

Forgive and Forget

Listed Scriptures

Gen 37-50

Lesson Aim

- 1) That the students will know to forgive those who have inflicted them with pain

Memory Verse

"Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." (Col 3:13)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Gen 37-50

W A R M U P



Have you ever felt hurt? Recall a few situations when you felt hurt. What happened then? Who was the person who hurt you? Did you reconcile with him? How did you do that? Guide the students in their responses.

If one has been badly hurt, it is not easy to forgive the person who caused the pain. Nevertheless, in the Lord Jesus Christ, all wounds can heal. If we view things in the right perspective, and turn to God for comfort and love, it is possible to forgive the one who hurt us and forget the injury and move on in life.



Love and Forgiveness

In the Bible, we see some wonderful stories of forgiveness and love. Are there any examples that come to your mind right away?

Today, we will look at some of these stories of forgiveness. Read the Bible passages cited here and then answer the questions that follow.

A. Isaac Gave in to His Neighbors (Gen 26:2-6, 15-33)

1. What did Isaac's neighbors do to his property? Why was what they did terrible and serious?
2. Who were these neighbors?
3. How many times did such similar incidents occur?
4. Why do you think Isaac was able to forgive them? How does readiness to forgive someone relate to one's level of faith in God?
5. If you were Isaac, could you forgive your neighbors? Why or why not? Explain what your feelings would be.
6. What are the difficulties in forgiving someone? Share your experiences of forgiveness.

(The Philistines envied the success of Isaac and stopped all the wells that were dug during the time of his father Abraham. Then Isaac moved to the valley of Gerar. The inhabitants of Gerar also stopped his wells. They did it twice. Each time, Isaac gave in and moved away to look for another well. Isaac was clearly a peace-loving and gentle person. Instead of fighting back, he gave in and moved away to look for another well. If we trust God, we would have confidence that God will take care of every detail of our lives. Hence, there is not much need to fight for our own gain. Also guide the students to come up with reasons in addition to his peace-loving personality. For instance, his faith in God's promise is one thing – see Genesis

B. Joseph Forgave His Brothers

(Gen 37:23-28, 47:1-6, 12, 50:15-21)

1. Genesis 37:23-28 records how Joseph's brothers sold him to Midianite traders who took Joseph to Egypt. That was not the real damage to Joseph. From age 17 to 30, he was a slave and prisoner. Put yourself in the shoes of Joseph. What were some of the hardships (physical and emotional) and missed opportunities he suffered in Egypt?
2. If you had been one of Joseph's brothers who had sold him to Egypt, what do you think you deserve as punishment for treating your own brother so badly?
3. What did Joseph say to his brother in Genesis 50 that shows his deep reverence for God?

(Joseph was the most beloved son of Jacob, which was why his brothers were jealous of him and plotted against him. When he was sold to Egypt, he must have had to endure a lot of physical pain and hardship. He worked as a slave, and on top of that, he must have suffered a lot of mental and emotional agony. In Genesis 50, Joseph assured his brothers that he bore no grudge against them: "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. This shows his fear and trust in God. It also shows his great love for his brothers.)

C. Moses Prayed for His Sister (Num 12:1-16)

1. What was the reason Miriam and Aaron accused Moses of wrongdoing?
2. Were they justified in their accusation? Why or why not?
3. What do you think were Moses' feelings at that time, to be openly accused by his own brother and sister?
4. What was the result of their accusing Moses?
5. What did Moses do that showed his forgiveness?

(Miriam and Aaron accused Moses of marrying a gentile woman, an Ethiopian. This accusation was not justifiable as Moses' wife must have been a supporter of his work and loved God. Otherwise, how could he have led the Israelites into the wilderness? The fact that God was with him was also very evident. Moses must have felt very hurt, to be betrayed by his very own blood brother and sister. But, he kept his peace. We know that God spoke up for Moses, saying that with other prophets, God appeared to them in dreams and visions but with Moses, God talked with him face to face. God also punished Miriam by inflicting her with leprosy. It was Moses who prayed to God to heal Miriam, thus showing his great love and forgiveness.)

