

Tab 1

## **Series Slide: Finding the Good Life**

The last 3 weeks we've been in a series called Finding the Good Life where we are looking at 6 phrases that are the keystones to any good, meaningful, and deep relationship when you say them AND mean them. We've seen from God's words and through Christ's example how these phrases have the power to transform our relationships:

- I love you
- I'm proud of you
- I'm sorry

Today we're going to consider the phrase, "I forgive you."

## **TITLE: I Forgive You | How to embrace others with justice and love**

Hearing those 3 words can change you deeply- the way you act, the way you think about yourself. And delivering those 3 words means you are willingly absorbing the cost of an offense/wrong for the sake of a relationship.

Forgiveness is difficult, even unnatural. If you're honest, meting out a little justice mixed with revenge. Whether it's the meme of Michael Jordan saying to every perceived slight or comment, "i took that personal" or John Wick going on a vigilante killing spree to avenge the death of his dog. It should be easy to see that failure to forgive can destroy not only your relationships with others but also your soul from the inside out.

Consider the true story of Brandt Jean.

- Saint Lucian teenager, took his mom's car out while parents on a cruise
- Flipped and demolished her car
- Mom, "I'm just glad you're OK."

There are many other true examples of more extreme cases of forgiveness:

- Elisabeth Elliot returning to forgive the men who killed her husband Jim and 4 others
- Corrie ten Boom who forgave a Nazi guard of the Ravensbruck concentration camp
- The PA Amish community that forgave the family of the school shooter who killed 5 and injured 5 others, even built a relationship with the shooter's mother

These stories point to something beautiful that we would all want to see in our relationships. The freedom of a forgiven and reconciled relationship.

Relationships inevitably bring about conflict, offense, and sin toward one another. But deep relationships are ones marked by not only saying the words, "I love you, I'm proud of you, and I'm sorry." They will also be ones that are reconciled by also saying the words, "I forgive you."

We'll be looking at forgiveness from the vantage point of many places in scripture today. But we're going to start with the story of a majorly dysfunctional family, one you could say was rescued by forgiveness. Genesis 50 where a family is restored through forgiveness.

Bibles in back. Words on screen.

### **Genesis 50:15-21**

**When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said to one another, "If Joseph is holding a grudge against us, he will certainly repay us for all the suffering we caused him."**

**So they sent this message to Joseph, "Before he died your father gave a command: 'Say this to Joseph: Please forgive your brothers' transgression and their sin—the suffering they caused you.' Therefore, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when their message came to him. His brothers also came to him, bowed down before him, and said, "We are your slaves!"**

**But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people. Therefore don't be afraid. I will take care of you and your children." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.**

Today I want to focus on 3 aspects of forgiveness. We see these in Joseph's story as well as in many other places throughout the bible.

These aspects are: Vertical. Horizontal. Transformational. So let's begin by unpacking how Joseph and his brothers got to this point in Genesis 50.

After Genesis 2 everything pretty much turns into a dumpster fire- sin, murder, sexual misconduct, wickedness. And starting in chapter 37 we see Joseph's entrance into the scene, nearly the last ¼ of the book.

His family is really just the culmination of all the other brokenness in Genesis to this point: Sibling rivalry. Favoritism. Attempted murder. Human Trafficking. Deceit. Betrayal. All this drama is in the context of one family. Tell me the bible isn't still relevant today! Here's a brief summary:

Joseph is the favored son of Jacob, which makes his brothers jealous. Their resentment grows after Joseph's dreams suggest that the family will one day bow before him. The brothers first plan to kill him, then sell him into slavery instead. They deceive their father by covering Joseph's coat in blood and letting Jacob believe Joseph is dead.

In Egypt, Joseph is falsely accused, imprisoned, and forgotten for a time. But God is with him, and Joseph eventually rises to power after interpreting Pharaoh's dreams. He becomes second-in-command in Egypt and oversees preparations for a severe famine.

When the famine reaches Canaan, Joseph's brothers come to Egypt for food. Joseph recognizes them, but they do not recognize him. After testing their character, he reveals himself, forgives them, and explains that God used their evil actions for good to preserve many lives.

Jacob and his whole family move to Egypt, where Joseph provides for them. Before he dies, Jacob blesses his sons, and Joseph later reassures his brothers that he will continue to care for them.

The book of Genesis ends with surprising hope, all because of the wisdom Joseph has gained through all his trials and tribulations AND because he chooses to forgive his brothers and reconcile with his family.

Let's dive in to 3 aspects of I forgive you:

**1. 'I forgive you' is vertical- it sees God in his rightful place.**

Uttering the words I forgive you is inherently difficult. It assumes that there has been an objective wrong committed against you- a slight, a sin, or even a crime.

Such was the case for Joseph. That's why Joseph's brothers panicked after their dad died and couldn't buffer them any longer.

