



FEED MY SHEEP

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More on how to practice jubilee forgiveness *Forgiveness, part 9*

We left off last time in explaining the second rule on how to practice jubilee forgiveness, which is “Do not allow your offender to be afraid of you or intimidated by you.” We saw an example in the life of Joseph. Now let’s apply that to ourselves.

For example, say someone has offended you and they know it. You have not seen them in a long time. Then suddenly, the two of you meet again. Maybe it’s a family member and you attend a family reunion and there they are.

That first eye contact between the two of you is going to reveal something to both of you. Do you see some hints of dread or anxiety on their face? ...perhaps because they really don’t want to see you, because it is very uncomfortable for them? You have the opportunity to savor the moment and enjoy their discomfort. But is that practicing jubilee forgiveness? No, it is not. It is giving in to those old feelings of anger and resentment, perhaps bitterness. It indicates that we have not really forgiven them.

Instead, at that first eye contact, if we can smile a natural, full-face smile—not a forced smile, a mouth-only smile, but a full-face smile, then that is a good indicator to them and to ourselves that we have truly forgiven that person.

“But they didn’t tell me they’re sorry yet!” someone is sure to be thinking. Ah, but remember, jubilee forgiveness is *unconditional* forgiveness. It does not *require* their repentance. If it does, then it is conditional forgiveness and it is falling short of overcomership. It is not true forgiveness, jubilee forgiveness. Let us remind ourselves of the example of Jesus.

Remember how just before the crucifixion when Peter denied Christ and they all abandoned him out of fear for their lives? Jesus had even prophesied it when He quoted the scripture: I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

Then on resurrection Sunday, all the apostles were locked in a room—again out of fear—when Jesus suddenly appears in their midst. Would they not have been in about as much shock and paralysis as were Joseph’s brothers when he revealed his identity to them? And did not Jesus have the perfect opportunity to lambaste his followers for deserting Him at His hour of greatest need? But instead, what did Jesus say?

John 20:19 ... Peace *be* unto you.

20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them *his* hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.

21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

22 And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

There is not one word of condemnation there, is there? Jesus put them at ease: Peace *be* unto you. Not only did He not condemn them; He gave them Holy Spirit. He gave them a great gift. Had He forgotten what how they had abandoned Him? No, Jesus knew all things; He did not forget literally. But He did forget in the sense that He would never bring it up to use against them. We should do likewise.

In response to my previous teaching on forgiveness,

someone wrote to me asking: “Since God is able to forget our sins and since He is our perfect example, should we not also try to forget (or strive to forget) wrongs done to us? Or, should we forgive but remember so as to avoid a repeat offense in the future?”

In addition to what we just learned from the example of Jesus, we must also remember that when we say forgive and forget, we do not mean to literally forget. Because if it was an offense to cause significant pain, then, chances are we are not ever going to forget it. Does God ever really forget our sins in the sense that he cannot remember something? No.

But as God does, what we mean by forgetting the offense, is that we *choose* to not hold it against them. This does not mean that we ignore the offense, nor that we deny what happened, nor that we trivialize it and all those other things we discussed earlier. But we make a decision of the *will* whereby we choose to not hold it against them. This, too, is illustrated in the holy Scriptures.

2 Corinthians 5:19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

You see, just as Joseph desired a mutual love relationship with his brothers, so our heavenly Father desires a Father-son relationship with us. Paul says in...

Romans 8:15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, *Abba, Father*.

The word *Abba* there is derived from a Scandinavian rock group—or not ☺. Well, actually, there are beautiful prophetic connections having to do with that band and God’s Plan, but *I* cannot give it to you. We would have to ask our brother, Ron Oja (himself a Scandinavian), for a complete download on that sometime. He has a couple of gigabytes in his brain about that. ☺

The word *Abba* is from the Aramaic and it has the connotation of how we use the term “Daddy.” It is a very intimate, personal and affectionate term of endearment. Paul affirms that such is the kind of relationship we can have with our heavenly Father. If you are like me, though, that might not be the easiest thing in the world to attain. I am referring to those of us who have had very bad or non-existent relationships with our human fathers.