D. The Lord Jesus Forgave Those Who Hurt Him (Lk 23:1-35)

1. Why did the people want the Lord Jesus crucified?
2. Outline some of the painful inflictions the Lord Jesus had to go through.
3. When the Lord Jesus was on the cross, He uttered seven sayings. These were all very important sayings because it was extremely difficult for Him to speak while suffering on the cross. Of these seven sayings, one of them was, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Lk 23:34). Do you think you would be able to do the same and forgive someone who caused you this much pain? Discuss your answers as a class.

(The religious leaders, and even political leaders at that time wanted the Lord Jesus dead because He had a lot of influence and they did not like that. On this occasion, the multitudes were in a great frenzy. They wanted to see Barabbas released and have the Lord Jesus crucified instead. Crucifixion on the cross is a very painful process. One can imagine the pain of having nails pierced through one's wrists and have one's whole weight hanging on those two nails. The crown of thorns was pressed onto the Lord Jesus' head, so much so that blood oozed out. As He was losing blood, He was also getting dehydrated and finding it harder and harder to breathe. To bring His body upwards to breathe meant more pain to the wrists. His feet were probably also nailed to the cross.)

Teaching Tips

Have a solemn session asking the students to slowly outline what they imagine to be the physical process/pain the Lord Jesus had to go through.

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



- 1 What did Isaac's neighbors do to him? How did he react?
- 2 What did Joseph say and do when he met his brothers again after more than 20 years?
- 3 What did Moses do that proved his great magnanimity towards Miriam?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Joseph's Tears

"Forgive and forget." Is it really possible to do this? We can forgive, but it is not so easy to forget.

God's word tells us, "Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Lk 6:37). The word "forgive" in Greek implies release or liberation. When we forgive and "liberate" people, we, too, will be liberated. Joseph went through great tribulations. We will use the story of Joseph to illustrate how he forgave his brothers and, in the process, liberated them and himself.

JOSEPH SOLD

Genesis 37 describes Joseph as a good child who disliked evil. His father loved him very much and made him a robe of many colors. Instead of bringing joy, unfortunately, his father's love created disharmony among the brothers.

God sent Joseph two dreams, revealing what would happen to him in the future. This was a promise from God, showing that he would have greater achievements than his brothers. Instead of bringing him respect from his brothers, the dreams caused his brothers to hate him. These dreams were from God; they were not his own dreams. But because God allowed him to have these dreams, his brothers condemned him.

One day, his brothers went far away to shepherd the flock. Joseph was sent by his father to see how his brothers were doing. To his consternation, there he discovered his own end. When his brothers saw him approaching, they said, "Look, this

dreamer is coming! ...Let us now kill him." Fortunately, two of his brothers had more compassion and did not want to kill him. Instead, they sold him.

If you were Joseph, would you have been able to understand all of this? Of course, in hindsight, we could say that he should thank God because he would become prime minister of Egypt through all of this. But at that time, Joseph had no idea what would happen tomorrow. When he was about to be sold, he pleaded with his brothers in anguish and with tears (Gen 42:21). He was sold like cattle.

JOSEPH AS SLAVE AND PRISONER

After Joseph was brought to Egypt, he was sold as a slave to Potiphar. Most people would ask God, "Why did this happen? Why me?" Joseph must have thought about Abraham, his great-grandfather, whom God promised a great blessing. God revealed to Isaac that there would be a famine. Jacob wrestled with God Himself. But what about Joseph? If you study the Bible carefully, you'll notice that God never appeared to Joseph nor spoke to him.

Here we see Joseph as a slave; however, he was not crushed by slavery. He could not understand why he was a slave, but he accepted it. He could not understand the situation he was in, but he accepted it. That was why he was able to become the best slave. He fell from the status of beloved son to slave, but he was not overcome by the tragedy. He became the steward of his master's house, and God's blessings followed wherever he went.

In Genesis 39:1, it states that God was with him. There seems to be a contradiction here, because if God was with Joseph, why was he a slave? But Joseph accepted it even though he could not understand why. He revered God, and God was with him.

Later on, Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph, but he refused to sin with her. Out of spite, she framed him, accusing him instead of trying to take advantage of her. Joseph was then thrown into prison.

