

COPS | THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

We are in a series right now called: COPS that is investigating four stories from the Bible where individuals spend time in the slammer.

- As we investigate these stories we are finding that they have great impact on our own lives.
- Today we will be looking at the life of Joseph and how his entire life displayed the Power of Forgiveness.

JOSEPH'S STORY

Joseph grew up with the same curse that I did... being the favorite child.

- Did any of you grow up with that curse?
- Okay, now how many of you are only children? That doesn't count.

Genesis 37:3-4 NLT

2 This is the account of Jacob and his family. When Joseph was seventeen years old, he often tended his father's flocks. He worked for his half brothers, the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. But Joseph reported to his father some of the bad things his brothers were doing. (nark)

3 Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children because (he was good at sports and a professional suck-up) Joseph had been born to him in his old age. So one day Jacob had a special gift made for Joseph—a beautiful robe. 4 But his brothers hated Joseph because their father loved him more than the rest of them. They couldn't say a kind word to him.

So, nothing abnormal here. Pretty standard sibling jealousy resentment situation with a healthy dose of very poor parenting.

Now it gets weird.

Genesis 37:5-8 NLT

5 One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever. 6 "Listen to this dream," he said. 7 "We were out in the field, tying up

bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine!”

8 His brothers responded, “So you think you will be our king, do you? Do you actually think you will reign over us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them.

Joseph, come on bro!

- Not only is he the spoiled brat child, but he’s arrogant about it too.
- Not exactly getting off on the right foot in life there Captain Obvious.
- Keep the dreams to yourself.

The animosity between Joseph and his brothers peak when his brothers see Joseph coming in the distance and begin plotting to kill him.

- They plotted to throw him in a pit.

On the next episode of Jerry Springer.

- When Joseph showed up, they took his technicolor dream coat off and threw him in the pit.
- However, their guilt ate at them, and since they were such sweethearts, they decided to pull him out of the pit, not leave him for dead, but instead sell him into slavery.

And you thought you had family problems.

- All you have to worry about is your weird Uncle Al that likes to collect his own toe-nail clippings. That’s not so bad anymore huh?

So Joseph gets sold to a high ranking Egyptian named Potiphar.

- After writing the song, Walk Like an Egyptian

- Joseph actually was a stud and got promoted to the supervisor of Potiphar's household.

- That meant you were a good servant, and very well trusted.

Potiphar, a high ranking Egyptian official looked favorable upon Joseph.

- However, Potiphar's wife also looked favorably on Joseph, but in a not-so-Biblical way.
- She attempts to seduce Joseph on multiple attempts, until things got super awkward.
- She actually like tries to jump on him, and he literally runs away from her.
- She rips a piece of his clothes as he escapes.

- Calls the other servants and holds up the piece of clothing and claims that Joseph just tried to rape her.

Joseph literally ran away from sin.

- He didn't hang around and flirt with it like Samson did.

Potiphar of course believes his wife and has Joseph thrown in prison.

- For something that he ran away from.
- Like I said last week, if you ever feel like you keep trying to do the right things and bad stuff continues to happen to you... you're not alone.

One morning in prison...

- Joseph is minding his own business, eating his Honey Nut Cheerios and finishing a level on Candy Crush, and two guys come in all sad and depressed.
- They end up telling Joseph they had dreams and couldn't figure out the meaning.

- So Joseph says, “My name is Joseph, Try me broseph. I’m good at dreams, I’ll discover their schemes. Just ask my brother, from a different mother. I will help you out, so don’t you pout. That’s what I’m talking about.”
- Joseph, being the dream expert that he is, nails the meaning of the dreams.

- One guy’s dream meant that he was going to be acquitted of his crime and released from prison in three days to return to his high position in the Egyptian government.
- Joseph says, “Can you throw me a bone when you get out of here and put in a good word with Pharaoh so I can leave here also.”

This is Joseph’s chance to get out of prison. This is his golden ticket.

And the guy forgot all about him for 2 years! The next event we see happens 2 years later.

- TWO YEARS! Joseph is sitting in that prison waiting to be remembered.

Two years later the king of Egypt or Pharaoh has a dream and doesn’t know what it means.

- All the sudden the dimwit cupbearer decides he remembers there’s this guy in prison that is really good at this stuff... his name is Sam Swin, Swamy, Swanson... just look on the briefcase, Samsonite!
- Joseph is brought in and interprets the king’s dream correctly that a famine is coming and they needed to stock pile everything to survive.

Joseph is promoted by Pharaoh to 2nd in charge in Egypt.

- The famine hits and they enact Joseph’s disaster plan and it works!
- Egypt ends up being the only one in the area with food.
- So everyone from the surrounding countries travel into Egypt.
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Well, guess who needed food? Joseph's dad and brothers. So they come asking for food and Joseph and his brothers and dad reunite.

