

Bible Studies for Life: February 27

The Pitfall of Guilt and Grudges • Genesis 50:15-21

By Paula Smith



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Having grown up as a Preacher's Kid, I was privileged to hear a lot of stories and illustrations. Here is one that makes a great point:

Three mean-looking guys on motorcycles pulled into a truck stop. There was a little guy sitting at the counter eating lunch. The three guys saw him, made fun of him, pushed his food off the counter, and laughed in his face. Amazingly, this little truck driver didn't say a word. He just got up, paid for his food, and walked out.

Apparently, these guys weren't happy they hadn't provoked him into a fight. One guy said to the waitress, "He sure wasn't much of a man, was he?" As she looked out the window, she replied, "No, I guess not. He's not much of a truck driver either. He just ran over three motorcycles."

I would think that the world's philosophy of "don't get mad, just get even" was as alive and well in ancient times as it is today. Why would Joseph's brothers think they needed to send a message to Joseph after their father had died? Why were they afraid?

Joseph had gone above and beyond to show them he had forgiven them. He sent for his father and whole household. He got Pharaoh to agree to give a choice piece of land in Egypt to his family. He saved them from death by starvation.

Still, guilt is like that, isn't it? We can't seem to be rid of it. It makes us afraid even though we have the assurance from God's Word. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love" (1 John 4:18 ESV).

The guilt they had been carrying all these years kept them afraid. They said their thoughts aloud to each other. "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him" (Genesis 50:15 ESV).

Isn't it interesting that the fear was so great that they could not face him? "So, they sent a message to Joseph" (Genesis 50:16 ESV). They sent someone else to speak to Joseph because they couldn't.

"Your father gave this command before he died: 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you." And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.'" (Genesis 50: 16-17 ESV).

The Bible doesn't say if Jacob actually said this or if the brothers just made it up because of their fear of Joseph. They referred to themselves as "servants" and they referred to God as the God of "your" father. Were they remembering Joseph's dreams? Here they were literally bowing down before Joseph.

I'm sure they were surprised and relieved at the way Joseph answered them. His forgiveness toward them could only come from a relationship with the Lord. It gives a preview of Jesus as He was nailed on the cross and cried, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34 ESV).

“But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones” (Genesis 50:19-21 ESV).

God brought good from evil in Joseph’s story and saved the lineage of Jesus. The cross of Jesus is the ultimate example of God bringing good out of evil. It was total evil scheming to wipe out total innocence, but Jesus’ death was the fulfillment of the plan made by God from the beginning of the world.

As Joseph told his brothers “to bring it about that many people should be kept alive” (Genesis 50: 20 ESV), Jesus’ death was the fulfillment of God’s plan of redemption and salvation for sinners – for you and for me.

Isn’t it interesting to note that Joseph’s brothers called themselves God’s servants and later told Joseph they were his servants? This reflects to me that those who belong to Jesus by faith serve Him and one another.

“For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:34 ESV). Whatever evil the world may mean toward God’s people on account of Jesus, God means it for good.

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