



FEED MY SHEEP

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Further tips on how to be a true (jubilee) forgiver *Forgiveness, part 10*

If we are true jubilee forgivers, we will not want our offenders to feel guilty. I have had in my files for many years this clipping of a letter to the editor. The date and newspaper are irrelevant. Since the winter Olympics are once again just around the corner, I thought this was a timely illustration because it refers to the Olympics of exactly 24 years ago. Do you remember the incident when ice skater Tonya Harding apparently had some thugs attack her competitor Nancy Kerrigan? Well, this letter is headlined "Tonya Harding's TV plea for forgiveness fails to thaw Nancy Kerrigan." It reads:

"I watched the Olympics in 1994 and remember the turmoil associated with the attack on figure skater Nancy Kerrigan. I remember Kerrigan's poor sportsmanship after she was beaten by Oksana Baiul. Last week, as I watched the special on Fox about the stars of women's figure skating and the much-awaited interview of Kerrigan and Tonya Harding, I could not help but remember the 1994 comments about Baiul as much as, if not more than, the attack.

"Kerrigan said in the interview the attack was in the past, she has started a new life with her husband and child and she doesn't think of the attack every day. However, when she was asked about forgiveness and whether she could find it in her heart to forgive Harding, the same coldness and inappropriate attitude returned. Yes, Kerrigan was hurt; there is no doubt about that. Yes, Harding, while she denies knowing about the planning of the attack, played a part in it. However, the difference is in their lives since 1994. Kerrigan has succeeded where Harding has failed. Harding not only has to face the fact she obstructed justice, but she also lost her friends in the sport and the career it took years to build. Don't get me wrong; I am not pleading Harding's

case or claiming she is a victim. But when Harding asked to be forgiven and indicated she is sorry for what had occurred, Kerrigan forgot her own words spoken earlier about moving on with her life and showed the same lack of compassion and sincerity that has become her trademark.

"The ice around Nancy Kerrigan's heart and her attitude thawed not one bit. Although my family and I watch almost every figure-skating competition broadcast on television, I lost some respect for Kerrigan following her comments after the 1994 Olympics. What little respect I had left is gone following her joint TV appearance with Harding. Not only do I feel sorry for Tonya Harding and the role she played, not to mention the waste of her talent, but I also feel sorry for Nancy Kerrigan. She has, once again, shown me why I was happy she did not win the gold medal in 1994 as she certainly is not the ideal athlete and does not exemplify the spirit or sportsmanship that should be embodied in every Olympic athlete."

I feel sorry for them both, too, don't you? Nancy is withholding forgiveness from Tonya. Why? Because she is angry and bitter and wants Tonya to continue to feel pain, and so if she can continue to make her feel guilty, that's what she wants to do. I feel sorry for Nancy because she is stuck in anger and bitterness.

I feel sorry for Tonya, too, because of her very public sin against Nancy and her missed opportunities that the letter-writer alluded to. But on the other hand, Nancy's unforgiveness is in turn presenting Tonya with a golden opportunity to practice jubilee forgiveness herself. Tonya is being hurt and offended by Nancy's unforgiveness and so that gives Tonya a chance to forgive Nancy. Interesting situation, isn't it?

Now back to Joseph. Joseph did not want his offenders to feel guilty. And so by the inspiration of God, Joseph gave them a reason why they should not feel guilty. Listen again.

Genesis 45:5 Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

In other words, Joseph is setting the captives free. His brothers could be held in bondage to guilt and shame all their lives, but Joseph gives them a reason whereby they can be free of their guilt and shame. He explains there was a good purpose that God had in mind for all of these events, including their selling him into bondage. Joseph certainly was not ignoring the offense; nor was he blind to it. Was he trivializing the offense? No. By telling them that God did it in order to preserve life, was Joseph denying that the brothers had done wrong? Not at all, because later on, 17 years later, after the death of Jacob, Joseph tells them.