- And he has the prime opportunity to retaliate and crush them for what he did to him years ago.
- But here is what he said...

Genesis 50:20-21 NLT

20 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. 21 So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

JOSEPH'S LIFE DISPLAYED THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

Joseph's life teaches us about the Power of Forgiveness in 3 ways.

1. Forgiveness is a decision

Forgiveness is a decision, and Joseph made the decision he was going to forgive in the pit.

- That's why when the moment hit it was no problem for him to forgive his brothers.
- He had spent the last decades processing his anger and dealing with his emotions.

- He made a decision everyday that if he ever saw his brothers again, he would forgive them.

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS TIES INTO THE POWER OF PERSPECTIVE WE TALKED ABOUT LAST WEEK.

HOW YOU PERCEIVE OR APPROACH AN OFFENSE SETS YOU ON A TRAJECTORY TOWARDS FREEDOM OR EMBITTERMENT

The reason why some of you are still stuck on an offense that happened years ago, is because you never made the decision to be over it.

- There's a part of you if you were honest, that enjoys holding onto it because it renders you a little bit of power in a situation you can't control.

(JOSEPH GRAPH 1) If you come out of the gate with the decision to hold onto their offense, your trajectory heads towards embitterment.

- This is why some individuals as they get older in life become unbearably hateful people.
- Their hatred used to be tolerable, then each day how they approached or perceived their offenses build until they hated not just their offenders, but every possible offender.

- Now, I'm not just mad at the person that hurt me, I'm mad at the world because I see everyone as someone that possesses the ability to hurt me, thus I treat them like they already have.

Some of you may already be on that path.

- But today, you can begin to make the decision to forgive.

- It may take a long time to process the pain you went through because even though you make the decision to forgive, your emotions are still playing catch up.
- Just because your emotions are there and you still feel anger, doesn't mean you haven't already made the decision to forgive.

- **FORMULA = Relationship with the offender x Degree of offense x Number of occurrences of offense / how you are wired to process pain = amount of time to process your emotions**
- Forgiveness is a decision and sometimes your emotions take a while to catch up. That doesn't mean you haven't forgiven them.
- That's okay.

- Here's what you need to know:

- Forgiveness is a decision not an emotion. (GRAPH)

- Your emotions will be different on different days, and that's okay
- Just because you woke up two weeks ago feeling fine and today you want to scream doesn't mean you took steps backwards.

- You're just human. Maybe you don't feel good, maybe you got sideways on a burrito from Mexican villa.

- So don't pile guilt on yourself for still feeling emotion regarding a betrayal that happened a couple of years ago.
- "Time heals but it doesn't forgive. Only I can forgive." – Pastor Eric
- It's a decision. It doesn't happen because your emotions are there or not.
- Joseph had formed a habit of forgiveness in his life

- His brothers
- Potiphar's wife
- Potiphar
- The cupbearer
- Etc, etc

- The burning question to God is... not how do you feel today, but have you made the decision to forgive. Are you everyday releasing them from their offense?

2. Unforgiveness builds walls

In Joseph's life, his brothers didn't get to the point where they wanted to kill him overnight.

- It was years of favoritism by their father.
- Years of bratty little nark Joey running around and tattle-telling on all their secrets.
- It was years of Joseph running around telling them about dreams he was having where he was greater than all of them.

- It's often a series of little offenses in our daily relationships that builds walls between us. Layers of resentment that drives us apart.
- Our response is often not to brush it off and move on, but bury it.

- That way it can resurface the next time that person does something to bother us, and it will resurface with a vengeance.

Joseph's brothers were generally good dudes.

They honored their father and took care of dad.

They were sorry and repentant of their actions when they met up with Joseph.

I mean they backed out of their plans on killing him, and instead sold him to slavery, so they are basically sweet hearts.

A series of small offenses had built a wall.

And now it was an explosion, an overreaction, a moment of rage, an outburst that they regretted their whole lives.

A marriage does not start out with the intention of having both people sitting across the table from each other with a lawyer in between them.

A friendship does not start and invest time into the other person so that they can eventually betray each other.

A family doesn't set out with the hope that some day they will be dysfunctional.

- Unforgiveness builds a wall between you and others, but it builds a prison around you.

3. Unforgiveness builds a prison

The lady on the internet ☺ Karen Salmansohn wrote this: **Forgiveness doesn't excuse their actions. Forgiveness stops their actions from destroying your heart.**

- Unforgiveness locks us up inside our own personal prison. How?

- Well, let's start with reality, forgiveness is hard.

