

THE PITFALL OF GUILT AND GRUDGES

Leader pages on pp. 156-159

THE POINT:
WE CAN ONLY MOVE FORWARD WHEN WE EMBRACE GOD'S FORGIVENESS.

GENESIS 50:15-21

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said to one another, "If Joseph is holding a grudge against us, he will certainly repay us for all the suffering we caused him."

¹⁶ So they sent this message to Joseph, "Before he died your father gave a command:

¹⁷ 'Say this to Joseph: Please forgive your brothers' transgression and their sin—the suffering they caused you.' Therefore, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when their message came to him.

¹⁸ His brothers also came to him, bowed down before him, and said, "We are your slaves!"

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?"

²⁰ **You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people.**

²¹ Therefore don't be afraid. I will take care of you and your children." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Transgression ... sin (v. 17)—Transgression refers to rebellious action, behavior, or lifestyle against God—revolt. It's a more general term that signifies any offense against God that breaks His law and His heart.

Servants of God of your Father (v. 17)—Joseph's brothers worshiped the same God that he did.

God planned it for good (v. 20)—God had transformed the soot of human sin into a diamond of divine blessing (Rom. 8:28; 1 Pet. 2:24).

WHAT HELPS US MOVE FORWARD IN GOD'S FORGIVENESS?

Many men love to show off their driving skills. They often brag about being able to maneuver roads during the worst conditions. Driving in snow is one example. Snow will stick quickly to the windshield and make the pavement slick. And despite the cries and warnings of spouses and family, these snow drivers will roll their eyes and keep driving. However, some will lose control of the vehicle, and with tires spinning, the family car will end up in a ditch. The family will be stuck because of the snow driver's ego.

It's one thing to be momentarily stuck in the snow, but many people live their lives stuck. It's not the snow that causes the problem, but the unforgiveness that surrounds them. Nothing prevents a person from moving forward like the holding of grudges.

In this final session, Joseph had seen the plan of God in the decisions of his brothers that caused so much pain in his life. Let's take one more look at Joseph and see what he can teach us about looking at our own struggles in light of the grace of God.

Reexamine Your Guilt

// Genesis 50:15-18

When the brothers traveled to Egypt seeking food, and Joseph revealed himself, they had reason to fear. They were now in the hands of a powerful Egyptian leader, and their guilt was undeniable. They thought the brother they had wronged would get revenge. Instead, they found Joseph to be compassionate, willingly forgetting their crimes. Joseph didn't want revenge; he wanted his family back. Consequently, the brothers brought their father and families and lived in Egypt under Joseph's protection for nearly twenty years.

All was good until Jacob's death. The family went through the stages of mourning and burial arrangements were made in Canaan. But after their father's passing, the brothers wondered if Joseph's love would turn to hate. "If Joseph is holding a grudge against us, he will certainly repay us for all the suffering we caused him" (v. 15) Should they expect payback?



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The brothers had reason to feel paranoid. What they did to Joseph years ago was unpardonable. They left him for dead and then sold him into slavery. But in Joseph's mind, their fears were unproven. Still, they sent a message to Joseph, explaining that before he died, their father had requested, "Please forgive your brothers' transgression and their sin—the suffering they caused you" (v. 17) We don't know if Jacob actually said that, but the brothers used it to regain Joseph's grace. They humbled themselves before him, saying, "We are your slaves!" (v.18). Again, Joseph was full of grace.

WHAT ARE SOME CONSEQUENCES OF CARRYING GUILT?

Wouldn't it be great if we could all put the past behind us? So much of our present pain relates to old wounds that never healed. By the grace of God and with His help, we can let go of grudges.

Matthew 6:15 is a difficult verse. Jesus didn't sugarcoat His call for forgiveness: "But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses." To be Christ-followers is imitating His ways. Just as the Lord forgives, so should we. Following Jesus means trusting God with all hurts and believing, as He loves and forgives us, He empowers us to do likewise.

Most people struggle through unresolved pain, but in Joseph's story, the happy ending came! While Joseph's brothers thought they had reason to fear, he had no plans for revenge. His only plans were to care for them. It was time to release their guilt and move on.

Refocus on God's Providence

// Genesis 50:19-20

Joseph's story, comprising the largest portion of the Book of Genesis, comes to this climactic finale in verses 19-20. Coming together is God's sovereignty and the humility of humankind.

