

The Joseph narrative is one of, (if not *the*) greatest stories in the Bible. It’s got every element of a great story. It has a dysfunctional family, a protagonist who is full of himself, is humbled and rises to his real potential. The story is full of betrayal, money, sex, violence, famine, royalty, power, potential revenge and finally redemption and reconciliation. The only thing missing is a good car chase. I’m sure we could squeeze a chariot race in there somewhere to give it a 100% Tomato rating!

Here's a recap: This is an Old Testament story. Joseph was the favourite son and his father, Jacob, lavished him with praise and gifts. The other 11 sons, most of whom were older and bigger, resented his status and the way he flaunted it. They resented him so much that they decided to kill him. They sold him into slavery and told his father he’d been killed by a lion.

Meanwhile Joseph was purchased as a slave in Egypt by a successful household: the Potiphars. At this point, life after the brutal betrayal seems to take a turn for the better. Joseph gains the trust and respect of his master and is given the responsibility of managing the entire household. He excels at this until he is shafted again: this time by his employer – actually his employer’s wife. She would dearly have liked to have an affair with the young and very attractive Joseph, but when, as a matter of honour, he refuses, she responds by accusing him of attempted rape. He is thrown into prison and totally forgotten.

First, he is betrayed and then he’s falsely accused. He remained in jail, forgotten, for years. But God does not forget about Joseph. One day he is given the opportunity to interpret a dream that the Pharaoh –the powerful ruler of Egypt—had which was troubling the Pharaoh greatly. None of his wise councillors could interpret the Pharaoh’s dream. Then the Pharaoh remembers Joseph, and sends for him. And God tells Joseph the meaning of the dream. The dream revealed that there would be a great famine in the land for many years, but before that there would be several years of bumper crops. So impressed was the Pharaoh with Joseph’s wisdom that he hires Joseph to prepare and manage the storing up food for the coming famine. Joseph ended up being essentially the prime minister of Egypt. He becomes the second most powerful man in Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh.

The scripture we read earlier comes at the climax of this story so many years later, after the years of plenty and several years into the brutal famine. Word spreads to the surrounding regions that Egypt has food. So Joseph’s brothers come from the land of Canaan desperate for food. Who do they have to see in order to buy food? Their brother Joseph! When the brothers come they don’t recognize Joseph — and they end up fulfilling one of Joseph’s dreams by bowing down to this great and powerful man.

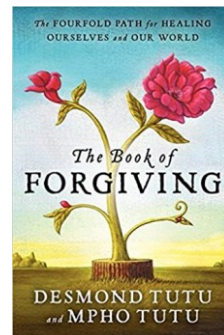
There are so many miracles in this story. But in my mind the greatest miracle of all is the change that took place in Joseph’s heart that allowed him to forgive his brothers. That was the miracle that saved the nation of Israel.

If you have a relationship in your family now that is causing you grief and pain, let me give you some good news and some bad news. Let's get the bad news out of the way first. People rarely change. If you are waiting for your brother or mother or child or whoever to suddenly realize what a donkey's rear end they've been and tell you how sorry they are ... you may be waiting an awfully long time. It's not impossible, but it's not very likely either. Mark Twain once said: "*Don't expect too much of human beings. We were created at the end of the week when God was tired and looking forward to a day off.*" In a way he's right. Don't expect others to change. That's the bad news. Here's the good news — others may not change, but *you can change!* God wants nothing more than to help you change and be more and more the person you were created to be.

Last week we started talking about having self-awareness. We talked about how when we are wrapped in the love of God we have the potential to be courageously honest with ourselves and with God. With some degree of humility or perhaps a willingness, real growth and transformation can absolutely happen.

Joseph was not perfect, but he didn't deserve what happened to him. What happened to Joseph was an incredible injustice. I have no doubt that Joseph had a lot of anger. Anger at his brothers, anger at his former employer, anger at God; his heart must have been full of it. Anger is a natural response to injustice. Anger is one of the stages of grief and Joseph had a lot to grieve – he had a promising future which was stolen from him *not once but twice*. This wasn't the life he imagined having. He imagined he would stay the favourite son of his father. Anger and resentments are natural and they can spur you to *do something*. They can be stepping stones across the fast-moving waters of injustice, but you don't want to get stuck there – you don't want to turn a stepping stone into your island home. Many people sadly do. Thank God Joseph didn't.

