

What is the most difficult thing in the world to do? Do you know what it is? Joseph did it. Lots of people would look at Joseph and say, "wow, Joseph went from being in prison to being in charge of Egypt - that must be the most difficult thing in the world to do - to become the king or the president of a country or something like that." But no, that's not it.

One of the most difficult things in the world to do is to forgive someone. Someone hurts you. And you're supposed to forgive him. Someone destroys your reputation by spreading lies about you behind your back. And you're supposed to forgive him. Someone hurts your mom or your dad or your sister, and you're supposed to forgive him. This is one of the hardest things in the world to do. Can you do this? We talk about this all the time in the Lord's Prayer, "forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against you." But it's not easy. Your best friend shares all your secrets with everyone, and now everyone is laughing at you and making fun of you - and you're supposed to forgive that person who's not your best friend after all? Let's look at the thought today: Forgive As God In Christ Forgave You!

It might be the biggest and most overlooked aspect of the story of Joseph. Everyone focuses on how Joseph went from nothing to the second command in Egypt, and that is an amazing story. But what he did with his brothers, the fact that he forgave them - that might be an even more amazing part of this story. Could you do what Joseph did?

Just put yourself in Joseph's shoes for a second. When Joseph was your age - a teenager - all of his brothers hated him. He was not part of their group. His father loved him and gave that special coat to him. But his brothers couldn't stand him. He was an outcast in his own family. Have you ever felt like an outcast before - people being jerks to you for really no reason? Imagine being Joseph - nobody likes you. And then one day, your own brothers throw you into a hole in the ground and sell you to some total strangers. And you are put onto a wagon, tied up, and taken to a foreign land. Your brothers hate you that much. And after that happens, your life goes on a roller coaster - you're a slave for a government official, then you're falsely accused and thrown in jail. And you're sitting in jail in a foreign land - and this is what your brothers did to you.

Would you forgive them? Joseph went through all of that, and now he was the second in command in Egypt, by the grace of God, and his brothers were all standing before him. And the Bible says that they were scared out of their minds - "his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence." They knew what they deserved. But Joseph gave them something that they did not deserve. He gave them mercy. He gave them grace. He forgave them.

And as we listen to what Joseph says, we find out how he was able to do this - he told his brothers not to be angry at themselves for doing bad things to him. And here's why "because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you." Joseph understood that God was ultimately watching over this whole situation. God used their evil for something good. Joseph understood that the bad things that his brothers did to him were part of a bigger plan to save lives. God knew that eventually there would be a terrible famine that would kill millions of people. God knew that Jacob's family - the very family from which the Savior would come - would be wiped out by that famine. And so God had a plan that he would save all those millions of people and the special Savior-family through one man - Joseph. That was God's plan. Joseph understood that, and it helped Joseph to forgive his brothers: "But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a

remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance."

But what really is forgiveness? **1. Real forgiveness is relinquishing my right to get even.** This is the heart of real forgiveness. You don't seek revenge. The Bible says it like this in Romans 12:19, "*Never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. For He has said that He will repay those who deserve it.*" One day, God is going to have the last word. One day, God is going to settle the score. One day, God is going to right the wrong. One day, God is going to balance the ledger. So you let God settle the score. You forgive so there can be peace in your heart and you can get on with your life, and you leave the justice part to God. Who can do a better job of justice? Who can do a better job of getting even? You or God? Who has more ways at His disposal of righting wrongs, you or God? The starting point is to relinquish my right to get even.

2. Responding to evil with good. The Bible says it like this in Luke 6:27-28, "*Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you.*" Circle those three verbs – "do good," "bless," and "pray for." That's part of forgiveness. You return good for evil. How do you know when you've genuinely forgiven somebody? You actually start praying for them. You also understand their hurt. You start seeing their hurt. Hurt people hurt people. When people are hurting inside, they take it out on others. That parent who hurt you a lot, they were hurting a lot. They were hurting in all kinds of ways. When you learn to forgive, you can not only see your own hurt, but you see their hurt, too. Then you start to understand why they acted in such evil or selfish or hurtful or abusive ways. You can pray for them.

How can I do this? **3.** The motivation to do so is:

3. Remember how much I've been forgiven. That's the secret. Remember how much I've been forgiven by God. I'm not spotless. I'm not blameless. I've hurt a lot of people in my life. And so have you. The Bible says in Genesis 32:10, "I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant."

Every day you and I slap God in the face. We do things that hurt Him. The Bible says, "There is no one righteous, not even one. And so we come to God and say, Forgive us our sins. We are asking God for the sake of Jesus not to look upon our sins. The Psalmist put it well when he said, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions."

We were forgiven, not because we deserved it. Not because we earned it. Not because we balance it out with good works. Not because we promised never to sin again, but because of the grace of God. His son Jesus dying for our trespasses or sins. Remember how much we've been forgiven by God. This is the secret to forgiveness. Let's now look at what forgiveness is not.

4. It isn't conditional. In other words, it's not based on somebody else's response. Real forgiveness is unconditional. It's not earned. It's not deserved. It's not bargained for. It's not paid for. It's not based on some promise that you'll never do it again. If you say to someone "I'll forgive you if..." that's not forgiveness. That's called bargaining. "I forgive you if..." is not forgiveness at all. Genuine forgiveness is unconditional.

5. Forgiveness is not minimizing the seriousness of the offense. It's not saying, "It's not a big deal." Or "It's OK. It didn't really hurt me." Or if somebody tries to ask forgiveness, you say, "Don't worry about it. It's no big deal. It didn't hurt." That is not forgiveness. What

if your child or grandson was killed in the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando On June 12th, 2016. Would you say to Omar Mateen, the mass murderer of 49 people there, It's no big deal. That's not forgiveness. That's called insanity. Minimizing what had happened. That is not forgiveness. The offense hurt us. It hurt deeply. It was not ok what Omar did to those people.

6. It isn't resuming a relationship. This is one of the most misunderstood concepts about forgiveness. Forgiveness is not the same as restoring a relationship. Some of you are afraid to forgive because you're afraid you're going to have to go back with that person. And you'll have to be their best friend again or you'll have to remarry them or whatever. No, restoring relationship and forgiveness are two different things, the Bible teaches. Forgiveness is instant. Trust must be built over a long period of time. The Bible says that those are two different things. Forgiveness takes care of the damage done. It just lets the person off the hook. You let them go – scott free. But it doesn't guarantee that the relationship will be restored. Those are two different issues.

7. Forgiveness is not forgetting what happened. You've all heard the cliché “Forgive and forget”. Isn't that nice? It sounds so sweet! Forgive and forget. The only problem is it's impossible to do. It's impossible. In the first place, it's impossible to try to forget something. You can't try to forget anything. When you're trying to forget something, what are you focusing on? The very thing you want to forget. And whatever you focus on, you tend to move toward. You can't try to forget anything. You have to try to put something in its place.

I want to say, though, is that there's something better than forgetting. This will take you to a new level of spiritual maturity. There's something better than forgetting. It's remembering but realizing how God can bring good even out of bad. You can't thank God for something you've forgotten. Thank God that even though this terrible thing happened to me and it hurt a lot, I believe that God could turn it around and use it for some good purpose.

I have no doubt that many of you are carrying deep painful wounds from the way you've been hurt by other people. And from the bottom of my heart, I am sorry. I'm really sorry. But there is only one proper way to deal with this. Forgive. It's the only way you're going to get on with your life and get over the hurt. Forgive Why should I do that? Because of Jesus. Forgive as God in Christ has forgiven you. Amen.