

Forgiveness and Family

October 11, 2020

Opening Prayer

Scripture for Today

Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them. Genesis 50:15-21

A soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger. Proverbs 15:1

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Colossians 3:12-15

Exploring the text

Husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters – these are the basic relationships of our self-identity. These are the relationships we depend upon during the formative years of our lives. We depend on them to provide for our physical needs, our emotional needs and our spiritual needs before we know how to care for ourselves. Directly and indirectly, these relationships form our values. The wholeness of our being is shaped and misshaped by the health of these relationships.

You do not have to look far in Scripture to see that family relationships bring problems. Cain and Able, Jacob and Esau, Rachel and Leah, Rebecca and Isaac, and the brotherly relationship of Jacob's sons all provide concrete examples that families have had problems since the beginning. Learning to forgive ourselves and others begins with learning to forgive at home.

- Why are wounds caused by family often the hardest to forgive?
- When does holding a grudge become a bitterness that needs forgiveness?
- Joseph's brothers expected to encounter bitterness and revenge. Instead, they discovered grace. How was Joseph about to show grace in the midst of past evil?

- How does the passage from Colossians set the example of how we live in our closest relationships?

Every day begins with getting dressed. We wake up, eat breakfast, take off clothes from the past, clean ourselves, and put on fresh clothes for the new day. Clothing is the metaphor used to describe our first response in relationships. (Adam Hamilton, *Forgiveness*) The items of clothing include compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. If we reflect on the broken relationships in our families, we will discover that the divorces and estranged relationships do not occur from one traumatic event but through the daily habits of how we treat one another.

Pebbles are described as the daily annoyances we experience with living with each other. It is the harsh response we give when we are tired. It is the roll of the eyes given by our teenager. It is discovering that someone ate the leftover spaghetti you were saving for dinner. It is forgetting to take out the trash. It is being angry that your parents refused to get you a new phone when they got one for your sister. Pebbles do not weigh much alone but left unforgiven, they pile up and weigh us down. If we are forgiven as we forgive, how does God want us to behave in our familial relationships? Hamilton suggests that we address these pebbles by Remembering our own shortcomings, Assuming the best, and Praying for God's blessing on each other. It is within our power to let go of these offenses even if the offending party shows no remorse.

Bigger stones are the more serious. They are the intentionally hurtful words we used against one another, the disrespect we show, and the disappointments that just won't go away. These wounds are deeper and can easily lead to bitterness and brokenness if left unresolved. The rocks need intervention. They require dialogue and understanding. You have to be willing to talk about the offense and how it made you feel. Without Understanding, the weight of these rocks can last a lifetime and create problems in future relationships with others. Understanding may not fix the problem but it can help you forgive and move on.

Then there are boulders. These include the child who was unloved, abused, or abandoned by a parent or the sibling rivalry that moved beyond jealousy to sabotage. These rocks weigh us down to the point of immobilization. They can cripple us emotionally and spiritually and help define all other relationships in our lives by tainting the way we view the world. Forgiving boulders requires work.

- How do years of small trespasses build if not forgiven?
- How does forgiveness play a role in healthy marriages?
- How do we raise our children so that forgiveness is open and understood?

Close in Prayer