Many in this congregation have taken the course or read *Forgiving* written by Desmond Tutu and his daughter. One of the things we learned is that every time we are at a cross road. We have a choice to make: we can path of revenge and retaliation or the path of forgiveness reconciliation. The easy one, the one we fall into naturally revenge and retaliation. But though it feels like it will path will eat you alive. An old proverb says, "The person revenge should dig two graves." When you have been hold onto that hurt, it grows like a cancer inside you and eventually, if you let it, it will destroy you and other people.



The Book of Mpho Tutu. hurt. we stand choose the and is the first — satisfy, that who pursues hurt and you

One of our life tasks is to die to our small or false self and be born to a new and true self. It is the 'small-fearful-self-centered self' that feels revenge will solve the hurt in our heart. It was because Joseph was able to die to his false self that he was able to forgive his brothers.

I'd be willing to bet that if, after having been sold into slavery, Joseph had ended up right away in Pharaoh's house and skipped the languishing in prison part, the reunion

with his brothers would have looked very different from the way it did in the end. I have a strong feeling that most of the tribes of Israel would have died out, not by famine but by a murderous revenge. But by the grace of God, that dark time in prison became a burial ground for his anger, his regrets, his grief and his fear.

Forgiveness takes practice and it is never, ever easy. I want to invite someone forward who, for better and for worse, has had a lot of experience with letting go of resentments and practicing forgiveness.

Jason Holmes Testimony:

I am a Christian in training, so there's definitely nothing perfect about me other than I have God with me today. I'm going to try to keep this short, because those of you who know me also know that I have a hard time to stop talking!

I want to start with a couple facts about forgiveness. In my opinion, the opposite of forgiveness is holding onto anger and resentment. Some of the effects of being able to forgive are:

- *Healthier relationships*
- *Improved mental health*
- *Less envy, stress and hostility*
- *Fewer symptoms of depression*
- *Lower blood pressure*
- *A stronger immune system*
- *Improved heart health*
- *Better self esteem*

It sounds pretty impressive and its all true! These are all things that affect our health and I ask you to think about it while I'm giving my message this morning.

Who do you need to forgive? Is it yourself you need to forgive? Do you need to forgive your parents? Pastor Kim mentioned that possibly, you may even need to forgive God. If that's the case I just ask you to focus on that.

I'm going to tell a story and then I'm going to close with a prayer. Hopefully we can all understand forgiveness a little bit better.

I was new to this world, probably as young as three or four years old, when I would have needed to learn forgiveness. My father was a physically and mentally abusive man. At the time I didn't realize there wasn't anything I could do right. I was beaten many times for things I said or did, and as a young child I didn't really know how to respond, other than having resentments and anger towards my father.

The more this progressed, the more I behaved in ways that reinforced "I am no good" and "I'm a bad kid". It made me feel that I deserved to be physically beaten because of my attitudes and behaviours. I developed serious anger and resentments. Yet one

thing I must say on my father's behalf ... there were times when he did express love in different ways, but I was too young to understand them.

As time went on I went into a very, very dark, dark place in my life. This continued on to the point when I was around 12 years old that my mother and father really couldn't look after me anymore. The last time my father ever beat me was when I was about 11 years old. I no longer cried when he beat me. I could see his eyes and I just stared straight into them. I don't know what that did, but it stopped the abuse and he was never able to lay another hand on me again.

At that time I was taken into foster care with the hopes that I could have a decent life or somebody could figure me out. My parents, who were uneducated from what I know today, had reached the point of deciding they couldn't raise me.

I was a wild child and I was uncontrollable. I was all these things because I didn't know how to react and how to respond. Over the next few years that took me into a very dark place of being angry and resentful. I felt injustice and I felt I needed to do something to make justice happen. The revenge thing is terrible. And yes, you do need to dig two graves — one for that person, and one for yourself. If you plan on revenge, it will certainly be a darker end.

Over the years, I spent probably 11 years locked in various cages in prison. I grew up in foster care and when that didn't work I was sent to more children's facilities. Eventually I was sent to lock-up facilities, then to a correctional facility and finally the federal penitentiary. I spent 11 years of my life locked in cages and being abused, physically and mentally. I used to have so much resentment and fear and anger towards these people. The institutions, our government our healthcare system and social services — I hated every one of them. I hated the whole idea of it, and what they were doing to me.

I was lost. I didn't know where to go, I didn't know what to do with all this pain. Over the years I had learned that alcohol and drugs took away all my pain, but only ever for a short time. Then I needed more alcohol and drugs just to get by, somehow hoping that the pain would disappear.

I do know today that God is the one who brought me here to Wall Street United Church in 2007. I came through those doors and sat over there to the side. I was scared to death of everybody here. I couldn't even think about looking you in the eye. I was also scared to death because every Sunday during the service we were asked to shake hands and greet one another.