Joseph was like a person getting struck down again and again as he tried to get up. The first time, his brothers struck him. The second time, he was struck down by his fear of God. It seemed like the harder he worked, the worse his situation became. He became a slave through no fault of his own. Now he was thrown into prison for a sin he did not commit.

However, the story states repeatedly that the Lord was with Joseph (Gen 39:20).

Joseph did not understand, yet he accepted his situation. He became the model prisoner and, once again, he transcended his miserable situation.

One morning, Joseph noticed two prisoners, the king's butler and baker, looking very sad. He must have transcended his difficult situation in order to show his concern for others' problems. For instance, if you've just lost ten million dollars, it is unlikely that you would notice other people's suffering. But Joseph noticed these two prisoners, showed his concern, and helped them by interpreting their dreams.

Joseph interpreted the butler's dream and told him that he would be restored to his original position. He asked the butler to "remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to the Pharaoh, and get me out of this house" (Gen 40:14). Notice how many times Joseph mentions the word "me" in his request. He wanted so much to leave this prison and return home; he was not happy.

Afterward, Joseph must have thought that this was an opportunity from God to leave the prison. Since only God can give the wisdom to interpret dreams, he probably thought that God wanted to rescue him from prison. The butler brought wine to Pharaoh every day, and he would be able to bring his request before him. The butler was his only hope for freedom.

But after the butler left and was restored to his position, he "did not remember Joseph, but forgot him" (Gen 40:23). To say "did not remember" and "forgot" is repetitive. This was written purposely, to show that it was God's will. It was impossible that the butler could have forgotten! Every day, as he bore the cup, he must have remembered how he got out of prison and how Joseph explained the dream. How could he forget something like that? But he did. Joseph waited day after day in prison, hoping that, each time the jail door opened, it would be to release him.

JOSEPH AS PRIME MINISTER

One day, two days, one month, one year, two years passed. The butler forgot about Joseph for two whole years (Gen 41:1) until Pharaoh had a dream that greatly troubled him. Then, the chief butler said he remembered Joseph and that he had fault (Gen 41:9). His remark shows that he did not intentionally forget about Joseph. He quickly called for Joseph, and Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream. Pharaoh then made Joseph prime minister to oversee all the affairs of Egypt, second in command only to Pharaoh.

Joseph was thirty years old when he became prime minister (Gen 41:46). If we

assume that he was seventeen when he was sold into Egypt (Gen 37:2), he suffered for thirteen years. How many “thirteen years” do we have in our lives? Have we spent thirteen years as a slave or prisoner? What kind of person would we become after this experience? Very few people would want to go to prison for thirteen years, even if they could become prime minister afterward.

Trying to Forget

Later, Joseph married. Marriage is a turning point in life; to have children is an even greater turning point.

Now Joseph had two sons. The first son was called Manasseh, meaning “God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house” (Gen 41:51). But did he truly forget? When he said “forget,” he remembered all the more. The more we try to forget about an incident in our lives, the more we remember. Even if we don’t stay angry at something, we will not forget it. Even if we forgive, we cannot forget. We can forgive others, but we will not forget them.

If Joseph had really forgotten all those trials, he would not try to forget. He named his second son Ephraim, which means “fruitful.” He wanted to forget his past and start a new beginning, but that did not resolve anything. Even though he had that kind of resolution, could he forget the wickedness of his evil brothers and his sorrow the last thirteen years? No, he could not forget.

JOSEPH’S PATH TO FORGIVENESS

From Revenge

When Joseph was prime minister, a famine struck the whole land. His brothers came to buy food from him. Joseph sat up there as prime minister, and his brothers bowed down to him. Joseph remembered the two dreams he had before. After thirteen years, he was now wearing splendid garments, and his brothers were still shepherds.

“Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them” (Gen 42:7). As a prime minister, many people came to him each day to ask for food. If he did not look carefully, how could he recognize them? Yet, he recognized them, because he did not forget them.

