

From Bitter to Better: Choosing to Forgive

Lesson 1

Genesis 37:1-36, 39:1-20

July 19, 2020

Obeying When Things are Wrong

Introduction

The story of Joseph takes up more space in the book of Genesis than any other story. This detail is remarkable given the significance of the other characters of the book, including Noah, Adam, Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph's father: Jacob. The story itself is a narrative not only of God's sovereignty and intervention but is also a story of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Joseph was gifted at a young age with charisma, looks, leadership, and prophecy. These qualities cause his brothers to jealously betray him and Potiphar's wife to accuse him of rape wrongfully. As a result, his young life is filled with trial after trial, including prison and slavery.

Through it all though, Joseph remains obedient to God's call and chooses thankfulness and forgiveness rather than bitterness and hatred. As a result, he can save not only his own family but also the entire nation of Egypt.

We can take a lesson from Joseph about remaining obedient through trials and remembering that God is glorified when we choose to be grateful rather than resentful.

Memory verse: "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."—Luke 6:37

Pray and read Genesis 37:1-36, 39:1-20. What questions or observations do you have about these passages?

What do the passages say?

1. Why did Jacob love Joseph more than his brothers? (Genesis 37:3)
2. How did Joseph's brothers feel about him when Joseph was young? (Genesis 37:4-5, 11)
3. How did Joseph's brothers rationalize their actions? (Genesis 37:21-22, 27)
4. Where did Joseph's brothers throw him? (Genesis 37:24)
5. How did Joseph end up as a slave to Potiphar? (Genesis 37:27, 36)
6. Why did Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his entire household? (Genesis 39:3-4)
7. How did Joseph respond when Potiphar's wife tempted him? (Genesis 39:7-10)

What does the passage mean?

1. What do we know about Reuben's character from his responses to his brother's actions? (Genesis 37:21-22, 29-30, 42:22)
2. God gave Joseph a great gift. Compare the reaction to it when he used it with his brothers and father and when he used it with Pharaoh. Why were there different reactions to what Joseph said? (Genesis 37:8-10, 41:37-43)
3. What are the ways that God used Joseph in this story? (Genesis 39:5b, 41:16, 41:28-31, 45:25-28)
4. What did God do for Joseph during each of these changes? (Genesis 39:2, 5a, 23)

Applying the passage

1. Because of his brothers' betrayal, Joseph spent much of his adult life as a slave and in prison. Instead of becoming bitter and angry, Joseph honored God and used the gifts that God had given him to help those around him. Think for a few minutes about times that you've felt betrayed by friends or family. Were you able to not become bitter and angry? How were you able to focus on God and his gifts during this time?

2. Potiphar, the prison guard, and eventually Pharaoh himself put Joseph into positions of high responsibility because they recognized his abilities and how the Lord had blessed him. When have you seen friends or family members that trust in the Lord be given more responsibility because they were proven to be capable and trustworthy? How does our trust in the Lord correlate to blessings at work and in our livelihoods?

3. Sometimes we disobey God out of jealousy and anger even when we know what God wants of us. Reuben knew the right thing to do and objected when his brothers threw Joseph in the cistern, but he still went along with their wicked plan. Joseph, on the other hand, made the most of the gifts that God had given him, despite what his brothers did to him. Pray for a few minutes to ask God to reveal any anger or jealousy that you might be harboring. Write down whatever the issue is and pray again to ask Jesus to soften your heart, so that you can respond to God out of obedience rather than bitterness. (Genesis 37:23-30)