In my case, as I came to understand the picture of

God the Father as a young Roman Catholic boy—they may not have intended it this way, but my picture of the Father was of this great big, fearsome king who sat on this huge throne, who was ready to fling you into everlasting hell fire if you didn’t toe the line with the ten commandments, plus all the rules and regulations and commandments of the Catholic church.

I was in nearly perpetual fear of that all my Catholic boyhood. Thank God, He saved me out of that with the true biblical understanding that my eternal salvation is not based upon my works, but upon the shed blood of Jesus alone! Later on, when I came to understand how God will ultimately save all mankind, well, then I could *really* come to that Abba-Daddy relationship with my heavenly Father. Oh, what a wonderful Daddy He is!

Thus far we have discussed two of seven tips on how to practice jubilee forgiveness. Incidentally, I want to give credit where credit is due. I have stated earlier in this series that I would not be drawing any material for this series from the book, *Choosing Forgiveness*, and in fact I have not looked at it for any support in this series. Although we no longer stock that book, I continue to recommend it.

Most of you have been in Sunday School classes where a whole quarter or semester is built around studying the material in one book. Well, when I began this series I had numerous resources available on the subject of forgiveness, and it was not my intent to focus on one book, and overall, I have not.

But I found a book called *Total Forgiveness*. When I had read the two separate Forewords and the Preface, I was gagging so badly from what I was reading to that point, that I nearly trashed the book. But I learned that not only should we not judge a book by its cover, but sometimes we should not even judge a book by its Preface either.

As the Lord compelled me to keep reading, I was so blest by it that these latter parts of this series have been based somewhat on this book. We do not carry the book, but for your information, it was written by R. T. Kendall, who was the pastor of Westminster Chapel in London for 25 years. Many of the ideas for the enumerated items come from this book, and then I have added my own thoughts and illustrations to those of Pastor Kendall.

The third rule for practicing jubilee forgiveness is this: **“We will want our offenders to forgive themselves and not feel guilty.”** Once again, we return to the story of Joseph.

Genesis 45:4 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.

5 Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

Look closely at verse 5. What did Joseph recognize about his brothers? It was that either they already were, or they were going to be grief-stricken and angry—with whom? With Joseph? No, with themselves for what they had done. They were exceedingly remorseful. In this case, they were probably so sorrowful and repentant over what they had done that they could hardly speak the words. You will recall from our readings in the book of Jasher in the *Joseph the Overcomer* series, how it showed their repentance had occurred long ago.

So Joseph is not dealing with unrepentant offenders here, but God ordained this situation so that we can learn another very important aspect of forgiveness; one which we mentioned some time back in this series; namely, the importance of forgiving *ourselves*. Let's address that in more detail.

Does God want us to hate our enemies, our offenders? Jesus charges believers: "but I say unto you, love your enemies." So we are not to hate *others*, but do you think that extends to ourselves? Of course, it does. When we do not forgive ourselves, it is actually self-loathing, self-hatred. Clearly, we must learn to forgive ourselves. What are some of the reasons that we have not forgiven ourselves?

One reason is that we feel guilty even though we confessed the sin. Well, let's be sure we understand the purpose of guilt and that will clear the way so that we can forgive ourselves. Guilt has to do with responsibility for wrongdoing. When we keep a record of the wrongs of others, we are attributing blame to them.

We are assigning to them responsibility for sin. When we feel guilty ourselves, it is because we are keeping a record of our own wrongs. Guilt is a good thing when it serves the purpose for which it was designed. And what is that purpose? Guilt is the method which the Holy Spirit uses in order to convict us of sin, that is, to bring our sins to our conscious attention. Once we are aware of them, we should immediately confess them. My friends, ponder this carefully. Either 1 John 1:9 is true or God is a liar. It says:

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us

from all unrighteousness.