Notice the question Joseph asked his brothers: "Am I in the place of God?" (v. 19) We should often ask that same question! In our sinful nature, we make frequent attempts to enthrone ourselves and rule, even though Scriptures continually remind us of God's sovereign lordship.



DIGGING DEEPER FORGIVENESS

Forgiving does not suggest someone's action wasn't wrong or didn't hurt. When God offers us His forgiveness, He is not claiming our sin was not wrong, for our sin rightfully separates us from God (6:23). Forgiving releases our right to punish someone. The message Joseph's brothers delivered to him after their father died called for Joseph to "forgive" his brothers (Gen. 50:17). The brothers used the same word in their own plea to Joseph. The word rendered forgive means "to send away," "to lift up," or "to carry or bear." Cain used it to express that God's punishment was too great for him to bear (4:13). It occurs in 13:6, saying the land could not support both Abraham and Lot with their flocks. The message directed Joseph to put the brothers' sin in the past, to send it away, to lift their accountability for it.

What are some characteristics of a Christian who has fully embraced forgiveness?



- “A person’s heart plans his way, but the LORD determines his steps” (Prov. 16:9).
- “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will travel to such and such a city and spend a year there and do business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring—what your life will be! For you are like vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes. Instead, you should say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil” (Jas. 4:13-16).

What made Joseph exceptional was his view of God affecting how he saw himself. It wasn’t as simple as “his brothers did him wrong.” Far more was involved. God used the pain of Joseph’s past for a much higher purpose in the future. What others meant for evil, God intended for good. This is a mature believer’s mindset.

Paul reinforced this truth while reflecting on his past and the pain he brought himself. “But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of

knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ and be found in him” (Phil. 3:7-9).

HOW CAN JOSEPH’S STORY HELP US WHEN WE DON’T UNDERSTAND GOD’S PLANS?

What brought Joseph to the healthy place in Genesis 50 was his hope in the Ultimate Planner. “God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people.” God knows the end from the beginning. We should remind ourselves the Lord is in control.

Receive God’s Comfort

// Genesis 50:21

It is God’s kindness that leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Throughout the Bible, God’s great love for His people is on display. From Genesis to Revelation, God’s most attractive quality is His love for the broken.

Joseph’s brothers had lived broken lives, and Joseph desired to bring healing and reconciliation by displaying love and compassion. Trembling in fear, they heard Joseph say: “Therefore don’t be afraid. I will take care of you and your children” (v. 21).

While Christians wholeheartedly agree God’s grace saved them, many focus on lives driven by works. “You don’t read your Bible enough.” “You don’t pray enough.” “You don’t give or serve enough.” Legalism causes feelings of inadequacy. This isn’t the message of the gospel at all. Jesus said, “So if the Son sets you free, you really will be free” (John 8:36).

Just as we’re saved by God’s grace, we’re also daily sustained by God’s grace. Catch that connection in Paul’s word: “So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him” (Col. 2:6). Joseph’s words in

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verse 21 reflect God's infinitely greater love and concern for us. Don't be afraid. The God who saves us also takes care of us.

WHAT ARE SOME PRINCIPLES FROM JOSEPH'S LIFE THAT HELP US EMBRACE FORGIVENESS?

We see this in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). This parable captures our attention because the father's love and forgiveness are amazing. After the younger son took his father's money and ruined the family name, he returned home. Fully expecting to be treated as a servant at best, he was embraced by his father. "Let's celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" (vv. 23-24).

The greatest need of the human heart is to feel the Father's full pardon, knowing we're accepted no matter what crimes we've committed. He looks for us, finds us, runs to us, throws his arms around us, kisses us, and rejoices. When we come to Him, He responds to us as Joseph did his brothers: "Don't be afraid. I will take care of you." Salvation, grace, and new life in Christ are wrapped in His love.

DID YOU KNOW?

Through Joseph's life, God's sovereignty is on full display. Joseph was an alien of Egypt yet became a ruler with all authority and power. While God had raised him to prominence, showered him with favor, and gave him the trust of the Egyptians, Joseph maintained his devotion and faith to God and his people. Upon death, the Egyptian tradition was to carry out burial rites and a forty-day embalming process. Joseph ensured his father Jacob was honored in death in the same manner as Egyptian royalty and the whole country mourned for seventy days. With Pharaoh's permission, Joseph buried Jacob in their homeland, Canaan, and was accompanied by a procession of Pharaoh's servants and elders, along with his brothers and his father's family all with horses and chariots. This impressive procession was witnessed by the Canaanites who thought it was all for Egyptian royalty.

