



# gracefellowship

Joseph: Living Between Dreams and Reality

May 6, 2018

“A Painful Past”

:: Genesis 42:1-17 (don't read yet)

If you had been mistreated by someone- hurt severely – then became powerful beyond your dreams, when you saw that person again, what would you do?

I know we are in church, but be honest! Would you want to get revenge? Would you be forgiving? Would you avoid the person altogether?

That's the position Joseph finds himself in as we continue our study. Last week we read about the dreams Pharaoh had and Joseph's interpretations of those dreams: 7 years of prosperity were coming followed by 7 years of severe famine. Joseph laid out a plan for Pharaoh that would allow the Egyptians to store up grain during the 7 good years and use that food during the years of famine. Pharaoh was so impressed by Joseph that he put him in charge of all Egypt! The famine not only affects Egypt, the entire Mediterranean world is impacted, including the land of Canaan, where Joseph's family lives.

**:: Genesis 42:1-17**

A cursory reading of this text may appear like Joseph is bullying his brothers and picking on them for their past actions toward him- like he is holding a grudge. But that isn't what is really happening. Joseph is trying to ascertain whether or not the hearts and minds of his brothers have changed or if they are still the same wicked men he knew as a boy. I don't think we should read this as Joseph in the role of a powerful bully manipulating a situation for his own personal satisfaction. Rather, he is testing his brother's character to see if he can trust them.

- Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies and then he imprisons them, demanding they bring their younger brother to him. Benjamin is now in the same spot as the favored son- the biological full brother of Joseph and the last child of Rachel. 20 years prior, when Joseph was the youngest brother in the family and the favorite of his father, these men had despised him and their hatred for Joseph led them to sell him into slavery. Now, he wants to see how they treat his younger brother, Benjamin.

- After 3 days in prison, to give them a taste of what he had experienced in his life, Joseph lets them all go- except one- Simeon. He passes over Reuben, the oldest, because Reuben had tried to save him all those years ago. (vs. 22-23)

The brothers see all of this and recognize it as punishment for their sin against Joseph. Their past has caught up to them!

**Life Lesson: The sinful actions of our life have consequences for our future.**

You may think you are getting away with something, but Scripture offers a warning:

**:: Numbers 32:23b**

**23 ...you may be sure your sin will find you out.**

The past has a nasty habit of coming back to haunt us, doesn't it?

Illustration: David and Bathsheba

David must have thought he got away with his sins. He had slept with and impregnated a woman named Bathsheba, who was not his wife; devised a plan to have her husband killed in battle so he could marry her, and thought he had done a good job of covering his tracks. But after approximately a year, the prophet Nathan confronted David about his sins. The child born to him died and David was broken from his guilt.

How did David respond when his sin caught up with him?

**:: Psalm 51:1-17**

**1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.**

**2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.**

**3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.**

**4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.**

**5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.**

**6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.**

**7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.**

**8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.**

**9 Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.**

**10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.**

**11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.**

**12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.**

**13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.**

**14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.**

**15 Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise.**

**16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.**

**17 My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.**

That's a pretty extreme situation. Maybe you haven't done something that crazy in your past to fear it catching up with you. But your story may be more like Peter. Peter had promised to never leave Jesus when he was told Jesus was going to be arrested and crucified- he even promised to die for him! But when the time came, Peter ran away. Then he followed Jesus at a distance to his trial, but when he was identified he lied about knowing Jesus and denied him three times- just as Jesus had predicted. Peter left that situation feeling like a failure and he went back to what he knew before he started following Jesus: fishing. His failure of Jesus haunted him. He had lied; he had rejected Jesus; he had abandoned his faith. But Jesus came to him after his resurrection and forgave Peter. Jesus gently restored Peter and gave him responsibility to lead the church.

Question: Has something from your past ever caught up with you? What did you do?

- Grieve
- Hide
- Fight it/Justify it
- Repent and Recover

I want to take a minute here to encourage you with something many people struggle with. There is a prevailing thought that as Christians we are supposed to be perfect. So, when we sin it feels as if we have lost the favor of God and we convince ourselves God could never really love us the way he says.

I want you to hear this clearly:

**You don't disappoint God!**

**You are not alone in your sinfulness.**

How many times have you convinced yourself that you're the only one who sins- all the other people in our church are perfect? All of us are sinful and are fighting every day to honor God and to live according to His righteous ways.