Joseph spoke to them roughly, saying, “Where do you come from?” Of course, he knew where they were from. Once he remembered the past, did he forgive? No, things were not yet resolved. Joseph began to take revenge on his brothers. He said

to them, “You are spies!” (Gen 42:9). In those days, spies were beheaded. An eye for an eye—they wanted to kill him before.

Joseph put them all in prison for three days. Those three days were probably very terrible for his brothers, because they did not know what would happen to them. In those three days, Joseph probably also struggled greatly.

But on the third day, Joseph brought the brothers out of prison and said to them, “I fear God” (Gen 42:18). Joseph feared God. It doesn’t necessarily mean that a person who fears God will never get angry. But a person who fears God will control himself and will not harm people out of anger.

To Struggle

When this happened, the brothers’ consciences rebuked them. They immediately thought back to their sin of selling Joseph (Gen 42:21). After twenty-two years, the brothers were still haunted by guilt.

The brothers spoke in Hebrew, and they thought Joseph did not understand. But Joseph understood. When he heard that his brothers were conscience-stricken for what they had done to him, he was greatly moved, because Joseph feared God. If he were a person with a heart of stone, he would want to repay his brothers with more harm.

Joseph “turned himself away from them and wept.” People weep because they are not emotionally balanced—too happy, too sad, too frustrated, etc. Joseph released some of his heavy burdens by crying. However, he was not able to wash away everything. He was still unable to face his brothers. He went away from them to weep, and, afterward, he returned to them, gave them food, and sent them home.

To Release

The second time, his brothers brought Benjamin his younger brother. When Joseph saw Benjamin, he quickly went into his room to weep. This time, he wept even more and he had to make haste, in case he was discovered. And after weeping, he even had to wash his face. Every time he wept, he released a little bit of his brothers as well as himself. If you cannot forgive someone, you are actually in bondage yourself.

The third time, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. This time, there was even more haste, but he could not escape. There was no time to run. Now Joseph could not restrain himself in front of all the people, so he made everyone go out from in

front of him. He could not run somewhere else to cry, so he asked someone else to run.

“And he wept aloud”—he wept for all the years of bondage and affliction. He did not want others to hear him, but everyone heard. The Egyptians and also the house of Pharaoh all heard it because he cried so loudly. Joseph had tried to forget, but he could not. But Joseph wanted to forgive, because he feared God.

He said, “I am Joseph, does my father still live?” His brothers were terrified, but Joseph said to them, “Do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life” (Gen 45:5). How can we forgive others? We need to gradually comprehend and understand the will of God for allowing the situation. At that moment Joseph understood there was a higher will of God for him. But Joseph’s realization did not come until after three or four times of weeping and about twenty years of affliction. It was not that easy for him to do.

Joseph wept when he reunited with his father and again when his father passed away.

Joseph wept much, and through his tears, he forgave and liberated his brothers. But his brothers did not understand that he had already forgiven them. After their father died, they became nervous. They thought that Joseph did not harm them because their father was still alive. So they sent messengers to Joseph saying, “I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you” (Gen 50:17). Joseph wept again. After he wept, he spoke words of kindness and comfort to his brothers. After this long, they still carried the burden with them.

You must liberate others in order to liberate yourself. You cannot forget the wrongs that others have done to you, but you must forgive and liberate them. If you don’t, they will also become a burden to yourself. When you forgive them, God will also forgive you. When you release others, you will also be released.

This is why Joseph wept. (By Preacher H.H. Ko – Manna Oct - Dec 2002)

Questions to think about:

1. Who has hurt you deeply?

2. Do you harbor feelings of hatred?

3. If you have been deeply hurt or offended by someone, you need to make a list of all the positive benefits that have come out of the pain you have carried. While focusing on these positive benefits, you need to ask God to change your heart with the power of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to change your heart from one of hatred to one of forgiveness toward the person who hurt you. Only then, will you be free to experience and enjoy a life of happiness and abundance.

R E F L E C T I O N & P R A Y E R



Sing Hymn 405. Often, we find that things that seem like such a big deal no longer mean anything after a while, or after a considerable period of time. Yet, when we are angry, we act in an unforgiving manner and find it hard to let go. May God give us a magnanimous heart of love, so that we can be more forgiving and not allow bad feelings to linger in our hearts.