

**SCRIPTURE READING:** Matthew 18:21-35.

**INTRODUCTION:**

People sin against us. Consider Joseph. His brothers hated him and could not speak to him peaceably (Genesis 37:4B); they sold him into slavery (Acts 7:9A; Genesis 42:21A, “We [are] truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear”); and he ended up forgotten in prison (Psalm 105:18; Genesis 40:14-15, 23).

Yet, Joseph forgave his brothers. Genesis 45:4, 15; 50:15, 21.

How was Joseph able to do it? How was Esau able to do it? How was Jesus able to do it? How was Stephen able to do it? The same way we are able to do it.

In this morning’s lesson let’s talk about, “Letting It Go – Learning The Fine Art Of Forgiveness.”

**DISCUSSION:**

What is “it”? Mark 11:25-26; Luke 17:3-4.

Have we let it go? Forgiveness is a choice. Just because an offense fades from our mind, doesn’t mean we have forgiven the offender. If something happens which brings the offense to mind, and we still hold it against the offender, then we haven’t let it go. Signs that we haven’t let it go, that we are still bearing a grudge, include brooding, “to think about gloomily and persistently; ponder moodily” (Job 9:27B), record keeping (Matthew 18:21-22; 1 Corinthians 13:5), ill-will (Genesis 50:15), bitterness (Ephesians 4:31-32), wrath, anger (Psalm 85:2-3; Micah 7:18-19), strife (Proverbs 10:12), evil speaking (Proverbs 17:9), physical and emotional distance (Genesis 45:15; 2 Corinthians 2:6-8), etc. Job 14:17.

In order to let it go, we must keep several things in mind.

1. **We can and must let it go.** Genesis 41:51.
2. **They are human beings.** Psalm 78:38-39. Genesis 37:3-4. Mitigating circumstances do not excuse offenses, but their due consideration can certainly help us let offenses go.
3. **We aren’t perfect either.** Romans 3:9, 23. Joseph tattled. Genesis 37:2B. He was tactless. Genesis 37:5-11A, 19-20.
4. **What other people do against us is nothing compared to what we do against God.** Matthew 18:21-22, 23-27, 28-30, 31-35. Luke 23:34A; Ephesians 4:32.
5. **Things could have been worse.** Genesis 37:21-24A, 26-28; Hebrews 12:3-4; Acts 7:60.
6. **What we suffer because other people sin against us is nothing compared to what we deserve to suffer because we sin against God.** Romans 6:23.
7. **The good that can and should come from the bad.** Genesis 41:52; 45:4-8; 50:20; Romans 8:28.
8. **We must keep our place.** Genesis 50:19; Romans 12:17-21.
9. **We must be consistent.** Matthew 5:43-48.
10. **We must assume the best.** 1 Corinthians 13:7, love “believes all things, hopes all things.”
11. **The negative consequences of not forgiving.**
  - A. We have no reason for moral outrage.
  - B. The consequences of not forgiving are often far more damaging than the original offense. Hebrews 12:14-15.
  - C. We will lose our soul if we don’t repent.
  - D. We make ourselves miserable. Esther 5:9-13. “To forgive is to set the prisoner free—and then discover the prisoner was you” (author unknown).
  - E. We can discourage people who have repented of their sins. 2 Corinthians 6-8.