



# FEED MY SHEEP

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## How to practice jubilee forgiveness *Forgiveness, part 8*

In the last issue, I began setting forth how to put the principles of jubilee forgiveness into practice, and thereby how to experience the joy of jubilee forgiveness. We were discussing a little bit about the laws of jubilee to have as a basis upon which to understand what is meant by jubilee forgiveness. I noted that jubilee is related to the laws of sabbath.

The essence of the sabbath is *rest*. In addition to the seventh day rest, many of our Christian friends have no idea that the Bible commands a seventh year sabbath and a 50<sup>th</sup> year sabbath-rest as well.

When Peter was asking our Lord if when his brother offended him over and over again, would seven times be enough of forgiving him? In other words, Peter was probably thinking in the literal mode, that after seven times, Peter could take a rest from forgiving the offender. But Jesus said Peter should forgive him 70 times 7. Seventy times seven equals 490 which was letting literal-minded Peter know that he had to keep on forgiving pretty much indefinitely.

However, 490 is also ten times 49, the jubilee number. Jubilee *by itself* means complete and unconditional forgiveness. What then does ten times 49 mean? Well, I think that Jesus was teaching Peter—and us, by extension—that we must always forgive the offender. Notice that there is nothing in Peter's question to indicate that the offender ever said he was sorry. Was Jesus being mean to Peter by telling him he had to forgive him every time no matter how many times he was offended? Not at all.

On the contrary, Jesus was actually telling Peter this principle for his own good. Remember, the one doing the forgiving in all likelihood gets the greater

blessing. So Peter and we are only hurting ourselves when we refuse to forgive. I brought this passage into the discussion to show you a New Testament connection with jubilee forgiveness.

Now as we go about trying to put into practice the principles of forgiveness, one of the most common questions that arises in the minds of most of us goes something like this: Well, how can I tell when I have truly and completely forgiven an offender? I mean, I *think* I have forgiven so and so, but how do I know for sure?

The answer cannot be given in just a few words—at least not that I have found. Therefore, as we answer this question, we will actually be learning how to practice jubilee forgiveness. We are going to answer this question by bringing into play once again the story of Joseph. We can all agree that Joseph was a jubilee forgiver, can we not? He totally and completely forgave his brothers, didn't he?

So let's review the life of Joseph from the standpoint of forgiveness. As a teenager, Joseph has the double dream. He tells his family about it. His older brothers get very jealous and resentful of Joseph being their father's favorite. They plot to kill him, but ultimately, they end up selling him to slave traders. Joseph becomes a slave in the household of a very important man in the government of Egypt, a man named Potiphar.

Joseph's great administrative abilities are recognized by Potiphar and soon Joseph is put in charge of all the household business. Meanwhile, Potiphar's wife, Zelicah, has been lusting after Joseph and one day, she tries to seduce him. Joseph resists her advances and as a result she accuses him of trying to rape her.

Potiphar has Joseph beaten, thrown in prison and his feet bound with chains. Joseph had much to be bitter about. Man's thoughts go like this: Since I was faithful and resisted that great temptation, then God ought to bless me. But instead Joseph gets sent from being a slave to being a slave in prison!

Let's apply this to our own life. Has there been an occasion or two when you feel you achieved a big spiritual victory, such as resisting an opportunity to commit marital infidelity, such as resisting the temptation to steal something sizable, whether money or property. Surely, we have all been tempted in major ways, and hopefully, by the grace of God, we passed with flying colors.

But then, having passed the test, instead of being blest, did it ever happen to you that God then seems to have pulled the bottom out from under you and you just end up going lower? Has that ever happened to you? I believe I can safely answer that for you. I know how that most of us are hurting in numerous ways at times in various situations of unjust treatment. At that point, we wonder and we cry out to God in our spirit, or maybe even out loud:

"God, what are you doing to me!? I am trying my best to do what is right and this is the thanks I get! I've been trying to serve you—I resisted Zelicah, or whatever your temptation was—and now I lost my job, or perhaps you were in an automobile accident, or perhaps someone close to you has come down with some dread illness, perhaps you yourself are the one afflicted. We feel that "old man" come welling up inside us, the Adamic man, that old carnal nature that wants to scream out at God: "Is this the thanks I get for serving you?"