What does Joseph's life teach us about God's sovereignty over every aspect of our lives?

LIVE IT

How can we move forward in the life God has for us after we've been hampered by guilt?

Joseph's life closes out the Book of Genesis with reminders of God's promises to His people and Joseph requesting his own promises. Be reminded of the theme of forgiveness and grace that runs like a river through the plains, valleys, and mountains of Joseph's life. Examine your life and ask God to identify key truths He wants to flow through your life so you can move forward. Use these tips to guide your trek.

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- **See it.** Take time to evaluate your life for sources of bitterness, unforgiveness, trials, and challenges. Record what you learned about yourself and God's grace through them.
- **Profess it.** Once you've discovered these areas that have actually been opportunities for testing and deepening your faith, share them with someone as a testament of God maturing you spiritually.
- **Offer it.** After acknowledgment of needed or experienced areas of growth, boldly pray for God to provide an opportunity to share about His forgiveness and grace, extending an invitation for salvation to someone He places within your path who has not confessed Jesus as Savior.

DAILY READINGS

1. GRACE OVER GUILT // GENESIS 50:15

Do you remember when you received grace though you were guilty? Maybe it was a traffic stop, and the officer let you off with a warning. Or you falsely accused someone and never apologized, yet they still treated you respectfully. Though we're totally undeserving, God offers deliverance from the guilt of sin through salvation in Him. Our salvation first requires acknowledgment of our guilt. When we acknowledge guilt, God doesn't hold us hostage to it. Instead, He offers us complete freedom. Since God's forgiveness releases us from guilt, we shouldn't minimize that by being trapped in condemnation, when we have been freed by His grace which overrides our guilt completely.

Thank God that though you are undeserving, His grace frees you from condemnation.

2. FLIP THE SCRIPT // GENESIS 50:20

Sometimes it's very difficult to see God at work when everything seems to be going wrong. One setback after another can make us feel overwhelmed and unable to move forward. It may feel like at every turn, the enemy is sending fiery darts, and everything is working against us. Though times may be challenging nothing or no one can negate the power of God. As the Great Author who has already scripted our story for His glory, we need not be concerned when it looks as if things are out of His control. God always flips the script and orchestrates all things according to His plans for us.

Ask God to help you to confidently trust the plans He has divinely scripted for your life.

3. GOT YOU COVERED // GENESIS 50:21

Insurance is an especially important commodity because it's a means of guaranteeing protection or safety. Whether it's insurance for your car, health, life, or belongings, it's coverage that provides you with the security of knowing, if you need care or

suffer a loss, there's a way to receive or recover it. In the story of Joseph, God's insurance for him and his family was his time. If God did it for Joseph and so many others in the Bible, why would He not do the same for us today? God assures us through the promises in His Word He's got us covered.

Trust that God is the Source of all you need so you can count on His protection.

4. PURPOSES AND PROMISES // NUMBERS 23:19

We're assured by God's Word that He is not a man so He cannot lie nor change His mind. Throughout Scripture, God makes promises that are according to the plans He has already preordained. In our world today, people often refer to "their" truth as a standard for decision-making. The problem is, anything but God's truth is biased and impacted by our earthly nature. God's truth never changes and is based upon His divine purposes by His sovereign will. When we need direction regarding being freed from strongholds that hinder us from being fully who God has purposed us to be, we can rely upon His promises to guide our way.

Surrender all your decisions and will to God's divine purposes and truth every day.

5. GOD CAN DO IT // ROMANS 8:1-4

Being a Christ-follower is not easy in this world we are in but not part of. Often, we're looked down upon or criticized for making mistakes and falling short as believers. In Romans, we're assured of two impacting truths. Romans 3:23 clarifies all have fallen short of the glory of God, which means none should be without condemnation. But later in Romans 8, Paul reveals God's standards. He said all who are found in Jesus and walk in His Holy Spirit are freed from condemnation because God can do what the law could not do.

Even though we fall short of God's glory, we should thank Him for His faithfulness. God's will shall be done in our lives.



JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

BY ROBERTA JONES

- + Although Joseph was born about 3,900 years ago,¹ human emotions remain the same.
- + Joseph's relatives often chose hatred and deceit. Guilt plagued his brothers. Favoritism, fear, and jealousy appeared. Conflict in Joseph's life sent him to a Canaanite pit, an Ishmaelite spice caravan, an Egyptian prison, and to the glories of Egypt. God guided him through every adventure.

Joseph's Family

Family history affected Joseph and his brothers. Using craftiness and deceit, Jacob received Esau's inheritance and the blessing of their father, Isaac (Gen. 25:27-34; 27:33-36).² Later, God spoke to Jacob in a dream, and he worshiped Him at Bethel (28:11-22). Laban deceived Jacob into marrying Leah; afterward Jacob had to work seven more years before he could marry his beloved Rachel. Leah produced Jacob's children in a loveless marriage. The sisters, Rachel and Leah, bickered. Rachel remained childless and blamed Jacob as she watched Leah and two slaves give sons to Jacob (29:16-30:21).

Rachel finally gave birth to Joseph, who met ten half-brothers and three stepmothers (30:22-24). Confusion reigned. Rachel and Leah disliked their father. Jacob felt cheated by

his father-in-law. Rachel stole her father's gods and used a lie to cover her actions (31:4-7,14-15,34-35).

Yet, Jacob led his household in spiritual markers, events that honored God and showed His work. Jacob wrestled with an angel all night; as a result, the Lord changed his name to Israel (32:24-32). Another time, Jacob's kinfolk worshiped at Bethel. He encouraged everyone to forsake foreign gods. These spiritual markers offered opportunities to worship God.³

Sold into Slavery

Family dysfunction continued. A gift encouraged hatred. Jacob gave Joseph a garment, often described as many-colored (37:3-4). Some scholars, however, emphasize the robe's long sleeves and long length. The style definitely resembled royal clothing.⁴ The brothers felt unloved by their father; they hated Joseph. The brothers felt unloved by their father; they hated Joseph. The young man shared two dreams, each suggesting his family would bow to him. The brothers demanded, "Are you really going to reign over us?" (v. 8). Tension and hatred increased.

As 17-year-old Joseph checked on his brothers and their flock, they discussed "that dreamer" (37:19). Except for Reuben, the envious group stripped off Joseph's robe, threw the boy in an empty pit, and sold him to an Ishmaelite spice

caravan. Joseph journeyed toward Egypt. The schemers dipped the hated coat in goat blood. Naturally, Jacob believed a vicious animal devoured his cherished child. Guilty sons and innocent daughters fervently tried to comfort their father. The grieving man refused any comfort (vv. 19-35). A sign of extreme mourning, Jacob put on sackcloth, coarse cloth made from goat's hair.⁵

Joseph in Egypt

God accompanied Joseph to Egypt—land of pharaohs and idols (39:1-2). The Nile River provided fish, waterfowl, fertile cropland, and reed pastures for cattle.⁶ Though innocent and a slave, Joseph landed in an Egyptian prison. There, he heard two dreams and predicted the release of Pharaoh's cupbearer. The cupbearer left prison but forgot Joseph (39:7-20; 40:12-15).

Two dreams troubled Pharaoh. Seven well-fed cows walked from the Nile River and grazed among the reeds. Seven ugly, thin cows ate the healthy cows. Then, he dreamed about plump and anemic stalks of grain. Pharaoh's cupbearer remembered Joseph, still in the dungeon. The hastily summoned prisoner predicted seven plentiful years, followed by seven lean years. The pleased Pharaoh promoted Joseph over grain storage and gave him a wife. Joseph supervised crops during seven bountiful years and welcomed two sons. Famine arrived. The man who hungered and thirsted in a pit, now sold grain to starving people (37:23-24; 41:37-57).

Family Reunion

One day, ten Israelite brothers bowed before the powerful Egyptian. Joseph recognized these men but decided to test their character. He spoke harshly through an interpreter and accused the travelers of spying. After the brothers endured a brief imprisonment, Joseph listened to their conversation. They feared God and regretted selling their little brother. Joseph requested to see their "youngest brother" on the next trip (42:1-22). Nine puzzled brothers returned home with food and agreed to leave Simeon with the demanding Egyptian grain supervisor.

(Continued on page 132)

