoted the Hebrew, then He said, "*seventy seven* (times)." A case could be made for either as both the Hebrew Scriptures and Greek translations of the same were in use in Palestine during Jesus' lifetime.

The more important question than "which did he quote?" is "what is does Jesus mean?" Whether He quoted the Hebrew or Greek, Jesus is saying the same thing.

The common thinking in Jesus' day was that you only had to forgive three times. Peter obviously thinks he is being very generous by saying he will forgive seven times when someone has hurt him. This is double the teaching plus one and is also the perfect number in Hebrew thought. Peter may have been drawing on such verses as Lev. 26:21; Deut. 28:25; Ps. 79:12; and Prov.

24:16, which speak of revenge and loss. Peter is saying that if revenge should be taken seven times, then forgiveness should also be offered seven times.

Jesus then raises the stakes. He alludes to Gen 4:24 where Lamech says that he is avenged more than Cain. Jesus turns the statement of revenge around and says that is the number of times we must forgive.

Though there is great numerical difference between seventy-seven and seventy times seven, it is not an important theological difference. Jesus is saying that His disciples should forgive as many times as it takes. If someone wrongs you once, you can recall that easily. If they wrong you three times, you can still number those rather easily. If you can list off seven times the person has wronged you, you are either keeping track or have an exceptional memory. And you are also guilty of maintaining an environment for you to be repeatedly sinned against which is wrong of you. You need to establish boundaries for your sake and the sake of your offender. But if you can count either 77 or 490 wrongs, you **are** keeping track, and the question could be put to you have you ever forgiven *even once*?

On the other hand, you may think of the offence once, three times, 77 or 490 times. Every time you think of it, you should remind yourself that you have forgiven the person or again forgive the person. Eventually, your feelings will catch up with your obedience. But your obedience is not based on your feelings.