

Forgiveness in God's Family ¹

† Deeply needed by us (vv.15-18)

† Deeply rooted in God's heart (vv.19-21)

In the Name of Jesus Christ, our all-forgiving Savior, dearly redeemed family of God:

Speaking of paying it forward, a couple Christian men were talking about integrity anger when business practices don't live up to promises. One described an incident at a drive-through where an item was listed at \$1.87, but at the pick-up window a dollar more! While his wife and daughters are saying, "Let's just pay it," he's arguing on principle. Then as he's remembering, he shares, "Here's how God teaches me. At the payment window I'm ready to launch again. Cashier says, 'By the way, the woman in front of you paid it forward. Your meals are free, all four of them.' But it gets better," he laughed. "I turned to my family, embarrassed and said, 'Maybe I can help the next guy.' So I offered to pay for the car behind me. God must have a sense of humor. All that guy wanted was a cup of coffee!"

You know that it's not about fast food prices or family embarrassment. As we heard in last Sunday's sermon (Matthew 18:15-20), "Loving Christian discipline recognizes no distinctions of rank or privilege. Pastor and parishioner alike need the same Christian love. There are no exceptions for preacher's kids, church leaders..." big givers or charter members. "We all need love, and we all need loving admonition – because we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10)...The goal [of church discipline] is not to kick someone out of the church but to win over our brother or sister in Christ. It works!"² That's why *The Church We God Wants* is A Church That's Quick to Forgive. And God's character factory is the family. Wake up to **Forgiveness in God's Family**.

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Just how deep this goes is illustrated by one of the saddest stories in the Bible with the happiest of endings. It takes up most of the second half of Genesis (37-50) Theater production? *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Does it picture how **Deeply** forgiveness is **needed in God's Family**?

Parents don't always see it coming. Father Jacob maybe wanted to love his twelve sons equally, but one was easier to love. Joseph stood out with the brightly colored coat Jacob gave him. Did he stoke the fires of sibling rivalry by telling his dreams about his brothers and parents kneeling down to him. Jacob was irritated too. But family pain tore deeply when the older brothers sold Joseph into slavery. Didn't care where, as long as the blood on Joseph's coat convinced Jacob an animal devoured him.

The brothers shut their ears to Joseph's pleading as a camel caravan dragged him away bound. What dusty stench those many miles south through deserts to the land of rich rulers – Egypt! Maybe Joseph thought things were looking up. His master Potiphar, Pharaoh's captain of the guard, put Joseph over his whole house. "***The LORD was with Joseph, and he became successful. He served in the house of his master the Egyptian.***" (Genesis 39:2 EHV) Everything was fine until Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph, then accused him of attacking her. Did Potiphar know she was lying? He did not execute Joseph, but put him in a prison for high-ranking political prisoners? Soon Joseph was in charge there too.

Why would God include such a story in the Bible? Worldwide famine, Joseph raised from prison to store Egypt's bumper crops and feed millions – including his own brothers. Tragedy turned to triumph.

¹ 2023 WELS Worship Foundations series: *The Church We God Wants: A Church That's Quick to Forgive*.

² "How is church discipline a loving practice of the church?" by Jon D. Bucholz. *Forward in Christ*, 09/2023, p. 30f.

After years of Joseph caring for his family in Egypt, father Jacob dies. What now? The brothers expected a painful grudge to crash in hatred they deserved. We don't know if they made this up, but they're pulling at Joseph's heart strings: *"Before he died your father commanded us, 'You are to tell Joseph, 'Please forgive the offense of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.' ' Now, please forgive the offense of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him."* His dreams came true as they fell down in front of him and confessed, *"We are your servants."*

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What we need so deeply, what brings real freedom beyond all the riches of this country is **Deeply rooted in God's heart**. What Joseph told his brothers was more than just encouraging words. He spoke the Gospel of forgiveness by word and deed to God's chosen people. God's Law clearly showed their sins, but the Good News Gospel joyfully proclaimed God's full and free forgiveness in the coming Christ who is *"the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes."* (Romans 10:4) Twice Joseph says, *"Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring this to pass and to keep many people alive, as it is this day. Now therefore, do not be afraid. I will nourish you and your little ones."* He comforted them and spoke to them in a kind way."

Our Christian faith is especially *good* for dark days when it seems no sun shines behind the clouds. In spite of the world's hatred, the devil's schemes, and our own traitorous sinful nature daily dogging self-destruction – we see it too. Joseph saw God bringing about Romans 8:28 long before the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write, *"We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose."* One Christian poet echoes the hopes of all believers: "Turn all to good that seems most ill. Help us our calling to fulfill."

Every once in a while someone says to me, "Pastor, I can forgive, but I can't forget what they did to me." And yet our Lord commands, *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven us."* (Ephesians 4:32 EHV) And we pray as Jesus taught us, *"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."* Under the New Covenant, God assures us, *"[Your] sins and iniquities I will remember no more."* (Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:12) How can God empower us now with the example of Joseph?

If you allow an unforgiving spirit to rule your heart, you're putting yourself in a prison of resentment from which there is no escape. During his twenty years of imprisonment Joseph did not dwell on the past or sit and feel sorry for himself. He went to work every day and excelled at what he did because God was with him through the Word of God he learned as a child. He was living in the Sunday School lessons we teach our children here at New Life. And when the time came to forgive, he kept forgiving by word and deed. Every time a memory comes back of some wrong done to you, you can use it as another opportunity to pray, "Lord, have mercy on him/her as you have had mercy on me."

An unforgiving spirit turns sentiment into sediment, like what settles in a bottle of fine wine. So do you keep shaking the bottle so the sediment floats? Do you keep drinking it all shook up? *"In repentance and rest is your salvation. In quietness and trust is your strength."* (Isaiah 30:15) Let it settle. Be at peace in Jesus. Then you can decant the fine wine of God's grace through the strainer of His Word: *Have I been hurt? Yes, but how deeply was Jesus hurt? Did I deserve what was done / said to me? No, not from fellow sinners. But neither did Jesus – who suffered on the cross for all the times I did deserve eternal punishment from God in hell. Did Jesus retaliate with His power? No, He forgave and forgot forever my sins and blesses me day by day. Now He tells me to go and do likewise.*

Decant the sediment of resentment through the Word of God such as, *"Give beer to someone who is perishing and wine to one whose soul is bitter. He will drink and forget his poverty, and he will no longer remember his trouble."* (Proverbs 31:6f EHV) Then drink the fine wine of God's all-forgiving grace and forget all the rest. **Forgiveness in God's Family** flows from His loving heart to ours. Amen.