**For believers in Jesus: Repent for restoration in your relationship with God.**

**:: Acts 3:19**

**19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord...**

**For non-believers: Repent for reconciliation (salvation).**

God is drawing you in as you recognize your sinfulness.

**:: 2 Corinthians 5:20-21**

**20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.**

**21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

When God's Spirit convicts you of sin, seek His forgiveness and enter His love!

**Life Lesson: Be careful not to think you are impervious to the consequences of sin.**

Let's get back to the story of Joseph. Joseph's harsh imprisonment of his brothers wasn't out of hate for what they had done, it was out of love to discover who they had become and could be. Joseph is testing them to see if they have changed as a result of their past.

- God does the same thing to us when we sin. The discipline of God may seem unfair or even harsh at times. But as we are maturing in our faith, I believe we need to see God's discipline of our sin as a loving action to correct us and bring us back to place of obedience.

**:: Hebrews 12:5-11**

**5 And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,**

**6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."**

**7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?**

**8 If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.**

**9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live!**

**10 They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.**

**11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.**

**:: Revelation 3:19**

**19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.**

Honestly, you need to be more concerned if you are living in open sin against God and He is not disciplining you! That's a way scarier prospect to be facing!

Let me remind you, or inform you of something else: The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin; the devil condemns us when we sin.

Whose voice are you listening to? If it's convicting, it's from God. If it's condemning, it's Satan.

God always acts for our good, even when he has to do something that feels like punishment to get our attention!

Illustration: I love my sons and want what is best for them. So, when they do something inappropriate, I discipline them. When my kids were little I asked them once to tell me about a time they remember me getting really upset and punishing them. I thought they would come up with a thousand examples- because they did a lot of things wrong! But neither of them really remembered anything. Now, to be sure, they were disciplined. And it wasn't fun at the time. But because we always back it up with love, they didn't seem to remember the pain of those moments. It's for their good!

God is very much like that with us. And Joseph is doing the same thing with his brothers. He let them experience the fear he felt. He chained them up. He let them feel the anguish of thinking they weren't going to return to their families. Then he watched to see how their character had changed.

**:: Genesis 42:21-24**

**21 They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us."**

**22 Reuben replied, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood."**

**23 They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.**

**24 He turned away from them and began to weep, but then came back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.**

Joseph's brothers recognize their past is causing their current crisis and they show remorse. They have connected the dots. Joseph hears the way his brothers talk about their sin toward him and he breaks down privately. Then he sends them on their way, keeping Simeon captive while the rest go to retrieve their brother, Benjamin.

But Joseph has one more test for them: He puts the silver they paid for the grain back in their pouches along with the grain. When the brothers stop for the night, one finds his

silver and it freaks them out! When they get home they realize all of them have their silver!

The last image Joseph has of his brothers as a 17 year old is them being handed 20 pieces of silver as payment for him. The brothers had spared his life, not out of love for him, but out of greed- they found a way to profit from his life.

Through this whole process Joseph has been testing their character. Now they have two problems in returning to Egypt: They must return with Benjamin and it appears they have stolen their silver from Joseph.

**:: Genesis 42:27-28**

**27 At the place where they stopped for the night one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack.**

**28 “My silver has been returned,” he said to his brothers. “Here it is in my sack.” Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, “What is this that God has done to us?”**

As the brothers feel more and more weight from their past catching up to them they Bible says they turned to each other.

Let me ask you a question: Where do you turn when sin catches up to you?

- You may turn to a friend, your spouse, an accountability partner or any number of things, but I want you to know this morning that God is waiting for you to turn to Him. When your past catches up to you your view of God will determine how you respond to his discipline.
  - Fearfulness of God causes us to run away from Him.
  - Faith in God causes us to run back to Him.

Next week will talk about doing the right thing, even when it's hard. Will the brothers be men of integrity, or cowards who only look after themselves?

Discussion Questions:

Read Genesis 42 together as a group or have someone from your group tell it as a story and then rebuild it as a group.

1. What is something in your life you get away with?
2. What do you do when your past catches up to you?
3. What is God doing in your life when your past catches up to you?
4. What does repentance look like in your personal relationship with God?
5. How do you keep a view of God as a loving Father even as He is disciplining you?