

Dealing With Guilt

And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. –Genesis 45:5

I sometimes think guilt is one of the most painful feelings in the world. My own greatest pain over the years has been guilt—and being reminded of my own failure, especially as a parent. If someone wanted to hurt me—to really and truly make me feel awful—all they would have to do is ask, “How much time did you spend with your kids in those critical years as they were growing up?” I am grateful that my children have totally forgiven me for my sins as a parent, but I still struggle with feelings of guilt for the mistakes that I made.

Joseph wanted to set his brothers free. He did not want them to blame or be angry with themselves; he wanted them to forgive themselves. Forgiveness is worthless to us emotionally if we can't forgive ourselves. And it certainly isn't total forgiveness unless we forgive ourselves as well as others.

God knows this. This is why He wants us to forgive ourselves as well as to accept His promises that our past is under the blood of Christ. Joseph was trying to do what Jesus would do: make it easy for his brothers to forgive themselves.

God does that with us as well; He wants to make it easy for us to forgive ourselves.

God doesn't want us to continue to feel guilty, so He says, “Just wait and see. I will cause everything to work together for good to such an extent that you will be tempted to say that even the bad things that happened were good and right.” Not that they were, of course, for the fact that all things work together for good doesn't mean necessarily that they were right at the time. But God has a way of making bad things become good.

This, then, is total forgiveness: not wanting our offenders to feel guilty or upset with themselves for what they did, and showing them that there is a reason God let it happen.

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