GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD!

**Genesis 50:15-21**  When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "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." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." 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."

There is a 76-year-old man by the name of Bill Baker. Bill Baker lives in London. He recently married a woman by the name of Edna Harvey. Edna is his grand-daughter's husband’s mother. That’s where the confusion began, according to Baker’s grand-daughter. Her name is Lynn. She said, "My mother-in-law is now also my step-grandmother. My grandfather is now also my step-father-in-law. My mother is now my sister-in-law and by brother is now my nephew. But even crazier is that I’m now married to my uncle and my own children are my cousins."

There are all kinds of families. But there is one thing that all families have in common. They fight. It’s hard to get along with everyone all the time. Conflict is part of family life.

"An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel." That’s Proverbs 18:19. That was King Solomon’s way of saying that family disagreements are among the most painful things in life. If you get into it with your friends at least you don’t have to live with them. If you don’t like the way your co-workers treat you, you can always find a different job. But if you can’t get along with your family, life becomes hard. You can’t just change families. Yours is the only family you’ll ever have.

If disagreements, harsh words, and even physical abuse have torn apart your family, the story of Joseph offers hope. Through Joseph’s actions God teaches us how to end family feuds. He says we do it by forgiving what has been done, and by foreseeing what God has planned. Most of the time, when people tell their life story, they speak about their pain. They describe how something from the past has scarred them. They tell you about how they were done wrong
How they were mistreated by either their family or their friends and for absolutely no reason at all. They were completely blameless. They played no part in the misunderstanding. They’ll tell you about the cutting comment that has stayed with them for years. They’ll speak about the criticism they could never quite shake off. Listen look enough and you will hear a cry of pain. Almost all of it seemingly completely undeserved and much of it family related.

Is your past scarred by criticism and messed up by hatred? Almost all of us have something to look back on that still hurts. We look back in anger, or disappointment, or fear. We look back and we still feel wounded. We can’t let the hurt go. The pain is still there

We can only get over it by forgiving what’s been done & by foreseeing what God has planned.

Joseph was one of twelve sons of Jacob. He was the grandson of Abraham. As the first-born of Jacob’s favorite wife, Rachel, he was Daddy’s favorite. The other boys may have been able to put up with their father’s favoritism but they couldn’t deal with their brother’s habit of bragging. Joseph claimed to have received dreams in which his brothers and parents bowed down to him. The dreams were real, but so was the hatred Joseph’s brothers felt for him. One day when Joseph’s brothers were taking care of their father’s sheep, they spotted Joseph coming towards them. As they grumbled about him, their jealousy turned to murderous rage. Before they knew it, they had hatched a plan to kill him. Thankfully two brothers, Reuben and Judah, intervened. They persuaded the others to sell Joseph into slavery instead. So Joseph was sent off to Egypt & his father was told his favorite son had been killed by a wild animal.

In Egypt, Joseph faithfully served the captain of the palace guard until he was falsely accused of sexual harassment. He was then imprisoned. There he languished for over two years before Pharaoh turned to him for help in interpreting his dreams. With God’s help, Joseph explained the meaning of Pharaoh’s dreams. As a result, he was elevated to a position he used to oversee Egypt’s food distribution.
It was under these circumstances that Joseph came face to face with his brothers once again. Famine had forced his brothers to come to Egypt for food. When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them immediately but they did not recognize him. When Joseph did reveal his true identity, how do you think his brothers felt? Do you think they were overjoyed to see him? No. They were scared. This was the brother they had hated and treated poorly. Now he had the resources to take revenge. Is that what Joseph had in mind for his brothers? No. Already at their first reunion Joseph put an end to the family feud. He forgave his brothers for what they had done. He didn’t just tell them they were forgiven. He showed it by caring for his brothers and their families and by giving them food and places to live.

Still his brothers weren’t convinced. They thought this was all part of Joseph’s plan to take revenge on them when they least expected it. And so when their father died years later, they thought for sure the time had come for Joseph to exact his revenge. Upon learning that his brothers still doubted his forgiveness, Joseph wept. Then he said to them: “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God?” Joseph had no plans for revenge. He knew that was God’s right alone. When we take revenge, even if that’s giving another the cold shoulder, we are playing God.

If you want to “play God,” do it by forgiving. When we forgive we do so at God’s command. We serve as God’s voice of love. Don’t wait for those who have hurt you to show that they are sorry for what they have done. Look at Joseph. He forgave his brothers before they even recognized him. The kind of forgiveness Joseph extended is the forgiveness God himself has shown us. God forgave us before we even asked for forgiveness. He forgave us by punishing his Son for our sins. It was our refusal to let go of grudges that pushed the nails through his hands. God not only forgave us for these and all sins before we asked, He forgives us forever. God’s forgiveness comes with a lifetime guarantee because the one who died for our sins is more than human. He’s God’s Son from eternity so everything he accomplished for us extends into eternity.
Since our debt of sin has been cancelled forever, Jesus calls us to do the same for one another.

“But Pastor, you don’t know the pain I’ve endured at the hands of family members. You don’t know how hard it is to forgive them!” You’re right. I don’t know the pain you’ve endured. But how does it compare to the pain Joseph experienced? His brothers hated him so much they almost killed him. If you’re bitter at family, know that Joseph had more reason but he wasn’t. Why not? Joseph wasn’t bitter because he saw the bigger picture. He saw what God had worked in spite of his brothers’ sins. Joseph explained to his brothers: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives”.