- It's hard because it's unfair.
- It feels unfair to release them from responsibility of something that caused you pain. Especially when that pain still exists, that person doesn't realize they hurt you, or even worse, they do know they hurt you and they haven't said sorry.
- Basically, great I got pain, they got freedom without having to pay for the pain they caused.

- Sound familiar? That's what Jesus did for us.

- The reality is, the process of forgiveness is not just for them, you forgive them for you. You are helping you.

- When you forgive someone you release the weight and responsibility of vengeance.
- You step out of the way and say God, they are yours to deal with now. I will stop getting in the way.

- God will deal with those who hurt us if we'll step aside and put them into His hands.

- Scary thing is... we are often the offender.

- So be careful.
- Aren't you glad that His grace is sufficient?
- Aren't you glad that his blood that he shed blots out our sin?

- But not only that... you forgiving releases God to do what He needs to do in you.

- That's because when you let go of the ownership of the offense, God can begin to heal you.
- He can begin to start doing his work in your life.
- It's hard to love everyone when you hate one.

- Even people that you may want to love may be suffering from your bitterness, resentment, and unforgiveness.
- The people around you suffer because of your self-imposed prison.
- Holding back forgiveness can keep you from being a good father, mother, husband, wife, friend, son, daughter.
- It is far more toxic for you, than it is for them.

Lewis B. Smedes said, "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.

Forgiveness is far more about you, than it is about them. And here's why...

- If God dropped the charges against you... what offense is there in the universe that you can't let go of?
- As a believer in Jesus, to hold an offense over someone is to deny the very nature of the salvation that you have obtained in Jesus Christ.

- That's why he says this:

Mark 11:25-26 AMP

25 Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him [drop the issue, let it go], so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions and wrongdoings [against Him and others]. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your transgressions.

When you turn over your right to see vengeance you release God to do what he does and that is heal you and forgive you.

You and release God to do what he does with your offender and that is to heal them and forgive them.

CLOSING

So, how do we do this forgiveness thing.

- It annoys me when people or preachers say this... "Just give it to the Lord."
 - Oh yeah?! Is he taking snail mail still, or is he a texter these days?
 - What's his number, I'll give him a ring.
 - How do I give it to the Lord?
 - It's such a vague answer with no practical help.

As I was praying about this, this popped into my mind.

- Some of you are holding stuff against a person to the extent that you can't even say their name without feeling like vomit is coming out with it.
- Some of you can't see their name, more-less write it on a piece of paper.
- Maybe you even blocked them on social media, because every time you saw their pictures or posts you got angry.

- Everytime you saw them happy, it made you mad, because you are hurting because of them. How dare they be happy.

Here is my challenge for you... #WriteTheName

- Every day, get up and make the decision to forgive.
- Grab a sheet of paper or something, and try to write down their name.

- For some of you this will be incredibly hard

- Some of you were sexually abused and you would say #MeToo
- Some of you were betrayed
- Some of you were left for dead like Joseph
- Some of you were blamed in your innocence
- Some of you were left unloved and unappreciated
- Some of you were gossiped about

- This first day you attempt this, you may only be able to start the loop in the first letter of their name.

- That's okay. Come back later.

- The next day, maybe you complete that loop, but that's it.
- Then maybe a week later, you finish the first letter.

- Still though.. this could be John, Jacob, Jingle-himer-schmidt. It doesn't have to be "him."

- Then maybe in a month you can complete that first name.
- Then in due time you're going to be able to write down the name of your offender
- After writing their name, you keep doing it... every day.

- Then you try saying their name.
- Each day you write their name and you say their name.
- Each day it will get a little easier and you will want to vomit a little less.

- And they say the words, "Josh, I forgive you."

- You won't really mean it with your emotions at first, but you are taking baby steps.

- All of the sudden thoughts start creeping into your mind.

- Maybe you had a relationship with this person and you actually begin to wonder what they're up to you.
- Maybe you reach out and this becomes an opportunity for reconciliation, but maybe it doesn't.
- Maybe it's healthier if you stay away, and that's okay sometimes too.

I learn this... forgiveness does not require you to be their friend.

- Maybe it's against someone where reconciliation is impossible. Maybe they are deceased.

For some of you... the name that you need to write down is your own.

- For some of you, you need to be able to look in the mirror for a few seconds and not be disgusted with what you can't forgive yourself for.
- Some of you need to be being held in your own prison, because of your own actions, that you can't forgive yourself for.
- How long will you keep beating yourself up over something Jesus forgave you for 2000 years ago?
- Was His death not enough for you to satisfy your ownership of your fault?
- Was His death not enough for you to satisfy the ownership of other's faults?

Release yourself from your prison

- Tonight, God is going to set some people free from their prisons.
- And it all begins with your decision to forgive.