

# “The Harmony of Forgiveness”

Psalm 133

Genesis 45:1-15

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Holding on to revenge is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.

Professor Fred Niedner says, “The first and foremost reason that forgiveness is necessary is that we humans like, more than anything else, to be right. Nothing is more important for us than to be right. Moreover we need to advise others that we are right and that others are wrong.” To prove his point Niedner recommends the following exercise: “Get married.”

God’s desire for us is forgiveness, mercy and grace uniting all in harmony. The psalmist declares. **Psalm 133 “How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live together in harmony! For harmony is as precious as the anointing oil that was poured over Aaron’s head, that ran down his beard and onto the border of his robe. Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon that falls on the mountains of Zion. And there the Lord has pronounced God’s blessing, even life everlasting.”** Anointing was a sign of hospitality one would do for an honored guest. Forgiving one another, resisting the urge to defend your rightness, causes a good and pleasant feeling like being anointed the honored guests. The dew of harmony reaches from Mount Hermon in the North all the way to the Mountains of Zion in the south. In other words harmony is to refresh everyone. God will pronounce blessing, even life everlasting, everywhere, on everyone. If you were a modern day psalmist what metaphor for the wonderful feeling of everyone living in harmony and being abundantly blessed by God would you use? When and where does the world unite to celebrate harmony? Perhaps at the opening ceremony of the Olympics.

Joseph shows us how to forgive, to let go of the desire to be right and the joy of being reunited in harmony. Joseph had plenty of faults and sins. As a youth he was overconfident, swollen with pride, always flaunting his Dad’s favorite status and annoying with his stories of how he was going to make it big, be rich, famous and rule over his entire family. Joseph learned, by in large, to control these sins yet he still struggled in these areas as evidenced by Joseph toying with his brothers for awhile and testing their loyalty before he revealed his identity and forgave them. Joseph has four wonderful strengths that we should try to emulate: forgiveness, letting go of the desire to be right, awareness of God’s work in his life and a great attitude.

Read the Joseph story in Genesis chapter 37-50 to see how Joseph overcame his faults, responded to numerous setbacks and became a gracious, joyful, generous man. Perhaps you can identify with Joseph as he was betrayed and deserted by his family, exposed to sexual temptation and punished for doing the right thing. Joseph endured a long imprisonment and was forgotten by those he helped. Notice in the Joseph story how Joseph’s faith and positive attitude transformed each setback into a step forward. Joseph spent little time asking why and getting angry. Instead of seeking revenge his attitude was God is with me so what should I do now? Joseph shows us that what matters is not so much the events or circumstances of life, but your response to them. With God’s help, any situation can be used for good, even when others intend it for evil.

Joseph's arrogance and favorite status caused jealousy to fester in his brothers until one day they beat him. One of the brothers was going to kill Joseph until Reuben convinced them to throw him into a pit so he could rescue Joseph later. However Judah convinced the others to sell Joseph into slavery. It was obviously a dysfunctional family with an out of control sibling rivalry. It is here that we first see Joseph's amazing positive attitude. Joseph does not replay what his brothers did to him in his mind. Joseph refuses to be angry, bitter, resentful or filled with revenge. Betrayed, abandoned by his brothers, alone in a foreign country, in pain, Joseph chooses to make the best of his awful situation to be the best slave he can be.

Charles Swindoll wrote, "The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, the education, the money, than circumstances, than failure, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company... a church... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it. And so it is with you... we are in charge of our Attitudes."

After years of performing hard labor with a positive, joyful attitude and going above and beyond his responsibilities Joseph is put in charge of Potiphar's household. Suddenly Joseph is tempted much like all of us are everyday.

### **Video Blue Fish Joseph-Tested with Teaching by Rob Duford 1:58**

Joseph's integrity lands him in jail. Sometimes we suffer for doing the right thing. One would expect as the years went by and fellow prisoners mocked and betrayed Joseph that he would become cynical, depressed, angry or bitter. Instead Joseph keeps a positive, joyful attitude striving to be the best prisoner he can be. After years of service Joseph's attitude and integrity lands him in Pharaoh's court where his wisdom advises Pharaoh to store up food to survive future food shortages. Pharaoh is so impressed with Joseph's attitude and integrity that Joseph is put in charge of the food supply. Once again Joseph serves with an exceptional attitude and becomes the second most powerful and rich person in all of Egypt. Never once does Joseph seek revenge against his brothers, Potiphar's wife, or the many people that wronged him. Joseph had the power and could have easily destroyed them all instead Joseph forgave them all and let go of the desire to prove his right actions.

A severe drought hits. Joseph's brothers, and their families, are starving so they go to Egypt to beg for food that is where we will pick up the story in Genesis. **Genesis 45:1-15 "Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, "Out, all of you!" So Joseph was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was. Then Joseph broke down and wept. Joseph wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh's palace. "I am Joseph!" he said to his brothers. "Is my father still alive?" But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them. "Please, come closer," he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. So it was God who sent me here, not you! And God is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt. "Now hurry back to**

**my father and tell him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all the land of Egypt. So come down to me immediately! You can live in the region of Goshen, where you can be near me with all your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and everything you own. I will take care of you there, for there are still five years of famine ahead of us. Otherwise you, your household, and all your animals will starve.’” Go tell my father of my honored position here in Egypt. Describe for him everything you have seen, and then bring my father here quickly.” Weeping with joy, he embraced Benjamin, and Benjamin did the same. Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and wept over them, and after that they began talking freely with him.**

It would have been easy for Joseph to embarrass his brothers, to deny their request for assistance, to hold a grudge. Instead Joseph gracefully forgives his brothers. Joseph not only forgives them he helps them forgive themselves. Joseph shifts their thoughts from their sinful deed to the good that God has brought from it. Terence Fretheim writes that “wherever there are signs of life rather than death, signs of reconciliation rather than estrangement, God had been at work in, with and under human affairs.” This was the gift Joseph gave his brothers. It is a gift each of us are invited to embrace. It is a positive, joyful attitude that looks at whatever life sets before us, even the bad, as an opportunity for grace, healing and reconciliation to break into our lives. God is constantly at work in our lives. Joseph’s brothers were jealous. They made a mistake. They sinned. Their actions caused Joseph to be beaten, abused and endure years of forced labor. God did not cause any of that. God took that mess of a situation, forgave the unrepentant brothers, sustained Joseph, bent that awful situation into a way to provide food for all the people in the region. God enabled Joseph to forgive his brothers and reunited Joseph’s family. God is constantly cleaning up our mess. God is constantly bending our hate into love. God is constantly redeeming us. Take some time to reflect on your life. Where has God brought peace from strife, blessing from pain, joy from sadness, life from death?

Joseph invited his brothers to view the past from the perspective of the present. Joseph invited his brothers to let the celebration of the reconciliation of their family and abundance of food wash away the guilt and regret. Joseph invited them to live in the present.

God has forgiven you. How are you letting go of regret, guilt and shame? God has forgiven you. How are you forgiving others? How are you letting go of your desire to be right? How are you nurturing a positive, joyful attitude? How are you living in harmony? How are shifting your focus from judgment to grace? How are you helping others see the good that God is doing in our midst? Amen.