**Genesis 50:15**

**When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said to one another, "If Joseph is holding a grudge against us, he will certainly repay us for all the suffering we caused him."**

They thought Joseph would seek revenge (holding a grudge). They feared Joseph would use his power to pay back his brothers and get justice through his own means. But Joseph resists.

What makes forgiveness so complex is that it can be seen as opposed to justice.

That's why some people view forgiveness as moral weakness or that it undermines justice. Soft on crime. Doormat. Pushover.

But the opposite of justice is not forgiveness. It's vengeance. And forgiveness is anything but weakness. It is strength rightly stewarded.

Joseph's brothers see the justice that is due. They've committed wrongs. Whether their dad said these words or not, they at least acknowledge their guilt in them:

**Genesis 50:17**

**'Say this to Joseph: Please forgive your brothers' transgression and their sin—the suffering they caused you.' Therefore, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when their message came to him.**

They acknowledge their sin and put God in view in their plea for mercy. Their request is that the consequence for their sin be removed, lifted away. Like a burden too heavy to carry.

Joseph could've gone full John Wick on his brothers. He could take matters into his own hands. But he didn't. In his response he puts things into the vertical perspective first:

**Genesis 50:19**

**But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God?”**

Am I in the place of God? No. He isn’t. No matter how wronged he was by his brothers, he knows he still isn’t God.

**Genesis 50:20-21**

**You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people. Therefore don’t be afraid. I will take care of you and your children.” And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.**

Joseph didn’t soften their sin. He absorbs it. He says you meant EVIL against me. He acknowledges the sin toward him and toward God. And still he forgives by treating them with kindness because of recognizing the right order he has before God.

**Romans 12:17-21**

**Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone’s eyes. If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God’s wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord. But**

**If your enemy is hungry, feed him.**

**If he is thirsty, give him something to drink.**

**For in so doing**

**you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.**

**Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.**

Don’t repay evil with evil. Allow the Lord to remain in his rightful place the the ultimate judge. Forgiveness for the wrongs you’ve committed against the Lord should change everything about the wrongs others commit against you. This vertical nature of forgiveness frees us from vengeance and evil and toward compassion and good.

**2. ‘I forgive you’ is horizontal- it absorbs others’ debt and hopes for reconciliation.**

In a global study from over 20 countries, it was concluded that people who forgive others their wrongs lead a happier life. This translates into both physical and mental well being for the *forgiver*. Lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol, and less anxiety/depression.

The counter-intuitive, horizontal nature of forgiveness has the potential to both free the offender and the offended from bitterness.

*(Both Quotes on same slide)*

**Resentment is like drinking poison, hoping the other person dies.**

**“By not forgiving, I chain myself to a desire to get even, thereby losing my freedom. A forgiven person forgives.” Henri Nouwen**

According to Robert Jones in *Pursuing Peace* (book of the month) there are two levels of forgiveness:

## **Two Levels of Forgiveness**

### **Level 1: Dispositional**

We can all grant level 1 forgiveness, not dependent on the other person

- Heart & 'want to', attitude of releasing the other person
- Not passive toward the other person with folded hands and raised eyebrows
  - I don't ruminate on the offense
  - I don't gossip and slander my offender
  - I don't wish for their demise

From where do these resources come? From looking to Jesus.

### **Ephesians 4:31-5:2**

**Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.**

**Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.**

The attitude of "I forgive you" is our way of imitating God and how he has loved us. Our heart is softened and our grievances released so compassion can grow.

### **Matthew 6:12, 14-15**

**And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

...

**For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses.**

Jesus' instruction on prayer is framed as a consistent practice. So when he speaks about forgiveness not only does he expect sin, but he empowers us with how to regularly repent and extend forgiveness. Furthermore, forgiveness means that you absorb another's debt of sin toward you. You don't ignore it or return it. You absorb it.

Level 1 forgiveness should be the standard operating procedure in relationships. This is how we translate vertical into the horizontal. This is how we participate in "Your kingdom come, Your will be done." And it starts with our attitude and disposition toward those who have sinned against us.

And though yes, this involves another person, you and I must take accountability for our own attitudes towards those who have sinned against us. Even if they never repent, you can still experience level 1 forgiveness. We can release that person from our judgment and entrust them to God.

## Two Levels of Forgiveness

### Level 1: Dispositional

### Level 2: Transactional

Can only truly be initiated when the other person repents. Here's a couple of things to keep in mind:

- Forgiveness shouldn't be coerced- you have to be ready to grant it
  - Joseph's forgiveness wasn't granted right after being thrown into the pit, it happened YEARS later. I'm sure he dealt with all kinds of resentment along the way.
- Forgiveness does NOT equal trust
  - Like Brandt Jean's mom- the mother of the kid who totaled his mom's car. She may have forgiven him quickly. But that doesn't mean she will just hand over her car keys when Brandt asks to borrow her new car.
  - Consequences, accountability, and justice naturally follow from sin. Unjust and unwise to ignore.
  - Forgiveness doesn't lock you into toxic or abusive relationships. Wisdom moves toward reconciliation and away from manipulation.