Genesis 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

So Joseph did not forget the evil that had been done; but he did forget about it in the sense that he chose not to hold it against them. Paul presents us with a verse of similar intent in

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Clearly though, it would be a grave misunderstanding, not to mention presumption, to choose to sin because God will work it all out for good anyhow. Joseph shows us that we can acknowledge that wrong has been done and yet we can seek to free people from having perpetual guilt about it. Of course, I cannot give you the words to say for any and every conceivable situation, and so when you are in such a situation, you will need to ask Abba-Father to reveal to you how and what to say when you are in a situation where some one who has offended you seeks forgiveness.

Nevertheless, the general principles for you to follow, we have given here: Once again, they are: 1. Acknowledge that there was an offense committed and 2. It does not excuse the sin, but I recognize that it was all part of God's Plan and that He will ultimately bring good out of it.

Next, the fourth rule in practicing jubilee forgiveness is: **"We will let them save face."**

This is actually going a step beyond the previous rule. In the previous rule, we free our offender from guilt; that is, we help them to remove something negative. In this step, we uphold their dignity, and if they don't have any, we find a way to give them some. We help to build them up.

I have seen this happen and it is beautiful. I am not going to mention any names here or even give you any specifics—*our privacy policy*, you know—but I have been in circumstances where there is an individual present whom I had considered despicable because I knew certain things about him. That was my carnality, my old man at work there, and I was silently ashamed as another person—who obviously had to put some thought and effort into it because there was nothing to like about the despicable person *that I could see*—but this other person came up with something with which to compliment the individual and grant him a dignity of sorts.

The person whom I had thought despicable then reacted favorably in response to the graciousness that had been shown to him. As I said, it was a beautiful thing to see, and it was a valuable lesson for me. James, go and do likewise! We find another beautiful example of this in the story of Joseph. Let us observe now how Joseph allowed his brothers to save face.

Genesis 45:5 Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

6 For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest.

7 And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

8 So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

Do you see that? A minute ago, Joseph told them not to be angry with themselves. Don't feel guilty about it anymore. The guilt had served its purpose. Now Joseph is giving them something to feel good about. "Hey, listen, my brothers, what you did wasn't right, but at the same time, that was God's Plan for getting me down here to Egypt so he could use me to save your lives and that of all Egypt." In that manner, Joseph is trying to build up self-esteem in his brothers, not to send them on a perpetual guilt trip.

Rule number five for practicing jubilee for-

giveness is: “We will protect them from their greatest fear.”

Even after Joseph had told his brothers not to feel guilty, and besides this was all in God’s Plan, we can imagine that Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Issachar and the rest of the gang are beginning to feel better about themselves. They are relieved that Joseph is not going to throw them into a pit as they had done to him. They are relieved that he is not going to have them executed for initially planning to kill him. But they can hardly believe that he is not only *not* going to punish them, but here he is weeping for joy with them and hugging their necks.

But after this initial joy and happiness with him wore off, and the brothers began to think about the whole turn of events, what do you suppose the brothers were most afraid of? Right! ...of being exposed, of their sin being made public. They were afraid the Egyptians would find out. But as we have already noted, Joseph had sent the Egyptians and even the interpreter out of the room before he revealed himself to his brothers! So he took pains to make sure the Egyptians would not find out. And he no doubt, when it was necessary—if they ever questioned him again: “Joey, you’re really not going to tell the Egyptians, are you?”—that Joey reassured his brothers that he would never reveal their sin.

But now think about this: Joseph had also begun to make plans to have his father move the whole clan down to Egypt, so was the brothers’ greatest fear merely of the Egyptians learning of their sin? Or was the possibility of someone else finding out actually the greatest fear of the brothers?

Yes, father Jacob. It was *he*, above everyone else, whom the brothers did not want to find out what they had done. At the moment, I do not recall in our study of the story of Joseph whether or not Jasher is specific on this issue. I don’t think there is any record that Jacob found out what they had done. However, there are probably some students who might conclude that the brothers need to confess that sin to their father and ask for his forgiveness.

