

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality 15/9/2013

Go back in order to go forward: Part 3 — Gen 50:15-21

How we do relationships and how we express our feelings and how we view the world are all this has been deeply shaped in our early years growing up in our families. So, when you come to Christ and his family, you are used to functioning in a certain way. Like those magnets, you have these rules for living lodged in your brains. It pulls you back. It's so powerful because it is what shaped us. It's like a blueprint for living and it is imprinted on us.

No family is perfect. The problem is that, unless we identify our sinful patterns, we are not going to be able to put off those sinful patterns. So we need to go back before you can go forward.

Gen 50:15-21 –

¹⁵When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" ¹⁶So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

¹⁸His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them

Joseph's father, Jacob, lies constantly. He lied to his father Isaac to get the blessing – he put on the skin of a *goat* on so he would feel like his brother Esau. Then Jacob's sons used the blood of a *goat* to fool Jacob that Joseph had been killed. Patterns of behaviour have been passed down from Jacob to his son.

Joseph is able to break with the past and forgive. How does Joseph do things differently?

- Recognized what had been done to him and faces up to his past ("you intended to harm me") v 20
- Stops himself becoming bitter by not judging ("Am I in the place of God?") v 19
- Realises how amazing God is and the good he has achieved ("God intended it for good to accomplish...the saving of many lives") v 21

Follow Joseph's example

How do we follow Joseph's example? Maybe there are three practical points:

1. Face up to the past. Identify the unwritten rules of your family, e.g.

MONEY: Money is the best source of security. No Jesus is our refuge and our strength

SUCCESS: success brings self worth. Our self worth is because we were created in God's image

CONFLICT: *Avoid conflict at all costs.* Avoiding conflict is not healthy – we should resolve conflict in a loving healthy way.

GRIEF AND LOSS: *Sadness is a sign of weakness.* But you know what? In God’s family, we embrace grief. We let God make us compassionate. But we don’t do grief and loss the way your families did it.

EXPRESSING ANGER: *Anger is dangerous and bad.* But in God’s family, we express anger in an appropriate way and it’s part of our discipleship.

2. Discern the Good God Intends “in, through and, in spite of,” Your Family and Past

The point of the story of Joseph’s family is that God is always working in a very hidden, mysterious way through all of the mess. God is working to move Joseph to a place in Egypt to bless and save many people. Knowing that God uses circumstances in our life for God is something we need to remind ourselves regularly. Let’s meditate about it. Seeing God use things in our life for good.... this will transform us. It made a huge difference for Joseph – it is part of the healing that he has gone through to be able to say to those who wanted to kill him – I forgive you.

3. Make the Decision to do the Hard Work of Discipleship

To change a habit of a lifetime is not easy.

It can be costly – in terms of time (going to home group, church, bible study and prayer). Prayer can be emotionally/spiritually exhausting these things don’t necessarily come easy to us – but there is no substitute to spending time with him so that we can become more like him

Joseph, I suspect, had a lot of silence and solitude with God in that prison because he knows God. He knows that God is good and that God is working. Joseph had many, many years pondering all this stuff with God. And he breaks free and he becomes a blessing to nations of people.

For further thought...

- Imagine yourself in Joseph’s shoes in prison with no hope of release. What thoughts, feelings or doubts would have about your family, about yourself, about God?
- Re-read verses 19-21 slowly. Here we see Joseph’s response to the enormous loss he has experienced. Consider the different aspects of the responses below. As you think about your own life story, which one speaks most to you?
 - “Don’t be afraid
 - “Am I in the place of God”
 - “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for God.”
- Joseph chooses to break with his family’s normal way of dealing with hurt and conflict by forgiving his brothers. How might you have responded in Joseph’s shoes?
- What are some of the unwritten rules from your family?
- What is one specific message God is revealing to you about your family that you want to change as part of your hard work of discipleship?