So let's remember Joseph again. How did he respond? We have to assume that he kept his faith and trust in God, that despite now being unjustly accused of rape and tossed in prison as an innocent man, that Joseph also wondered what was happening and why.

Here I am reminded of what the great English preacher, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was fond of saying: "The worst thing that can happen to a man is for him to succeed before he is ready." Having scrutinized the life of Joseph in a previous series of lectures (see page 4), and in FMS, we can see with perfect hindsight that God was not yet finished preparing Joseph for the tasks which lay ahead. God did not want him to succeed before he was ready.

In the prison, Joseph must have thought every day about the prophetic dreams he had as a teenager, and he must have had many occasions to fantasize about

the day when his brothers would all bow down to him, and boy, he would tell them then! "See, I told you so, but did you guys believe me!? Nooooooo. Well, I'll show you who's boss now." And on and on.

We don't know how long any remnants of that type of carnal thinking may have lingered in Joseph's character, but it is possible that it may still have been there to some small degree even when the baker and the butler were taken back out of the prison. In any event, certain aspects of Joseph's character apparently still needed refining in that furnace of affliction. Perhaps he needed to learn more about dealing with bitterness, resentment, anger and so forth.

Perhaps Joseph needed to learn more about patience, perhaps more about faith and trust in the heavenly Father, perhaps more about longsuffering, perhaps more about jubilee forgiveness—perhaps all of the above, and other virtues as well. But when the time was right in God's timetable, Joseph *would* come forth.

Applying that to ourselves, God has a plan for you and for me. I think we can say that it is not likely that any of us are being prepared to be some sort of high government official as Joseph was, but whatever God's plan is for you, remember that God does not want you to be unprepared either, and so He continues to refine us all just as He did Joseph.

Here's another small but very important lesson from the life of Joseph. After many years in prison, you recall how the baker and the butler were tossed in with Joseph. Then one night they had their weird dreams and Joseph gave them the interpretations. Since the baker was going to be executed, Joseph then asked the butler to put in a good word for him with the Pharaoh. He said to be sure to tell Pharaoh my story, how I was kidnapped and sold into slavery, that I am an innocent man unjustly accused and convicted of a rape I did not commit.

What if Joseph's plan to have the butler intercede for him had been successful? What would Joseph have thought if he had *then* been set free? Well, he would have been able to credit his own wisdom and resourcefulness and God would have been deprived of some of the glory.

You see, Joseph's release had to come about in such a way that it was totally unexpected so that only God would get the credit and it would not be due to Joseph trying to manipulate the situation. So the answer to Joseph's prayer for release from prison was delayed. Here is the lesson for all of us. When it *ap-*

pears that God is not answering our prayers, it may be that He is simply delaying the answer. And that is His answer for us at that time: “Not now, my son,” or “Not yet, my daughter.”

Here are seven practical tips, mostly derived from the story of Joseph, on how to be a jubilee forgiver. You may want to revisit these later as you begin to incorporate them into your daily life. Some of these you will recognize from previous essays which concerned what jubilee forgiveness is and what it is not. 1. Don't tell anyone about how you were offended.

I would suggest there are at least two important exceptions to this. First, if the offender is not your spouse and you and your spouse have a confidante relationship with each other—which is a mark of a good marriage—then by all means feel free to share it with your spouse for mutual support and encouragement as you strive to forgive the offender.

The second exception is when it is important for victims of traumatic crimes or offenses to seek professional help. A woman who is being beaten by her husband, for example, should take action to let someone know, to get outside help. So we are not saying for the victim in such cases to “just keep to yourself, to tell no one, just forgive.” Not at all. It is critically important to let someone know and get appropriate help.