So what does Level 2 forgiveness look like?

### Luke 17:3-4

**Be on your guard. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and comes back to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him.**

Jesus identifies the offender as brother. Familial language. Subtle reminder to view your offender as family and not enemies.

And Jesus makes it pretty simple: If they say 'I repent' we forgive. And this opens the door to reconciliation and rebuilding of trust and relationship.

- Level 2 can't be transacted until the offender repents
- And Level 2 forgiveness means absorbing your brother or sister's sin debt- cash in on God's grace given to you and extend that grace and mercy to them
- Initiates the possibility of reconciliation

### **3. I forgive you is transformational- it is the vulnerable embrace of love and justice.**

The most vulnerable, sacrificial, and transformational act in all of history was Jesus death on the cross. Naked. Exposed. Arms spread helplessly. All for crimes he never committed. In fact we understand that he was our substitute for the penalty of our sin. And through his death and resurrection we can receive forgiveness of sin and restoration of relationship with God.

### Ephesians 1:7

**In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace**

It is through Christ's blood, his death, that we have our sins forgiven. We receive God's GRACE: God's riches at Christ's expense.

The story of Joseph & his brothers reminds me of the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. The younger son in that parable wishes his dad as good as dead, demands an inheritance, and then foolishly squanders it away before realizing his error. He didn't deserve grace or mercy. And yet when he sheepishly returns home he finds his dad running to him and embracing him with open arms.



This sculpture shows this moment the prodigal's father embraces his wayward son. You can see the emotion in the father's embrace with the strength to hold his son who is weakly draped in his arms. What a moment of grace and mercy.

There's more to Brandt Jean's story by the way. In 2018, after Brandt's car wreck in Saint Lucia, a Dallas police officer named Amber Guyger got off work from a nearly 14 hour long shift and went home to her apartment building around 10pm. She walked upstairs to find what she thought was her apartment door open and a voice coming from inside. She pulled her gun and yelled at the person inside. The person approached her in the darkness and she fired two shots- one of them striking the man directly in the chest. She calls for 911 to send EMS to the apartment and only then realizes she is in the wrong apartment.

That man was named Bo Jean, Brandt's older brother. Bo died. Amber was removed immediately from the police force and went to trial for murder. She was convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison.

Brandt gave a victim-impact statement at Amber's sentencing hearing. Leading up to it Brandt was honest about his anger and even desire to kill Amber in revenge. But when the day approached he knew there was a different opportunity.

From the stand Brandt said that if Amber was truly sorry, he forgave her, and wanted the best for her. He told her she should give her life to Christ. He said to her, "I love you as a person, and I don't wish anything bad on you." And then he says to everyone and to the judge, "I don't know if this is possible, but could I give her a hug, please? Please?" The judge says yes. They met in the middle of the courtroom and hugged for 45 seconds.



This is a moment where two people are experiencing forgiveness that's vertical, horizontal, and transformational. It reminds me a lot of the sculpture of the Prodigal Son.

Amber was convicted of murder. And she's still in jail today. Justice was served. And yet an underserved love and forgiveness was put on display in that Dallas courtroom. Burden lifted. Debt absorbed. It freed Brandt from hatred toward Amber and Amber from hatred toward herself. Forgiveness in a hug that holds the tension of both love and justice.

Listen, in order to have deep relationships we cannot extend the attitude and delivery of forgiveness in our own power. We must experience it first through the grace and mercy of God in Jesus. We cannot truly put forgiveness of others into perspective until we've seen the impact of our own sin toward a holy God who stands ready to forgive us and embrace us.

### **POINT 3 Again**

On the cross Jesus absorbed the penalty of our sin. His life paid the debt of our sin to reconcile us to God. It is one thing to sense the weight of guilt because of your sin. That's feeling the reality of justice. It is quite another to experience God's grace and mercy of forgiveness in Christ.

Have you received this transaction of his grace? That transaction will transform you and every relationship you have.

What would it look like in our relationships if we truly forgave? Imagine the depth of peace and freedom you might experience. Imagine the burdens lifted off others that would point them to Jesus. Imagine being a church that does not slander, doesn't avoid one another, and doesn't hold grudges.

What a testimony to God's grace that would be not only to one another but to our city and to the world.

In just a moment as we sing there will be prayer counselors available.

- Pray to receive God's gift of grace in Jesus.
- Prayer to forgive someone who has deeply hurt you.
- Pray for someone you want to forgive but hasn't repented yet.

Let's not waste this moment and opportunity to respond in faith.

Tab 2

