



DIGGING DEEPER WEEK 5



Forgiving Ourselves: Breaking the Chains of the Past

Often our pasts haunt us. We remember how we treated that girl in middle school or some bad decisions we made in college. Other times we have big regrets over the consequences of our gossip, anger, destructive habits, or actions that have hurt others. Joseph's brothers did something that brought major consequences. They kidnapped and sold their own brother.

In their jealousy and hatred, they made a choice that greatly affected Joseph, but it also changed their own lives forever. Observing them throughout the Genesis narrative, we notice the weight of guilt and shame in their lives as they struggled to be free of the past. Here are a few glimpses we're given into their struggle with freedom:

- **About the time that Joseph is serving in Potiphar's house, we find that "Judah left home and moved to Adullam" (Genesis 38:1). Though we don't know for sure why he moves, we do know that Jacob's mourning over his lost son is great. It's possible that Judah just can't stand to watch his father grieve, knowing he played a role in causing his pain. In Adullam, Judah marries a Canaanite woman and watches his sons grow up and make such bad decisions that the Lord takes their lives. We find Judah soliciting a prostitute and seeming to flounder spiritually until he gets a wake up call when his daughter-in-law confronts him. Though we will see a transformation in Judah's life later, shortly after his vengeful act toward Joseph he appears to be affected by the sin of his past.**
- **When the brothers travel to Egypt on their first trip to buy grain, they encounter Joseph, whom they believe to be an Egyptian official. When he accuses them of being spies and puts them in prison for three days, he then tells them that one of them must remain in prison until they return with their younger brother. Joseph overhears them speaking among themselves about why the reason things are going so badly for them, saying it is related to their treatment of Joseph: "Clearly we are being punished because of what we did to Joseph long ago. We saw his anguish when he pleaded for his life, but we wouldn't listen. That's why we're in this trouble" (Genesis 42:21). Over two decades have passed since they sold Joseph into slavery, but they still see every bad thing happening to them as punishment for what they did.**
- **Then when the brothers find money in their bags, their response is, "What has God done to us?" (Genesis 42:28).**

While we easily can stand in judgment of Joseph's brothers, we know our pasts are not blameless. Perhaps unwed pregnancy, abortion, adultery, a broken relationship, a lost job or opportunity, or some other memory from our past is the thing the enemy uses to taunt us when something goes wrong in our lives. He is the accuser, and he longs to keep us shackled to the pain of our past.

On the other hand, God longs to free us. He doesn't want us to live in guilt and shame. He sent His only Son Jesus to die as a payment for *all* our sin—both the little stuff and what we consider the big sins. Nothing from our past is unforgivable. We diminish the power of the cross when we believe our sin is too big to be forgiven.

God's Word tells us:

- *"He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world."* (1 John 2:2)
- *"For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins."* (Colossians 1:13-14)
- *"He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name."* (Acts 10:43)

Christ died to free us from the chains of the past. He calls us to repent—to express sorrow over what we have done and to turn from that behavior. God promises to help and guide us along a new path, knowing that although we won't follow it perfectly, our heart's intent is to do things His way.

When we can't forgive ourselves, we are saying that Christ's finished work on the cross isn't enough for us. Living with unforgiveness for ourselves leaves us living in condemnation like Joseph's brothers. We will see every bad thing in our lives as God's punishment and operate out of fear instead of faith. This is not how God longs for us to live.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). You may say, "I *believe* that, but I just don't *feel* it. I feel so bad about what I've done." First John 3:20 says this: "Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything."

Sweet sister, God is greater than your feelings. He does not condemn you. He forgives you. He knows the things you've done, and He loves you. He sent His Son to die in order to cleanse you of the sin in your life. Don't live one more day chained to the past; walk free in God's forgiveness, knowing He has removed your sin from you as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). He is crazy about you!