But I kept coming. All I had to do was surrender. I needed to surrender to God, to surrender to a power that I never really understood, but I was told that I had to. I couldn't keep carrying these loads, so I did. I surrendered. It's not an easy process and it's not a process that happens overnight, but it does happen over time. God carried me until I could walk on my own two feet. I testify to that today. He took away my desires to harm myself so that I didn't need to drink alcohol anymore. I didn't need to

abuse my body anymore. I didn't need to constantly contemplate suicide, as I was ready to give this world another chance..

God showed me many powerful things when I surrendered my will to Him. God showed me that my dad was in so much pain himself that he had no idea how to deal with a young child who was out of control. The only thing my dad knew was physical abuse ... so he beat me and yelled at me, hoping that I would just shut up and go away. God showed me my father being beaten and abused as a young child.

I hated my mom for many years as I couldn't understand how my mother could let me go. How could she give me up to a system that was so very, very dark inside! God showed me that my mother was a victim herself. My mother was scared, she was too scared to stand up to my father and stop the physical abuse against me. My mother was a victim of mental abuse.

There was a time I was in isolation in a prison in Regina Saskatchewan. I was locked up in a dark cage where I sat for 23 1/2 hours a day, doing nothing. Certain correctional workers who I remember very clearly, over a period of about two weeks, would come in to the cage on a daily basis, take my clothing from me and use me as a punching bag. I was barely 17 years old at the time.

God showed me those correctional workers somehow. I can't explain it to you, but I saw their eyes and I understood that things they were doing to me were not directed at me but came from another source, from how they had grown up and where they were in their lives. It's so important that when you look at these people you are resenting today, and that you have anger and fear and resentment towards, you realize that it is not them attacking you. They are behaving in that way because they don't know any other way! They haven't been blessed yet by surrendering to God.

Today, I forgive my father and I forgive my mother. I forgive the correctional workers because I saw their pain. God showed me their pain and what they were going through, but I was unable to see it until I was able to surrender my will.

I can't express enough that you need to surrender your will to God.

Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting the things that happened to you or excusing those things that happened to you — it means that you are giving yourself permission to live to live a good life. Forgiveness gives life!

It's given me a life I couldn't have imagined. Resentment and anger has taken almost 30 years of my life, and for 11 of those years I was locked in a cage. That's what resentment did to me, that's what anger did to me and that's what holding onto revenge did to me.

Being able to forgive is the ultimate powerful gift by the grace of God. If you don't understand it, I pray that you learn to understand it, because if you have forgiveness in your heart, you have the ultimate power in life.

I think I'm going to end on that. I've gone way over my time.....

I would like to close in prayer.

Is there somebody that you need to forgive? As I mentioned, it could be your spouse, your brother, sister, mother, or father. It could be the correctional system, or it could be the government, it could be many things. Do not blame the person place or thing, because it is a much bigger problem than we realize. It starts right here with forgiveness, because forgiveness gives new life. So I just ask you to please focus on somebody in your life that you need to forgive. You need to lay down these burdens that are weighing you down. We need to get rid of them and we need to do it now.

Dear heavenly Father, creator of life,

We give up to you now our resentments, our anger and our fears as we cannot carry them anymore. They are too heavy a burden.

They bring darkness into our lives and we need them gone.

Give us compassion and understanding for those who offend us.

Help us to see more clearly through our offenders' eyes so that we may forgive them and offer them help, bringing new life to all.

I especially need help Father with forgiving myself, because it is the key that unlocks the ultimate power of forgiveness.

For if I cannot forgive myself first, as you already have, I will be lost forever.

Please take my resentments now. I offer them to you so that I can have the life you have planned for me in the powerful name of Jesus.

Amen

Before I leave, one of the last things that Jesus said before he was so brutally murdered and crucified on the cross was:

"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do"

I believe that Jesus understood how these people got to where they were, that they had gotten to a place where they could crucify another human being without reason.

Try to remember that. Amen

Pastor Kim:

Thank you Jason! Freedom — that's the gift that God wants to give you!

God set Joseph free — free from slavery and free from prison. God set Jason free from prison. The real prison he was set free from was the prison of hate, hurt, and resentments that were growing inside.

You have to be willing, but God will work the miracle! Jesus said: "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed!" That freedom is for you, but the miracle of that comes with the freedom of forgiveness that spills out and makes a difference to many.

Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers set *him* free for a new life, and it saved a nation. Don't underestimate the life that can come when you give your dark times and hurts to God. God has a plan for you and for others through you.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

