

**"FORGIVEN. FORGIVING. AND FREE."**

**March 8, 2015**

**Ephesians 4:31-5:1**

**CORE- One of the greatest causes of iniquity—passing the effects of sin from generation to generation—is maintaining an offended heart. The most powerful way to stop iniquity in its tracks is forgiveness.**

*[Something powerful happens within us as we learn to receive His unconditional love. Something equally as powerful occurs as we learn to give it away.]*

### **1. PUT AWAY BITTERNESS**

- **Bitterness is "resentful thinking—born out of being hurt."**
  - **"Resentment"—"to re-sense"; to rehearse & experience the feeling over-and-over." (Lit.- to continually send the message)**
  - **"Bitterness" is the root that produces "rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice" (v. 31)**
- **"Put away"—a decisive choice; "Do it NOW!" (strong word); don't hold onto it one second longer—far from a passive word.**
- **"Bitterness" is a state of mind in which you think and feel; "brooding" over a wrong done to you (recent or decades ago)**
  - **I.e., a "brooding hen"—focused on nothing else but to "hatch" a plan for revenge; Returning to & replaying a hurt again & again.**
  - **The one we think we are paying back is usually unaffected; we are actually punishing ourselves (*Infirmity & insanity*)**

**Until we "put it away", we develop an ungodly pattern of dealing with hurts. We must learn Jesus' way of HANDLING HURTS.**

### **2. BITTERNESS is rooted in BELIEVING THE LIE**

**"You shall be AS God." I'm in control of punishment. [Vengeance is mine. It's my responsibility to protect myself and "get even."]**

**JOSEPH (Genesis 37-50) was an abused child.**

- **Born into a dysfunctional family. Four wives. Four families and one father. Tension. Jealousy.**
- **Joseph's mother was the only one Jacob really wanted. Joseph was the favorite son of the favorite wife.**
- **He was further abused by his father's "spoiling" him. His brothers hated him. He's given the coat that belonged to Reuben (the first born)...the coat of the next chief. At a very young age, put in a role he was not equipped for.**

- His brothers sold him (**human trafficking**). His brothers (for the next 25 years) are haunted by the memory of Joseph's terrified screams.

**If Joseph had lived like a victim** ("Poor me! My life stopped when they did this to me!"), **we never would have heard of him again**. He would have easily given himself to Potiphar's wife—suffered the consequences—and died a very lonely man.

**YET, HE FORGAVE!**

### **3. More than WILLPOWER, FORGIVENESS can ONLY be done in the POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

- Paul refers to it as being "strengthened with all power according to His glorious might" (Colossians 1:11)
  - Lit.- "empowered with power"
  - Like raising the dead (or any other miracle) this, too, is a sign & wonder as we are empowered to forgive and love our enemies.

### **4. He EMPOWERS us to overcome the OBSTACLES to FORGIVENESS.**

- Some are afraid to forgive—fearing they will become a "doormat". Afraid they will falsely justify the "wrong" that's been done to them.
- Others think forgiveness means denying that you've been hurt. (*i.e., "I guess I just overreacted."*)

**NOTE: You can't forgive anyone unless you admit that they hurt you!**

- Being a Christian is not "not getting hurt"—it's what you do with the hurt!
- Years later, when Joseph was the prime minister of Egypt, he said (25 years after they kidnapped him), "You MEANT IT FOR EVIL" (You set out to hurt me).
- "Forgive us our debtors" (they owe us something; stolen my reputation; robbed me of peace). We must acknowledge the hurt—the debt!

### **5. FORGIVENESS IS RELEASING A PERSON INTO THE HANDS OF GOD.**

- It's why Joseph said (*when they begged for his mercy*), "Am I God?" No, I have given you to Him. You are out of my hands.
- The word, "forgive," means to "send away; to release a person". (I AM NOT GOING TO BE THE JUDGE ANY MORE. No longer plot your revenge.)

**JUSTICE SAYS, "SOMEONE HAS TO PAY FOR THIS."**

**Forgiveness hears the voice of Jesus say, "I HAVE PAID FOR THIS."**

## 6. We struggle to forgive when we lose sight of our forgiveness

Note: Religious pride sets in telling us we "weren't so bad"

**Stephen** did this while being executed: "**Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.**"

- When we forgive, **sanity replaces insanity.**
- We **get out of God's way** as He works on the hearts of our abusers
- By this one act of forgiveness, **Stephen released Saul** of Tarsus **to God**, trusting Him to work in Saul's life (*What a powerful impact! May be the reason this story is included in the Bible.*)

**BUT when we do not forgive, we misrepresent the Gospel.** (*We say, "In Christ, all the sins of the world can be forgive—except what you've done against me."*)

### WHAT DO WE DO?

#### **1. ASK GOD TO FORGIVE YOU FOR THE BITTERNESS YOU HAVE HELD AGAINST THE OTHER PERSON**

**2. GET ALONE WITH GOD & BEGIN TO DEAL WITH THIS.** Come out of denial and admit that you have been hurt...and angry...and release those people to God.

**3. ASK THE HOLY SPIRIT TO POUR HIS LOVE INTO ALL THE HURTS.** (i.e., people with notebooks full of crossed off names of those they have forgiven...releasing a whole lifetime of hurts into the hands of Jesus)

**4. RE-WRITE THE STORY OF YOUR LIFE.** God was there all the time. Go back and see where He was at work. Joseph (Genesis 50)--"**And the Lord was with Joseph...what you intended for evil—God used for good**" (Joseph wrote this story!!!)

**God can take the biggest hurts and make them the biggest blessings—sources of healing to others.**