When you confessed whatever sin it was that you still feel guilty about, if your confession was sincere, then simply trust God that you are forgiven. Grab hold of that forgiveness which the Creator of the universe has declared is accomplished. Do you take Him at His word or not? To believe is a gift from God, and if you don't think you have it, then *simply ask Him for it*, and He will not refuse. He wants you to have it; receive it!

Receive forgiveness with gladness! It is a done deal! So thank Him for it. Praise Him for it! Keep doing that until your consciousness is saturated with the fact that you are forgiven. No more guilt. If after all that, the guilt comes back, what then? Well, then I would say that you are keeping a mental scorecard... the one I described in a previous FMS, whether it's a stack of mental index cards or if you imagine it as a kind of ledger sheet in your mind where you keep a record of your own wrongs.

You may have to do as I had to do with my human father 21 years ago. I had to come to a place where I tore up that ledger sheet. Where all his offenses, the sins, the debits that I believed he owed me, where those debits were not only erased, but *the ledger sheet itself no longer existed*. I had to visualize that. Then I was released from unforgiveness towards him. (The whole story is contained in my two CDs, *Could You Forgive God!? My Personal Testimony on Forgiveness*—this pair always free upon request.)

So in review, how do we forgive ourselves? First, by recognizing the purpose of guilt. Secondly, by confessing the sin to God. Thirdly, by accepting God's forgiveness of ourselves, accepting it with an open heart. Fourthly, by not keeping a record of our own wrongs.

Now again, that does not mean that we don't remember them and learn from them. It means we don't continually beat ourselves up over them. If we continue to keep a ledger of our own mistakes, that means we will always feel that we have this mountain of debits (debts) which we must somehow balance out by our own righteousness or good deeds.

We will *never* be able to do that. Now, I'm not talking about restitution here. I'm talking about the fact that our good deeds can never make up for or balance out our sins. Only the blood of Jesus can and did accomplish that. When we feel that we have to punish ourselves, then we are, in effect, believing that Jesus' blood was not enough! We are competing with the atonement, with God Himself who said His blood was

and is sufficient, not only for my and your sins but for the sins of all who have ever or will ever live!

Back in the fourth and fifth centuries some monastic orders began the practice of self-flagellation. These monks made whips and they would go to their cells, take off their robe and whip themselves over the back until they were bloody. All the while they were thinking and believing that such practices would somehow help atone for their sins and earn them “brownie points” with God.

If I am not mistaken, I believe there are a couple of monastic orders which still practice this bizarre behavior of self-flagellation. Their motives may be honest, but they are honestly mistaken in their understanding of God’s mercy and grace. Remember the definitions. **Mercy is not receiving something that we actually deserve**, which is punishment for our sins. **Grace is receiving something we do not deserve**, which is blessings.

So when people think they have to punish themselves for their sins, by whatever means it is: by self-flagellation, by fasting, by praying rosaries, whatever; they are failing to believe that Jesus’ blood was sufficient not only for their sins, but for those of the whole world.

By the way, I condemn self-flagellation because I can see no other reason why people would do it; but I do not condemn fasting in general because many people do it for health reasons and that is a very good thing. It can also have spiritual effects as our temple, our body is being cleansed; but to do it as atonement for your sins is flat-out wrong, a sin in itself, because it is essentially denying the atonement of Christ. Are we clear on that?

One possible sign that we have not forgiven ourselves is when we have difficulty forgiving others. Actually, it is a paradox. I believe that to the degree to which we refuse to forgive others, the more we will be unable to forgive ourselves. By the same measure, the more we refuse to forgive ourselves, the more difficult it will be to forgive others. To experience the joy of jubilee forgiveness, both must happen and I think they happen together.

All of this discussion about forgiving ourselves has been under the third rule for practicing jubilee forgiveness, which is: **“We will want our offenders to forgive themselves and not feel guilty.”**

Let’s not forget that last part. If we are true jubilee forgivers, we will not want our offenders to feel guilty. We shall begin with an example of that next

time—a case that was very prominent in the news some years ago. I am sure my readers will remember it. It is still a stellar example of this third rule of practicing jubilee forgiveness.

(To be continued.)

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