Let’s examine that question. Joseph was 17 years old when he was lost. It has now been 22 years since then—all this time Jacob thinking that Joseph was dead and gone. Now he is about to learn that not only is Joseph alive, but that he is the prime minister of Egypt. Oh, what joy the old man will experience. Notice that Joseph tells the brothers exactly what to say when they get home.

Genesis 45: 9 Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not:

10 And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast:

Now let your eyes skim over verses 11, 12, and all the way down to... Verse 13: ... tell my father of all my glory in Egypt. Verse 14, 15; he weeps as he hugs and kisses his brothers. And so they arrive back home, and in verse 26...

26 And told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not.

27 And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived:

Remember, Jacob is now 130 years old. And he could barely handle this fantastic and miraculous good news. But then, are the brothers supposed to hit him with such devastating news?... That they were responsible for 22 years of agony that their father suffered. What purpose will that serve?

Such news given to a man of those years might well be enough to cause in him—or any man—such immediate anger, rage, resentment, and bitterness over his sons robbing him of all those years he could have had with Joseph, that the stress could kill him. Then, how would the brothers feel? How would Joseph feel?

What I am saying is that sometimes it is prudent and wise to not confess to the injured party, if doing so will likely cause greater harm. Because once a sin has been confessed to God, it is covered under the blood and it is forgiven. Notice Psalm 51. One little part of this psalm became clear to me as I was preparing this teaching. This is the psalm David wrote after his great sin in the Bathsheba incident. And so when he confesses to God, David says...

Psalm 51:4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

I always wondered, Wait a minute. It seems to me David sinned against Bathsheba also, and he sinned against Uriah when he had him killed. But now I think I understand that this is a case like Joseph and his

brothers, where the sin is dealt with without having all the participants ever knowing about the awfulness of the sin. It is confessed to God and that is it.

I mean, as far as we can tell, David and Bathsheba had a very close marriage. She was probably his favorite wife because it was her son Solomon who succeeded David. There is no record in Scripture and I do not think that David ever confessed to Bathsheba that he had her first husband murdered so that he could marry her. What good purpose would that serve? There are many conceivable applications to this principle today. In other words, there are many situations where one has committed a sin where it might be wise and prudent *not* to confess to the injured party. This would be in situations where the injured party is up to *this* point ignorant of your sin.

For some decades, a man named Bill Gothard built quite a large ministry and has produced some excellent material. It is presented in many formats but primarily in day-long seminars, seminars over a week-end, and even week-long seminars. I and my (then) young family attended quite a few, including the week long program. Most of his material is tremendous and has changed many lives, including mine. That doesn't mean he is always correct in everything he teaches, of course.

When home schooling first began, he was against it and over a period of a couple of years it was interesting to see how his opinion and teaching changed until he become a tremendous advocate for home schooling. He also had some great material on forgiveness and I had originally planned to use it as partial source material for these lectures, but it didn't work out that way. Anyhow, I remember hearing Mr. Gothard teach that if a husband or wife had had an affair, and it has been over with for many years, that the husband or wife should definitely confess it to their spouse.

However, I have read in Christian counseling books just the opposite opinion. That it may do more harm than good. It would be very similar to both the Bathsheba and the Jacob situations. Say you and your wife have been married 30 or 40 years and things are relatively good between you. Then one day you spring the news on her: "Oh, by the way, guess what honey. I was unfaithful to you with so-and-so about 25 years ago, and I just wanted you to know so that you could forgive me."

Or worse, if your marriage is not so good or if it is currently undergoing some severe stress, and you dump that kind of load onto your mate, I would say your chances of healing just went down the tube. Of course, it goes without saying that if there is a string

of affairs or a long-term affair, that might very well be a major part of the present severe stress. The sin must stop—now! In short, pray about whether your situation requires confession to the innocent party who is unaware of the sin. Ponder the question: what good purpose will it serve? If necessary, seek some independent, outside counsel on the situation before you spill the beans, because obviously, once it is done, the damage is irreversible.

Next issue we will continue with rule number six in practicing jubilee forgiveness: **"It is a life-long commitment."**

(To be continued.)

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