God gave Joseph the faith to see how he had allowed everything in Joseph’s life to happen so that he would be put in a position of authority to help his family and others through famine. No, Joseph was not excusing his brothers’ sin but he had come to see how God used those sins, and all the difficulties he had suffered as a result of them, for his benefit.

In the same way, God has promised to work everything in our lives, including painful experiences caused by the sins of family members, to work for our good. On this side of heaven we may never learn exactly how all the painful things we experience add up to our good. But that’s God’s promise. Family feuds aren’t fun. So why not end them? Forgive what has been done. Foresee the good God has planned in spite of the heartache you’ve experienced. End the feuds today, for God also said through Solomon: “There’s joy 4 those who promote peace.”

On the night of December 9, 1914, Edison Industries was destroyed by fire. Thomas Edison lost much of his life’s work that night. The next morning, walking about the charred embers of all his hopes and dreams, Edison said, “There is great value in disaster. All our mistakes are burned up. Thank God we can start anew.”

But not everyone believes that way. There are some people who’ve sinned so badly they don’t think they could ever be forgiven. They’ve given up on second chances. They live without hope.
A poet by the name of Hazel Felleman wrote:

"I wish there were some wonderful place
Called the Land of Beginning Again
Where all our mistakes, and all our heartaches
And all our selfish griefs
Could be cast like a shabby old coat at the door
And never be put on again"

She wished there was a place where the past could be put aside but she wasn’t convinced that such a place existed. That’s what we see with Joseph’s brothers. They seem to believe their sin will never be forgiven. “When 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?’” Joseph had forgiven them... but they’d never forgiven themselves.

Adam Clarke observed: “The conscience records our sins & by giving birth to continual fears and doubtfulness destroys all peace of mind, security, and confidence.”

Until a person comes to the point where they accept forgiveness they’ll tend to run away from the very thing that would give them peace of mind. They run from what they need the most.

A lawyer decided to cancel the debts of all his clients that had owed him money for more than six months. He drafted a letter explaining his decision and its biblical basis. He then sent out 17 debt-canceling letters by certified mail. SIXTEEN of the 17 letters were returned, unsigned and undelivered. Why? Because the clients refused to sign for them and open the envelopes. They were afraid that the attorney was suing them for their debts. So in their fear they ended up running away from his forgiveness.

This passage in Genesis 50 deals with two kinds of guilt.

1st it deals with Guilt that is forgiven. Joseph forgave his brothers. But why would he do that?
How could Joseph possibly forgive what they had done to him? Even his brothers had problems figuring that one out. Think about how you’d feel if someone did to you what they’d done to him. They robbed him of his coat. They violated his body by beating him and throwing him into a pit. They deprived him of his home and family. They planned to murder him and sent him to face a fate that could have been worse than death. What these brothers had done was cruel and unforgivable. But Joseph forgave them anyway. How could he do that? He could do it because he really did love his brothers. They may not have loved him but he loved them. When their message came to him, Joseph wept. Why? He loved his brothers.

A teacher was talking about how mean people could be to each other. One little girl raised her hand & said: “My sister is always mean to me...but I love her anyway. She’s my sister.” If you love someone, you can find it easy to forgive them. But what if you don’t love someone?

“Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.” That’s Proverbs 10:12 If I already hate someone I’ll find reasons to condemn them. But if I love someone I’ll tend to find a way to forgive them. Think about it. That’s how God dealt with us.

“For God so LOVED the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever would believe in Him might not perish but have everlasting life.”

Have you ever wondered how God could forgive you? He forgave you because He loved you. He’s always loved you. And because He’s loved you, it’s easy for Him to forgive you... no matter what you’ve done. And because God loved us so much that He could forgive US our sins He commands us to do the same thing to others. Peter writes: “love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” 1 Pet. 4:8 In Ephesians He says it even more powerfully: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.”
God says love each other - and forgive each other - BECAUSE I DID IT FOR YOU!

2ndly – not only did Joseph love his brothers... He trusted God. Joseph believed the promise God gives US in Romans 8:28 ”...we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Through it all Joseph always looked for God. He always depended upon God to be there for him in his slavery. He always depended on God to be there for him when he was in prison. When he finally was released from prison and became a powerful man... he still saw God in everything that had happened to him. That’s why he could tell his brothers: “as for you you meant it to me for evil but God meant it to me for good.”

The evil his brothers had done was something that God used to benefit Joseph and those he loved. What his brothers had done WAS evil...but what God did in response to their evil was faithful. If Joseph’s brothers hadn’t done that evil deed, Joseph wouldn’t be where he was now.

I’m not sure that everything that happens to us is God’s will, but I am convinced that we serve a MIGHTY God who can take whatever circumstances we give Him and turn it to our good. So this passage deals with guilt that HAS been forgiven...But it also deals with guilt that hasn’t been forgiven. Joseph’s brothers can’t figure out how Joseph could possibly have forgiven them. And they have good reason to believe that. They had beaten him. They had robbed him. They had thrown him in a pit. They had sold him into slavery.

What they did was a terrible thing but he forgave them. The problem was they couldn’t believe it. They couldn’t forgive themselves of what they’d done. Until they accepted Joseph’s offer of forgiveness they’d still live a life of doubt. They’d still live in fear of judgment. They’d still be separated from their brother who loved them. Maybe the hardest forgiveness of all is forgiving ourselves. If you have that problem don’t ever take your eyes off the Cross. AMEN!!