

BROOKLAND BAPTIST CHURCH
Bible Study
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Lecture IV

November 1, 2023

Forgiveness: A Key to Unlocking Your Divine Destiny
Case Study: The Account of Joseph
Ref: Genesis 37 – 50

The story of Joseph is recorded in Genesis 37-50 and is one of the most well-known narratives in the bible. Theologians and scholars agree that the story of Joseph highlights a plethora of biblical principles that include godly patience and perseverance, the sovereignty of God, and yes even forgiveness to name a few.

For this study, we will focus on forgiveness, however, we will undoubtedly touch on some of the other principles as we navigate through the life of Joseph. This case study will be presented in multiple stages beginning with Stage One - Being Objective: Did I Play a Role in the Offense?

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When we are the victim of an offense, how often do we step back to conduct an objective cause-and-effect analysis to determine what role, if any, we may have played in the offense taking place? Typically, our first thought, depending on the offense, is one of bewilderment, confusion, possibly disbelief and even dismissal. Then, if we are not careful, these thoughts can morph into feelings of rage, anger, bitterness, and hatred, eventually spawning actions of retribution, vengeance, and payback. When we get hurt, we tend to look at the offender with harsh criticism, bent toward the question, “how could they do this to me?” and seldom, if ever, from an introspective perspective bent toward the question, “**did I do something that contributed to this offense happening to me?**”

Now to set the record straight, stage one of this case study IS NOT to suggest that you are always at fault for what another person does to you. People are responsible for their own decisions and the actions they take, whether provoked or not. However, when addressing the topic of forgiveness, the victim must be willing to hold themselves every bit as accountable as they do the offender. This is one of the reasons why Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:28 admonishes us to “examine ourselves”. The term “examine” in the Greek is “dokimazo” and it means to, “test, prove, or scrutinize”.

Now Paul was dealing with the context of communion when he penned those words to the Corinthian church, however, these same words are apropos when dealing with the issue of forgiveness because we still need to scrutinize our actions to see if something we did or said contributed to the offense happening.

Taking this step may even require us to come together with the one who offended us to ask the simple yet relevant question, “**did I do something to offend you?**” This act is also in keeping with scripture since Colossians 3:13 instructs us to, “bear with each other and forgive one another...” if a grievance exist. The Message Bible says it like this, “Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing.”

This scripture simply contends that the process of forgiveness is an opportunity for the offender and the person offended to come together and peaceably settle the offense, and in this bearing with each other, this keeping in tune with each other, it allows meaningful and genuine dialogue to take place in order for real forgiveness to take place. The dialogue that Colossians 3:13 recommends may yield an inconvenient but relevant truth, that the person offended may have played a more prominent role in the offense than originally thought, and this as well must be addressed and remedied.

The essence of Colossians 3:12-13 is vitally important to the believer because research suggests that people who are hurt, particularly by family members or close friends, initially are willing to forgive publicly, but privately they endeavor to take matters into their own hands. This is to say that they may seem indifferent, perhaps even calm on the surface, but below they are a simmering volcano waiting to erupt.

Now based on this reality, let us shift to our case study of Joseph as we apply the importance of stage one in this forgiveness study. Let us take an analysis of Joseph's early years as recorded in scripture to see what conclusions, if any, can be made.

Read Genesis 37:1-11

From the scriptures we just read, would you say that Joseph's brothers felt some kind of way about their younger brother? If you said "yes", how do you think they felt about and why?

When we analyze Joseph's family scripture, we discover that they are quite dysfunctional. This is not to criticize or become overly judgmental of his family dynamic but to come to terms with the reality that we are oftentimes the product of our environment. Understanding this is helpful in the forgiveness process. Let's conduct a biographical sketch of Joseph's family dynamic.

Joseph's father's name was Jacob and he had four wives (Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, Zilpah). From these wives Jacob fathered 13 children:

- Leah birthed Rueben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun and Dinah
- Bilhah birthed Dan and Naphtali
- Zilpah birthed Gad and Asher
- Rachel birthed Joseph and Benjamin

As you could probably imagine, there was quite a bit of drama within this blended family. We see evidence of this early on in Genesis 37:2 where we learn that Joseph was a snitch, even at 17 years old. We also see evidence of family friction in Genesis 37:3 when we read that Jacob loved Joseph more than all his children because Joseph was a miracle child. So, because Jacob loved Joseph more than his other children, he made Joseph a tunic, a coat, of many colors.

Now Genesis 37:4 is very telling in that it contends, that Joseph's brothers hated him because their father Jacob loved him more than he loved them. This was a major in the lives of Jacob's sons. Now it also did not help matters much that Joseph was also a snitch.

So, when we put this all together we can conclude that Joseph is shown favoritism, (we can recall from Dr. Jamison's lessons from the Book of James this past spring that favoritism is a sin that God frowns upon and disapproves of), loved more by his parents, recipient of special gifts, and is a tattletail.

Why is this relevant?

Would you say Jacob and Joseph's actions were instrumental in causing the older brothers to feel this way towards their younger brother? Now do not get this twisted, this reality does not excuse their actions, or suggest that they should get a pass for what they did. However, it does help us to understand why they felt this way towards Joseph, whether we agree with them or not.

It is reasonable to conclude that Joseph's brothers were also hurt and felt inferior to their younger brother because of the actions of Joseph and their father Jacob.

So, in circling back to being objective, when an offense occurs, asking ourselves, "**did I do anything to contribute to the offense?**" is not unrealistic or an act to blame yourself for the actions of another. It is, however, the first step towards true forgiveness by being totally transparent and accountable before you and God.

In taking this first step, and being honest with yourself in the process, it opens the door for true forgiveness to manifest and for the requisite healing to take place.

Questions/Comments?

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