Those are the two exceptions. Now, what we *are* talking about here is illustrated by Joseph when his brothers came to Egypt the second time and Joseph threw the big banquet for them. Then as the brothers prepare to go back to Canaan, Joseph commanded that his divining cup be placed in the mouth of Benjamin's sack, and when the brothers are all brought back before Joseph again, Joseph can't hold himself back anymore, and so what does he do?

**Genesis 45:1 Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.**

That is significant in terms of forgiveness. Joseph did not want any servants, soldiers or any Egyptians or anyone else there except him and his brothers. Why? Because Joseph was virtually the godfather of Egypt. The Egyptians revered him. Had they found out that Joseph's brothers had tried to kill him and were responsible for selling him into slavery, the whole population of Egypt would have hated Joseph's brothers. But Joseph took steps so that no one would ever know. He protected the reputations of his offenders.

Did you know that that is how God treats your sins and mine? When you have confessed your sins, you can rest assured that God is not going to blab them to anybody else. We are all familiar with how banks and insurance companies and internet merchants have statements about our privacy rights? Well, God gave us privacy rights in His statements also. One of those places is in...

**Micah 7:18 Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. 19 He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.**

Here's another...

**Psalms 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.**

No matter where you are on earth, east and west will always be 180 degrees apart, so God is saying that He will protect your privacy that much. No one will ever know.

Now think about Joseph's situation. If Joseph had not already forgiven his brothers, then what a tremendous opportunity for revenge he had. He could have ruined his brothers for life simply by letting it be known outside the family what they had done.

But because Joseph had learned to practice jubilee forgiveness he set them free from that concern. This action that Joseph took to ensure that no one knew what they had done, *that is proof that Joseph had completely forgiven his brothers*. So how do we know if we have completely forgiven someone? That's one way.

Some of you might be thinking, then, well, what about the harshness with which Joseph had treated them up until this time. What was that all about? The answer is that it was a series of tests that Joseph had devised. But... the tests were *not* to determine if he was going to forgive them; he had already done that. The testing was to determine the level of reconciliation he could achieve with them. We will come back to this scene later as we discuss other aspects of practicing jubilee forgiveness.

The flip side of this is to ask, why then, do we tend to blab to others how we have been offended by

so-and-so? Why do we do that? One reason is because we want to punish our offender by hurting his reputation. Such action marks us as a carnal Christian, so let us pray God for His grace to resist that temptation always, shall we?

The second rule on how to practice jubilee forgiveness is “Do not allow your offender to be afraid of you or intimidated by you.” We find this also demonstrated by Joseph.

**Genesis 45:2 And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. 3 And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence.**

Other ways that word “troubled” could have been translated are that the brothers were dismayed or anxious or even terrified at his presence. Joseph had asked them a question. Is my father still alive? But they were petrified with fear and shock so much so that they could not even speak a word.

Picture yourself as one of those brothers who had planned to kill your brother and now after all the harshness he has already put you through with the sacks of grain and keeping Simeon in Egypt and all that, and now this Premier of Egypt reveals to you that he is the very brother you had planned to murder 22 years before. Wouldn't you feel quite a bit of anxiety or even fear and terror at this moment? I know I would. But that is not what Joseph desired for them. He did not want them to fear him.

**4 And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.**

Why did he tell them to come near to him? Obviously because it was a sign of affection. What he really wanted to do was throw his arms around their necks one by one and sob on their shoulders. He knows that he has fully forgiven them. He knows how much he loves them and he only desires their love in return. He does not want them to fear him.

Of course, we can understand their reactions because all they have seen up until this point is that he had accused them of being foreign spies, then of being thieves because of all the money in their sacks which they knew he had put there, and then of the incident with the divining cup, which again they must have realized by now that Benjamin had *not* stolen.

So here is this rather harsh man who says he is

Joseph and who now wants to hug their necks. You can understand why they would be paralyzed with fear.

**1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment [Or alternately, “fear has to do with punishment or correction”]. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.**

Well, these guys are having a hard time coming up with perfect love for Joseph because they have great fear at this point, fear that he will *punish* them. Again, this has direct application to many situations where we can extend forgiveness. We will begin with an example, when we continue next time.

*(To be continued)*

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