

10/16/11

Six Words Every Relationship Needs #1 - Grace

- one of the privileges I have as a pastor is talking to men and women after they or a loved one have received a difficult medical diagnosis...
- that's just a natural time for one of our pastors to connect with someone in the family who is hurting...
 - many times those conversations include the dreaded "c" word – I just learned that I have cancer...I realize that even this morning the mention of that word evokes emotions that are real and raw for a number of people who will attend our services...
- at some point in those conversations the issue of treatment options comes up...because our brothers and sisters are not just trying to digest very hard news but they are also faced with a myriad of directions they can now go regarding treatment and they are asking for prayer during such a critical time...
- one of the phrases that I frequently hear at times like that is...I just want this out of my body...
 - I don't care what they have to cut...I don't care what they put into my veins...I just want this gone...I don't want this growing in my body...
 - that's a powerful concern...
- even this weekend – Pastor Woodall and his family are out east to be with Julie's father who has been a faithful pastor for many years and he struggled with cancer a few years ago and they just learned that it has returned...please pray for them and the many others in our church family who are facing similar challenges right now...
- you know, the Scripture uses that same powerful metaphor of the possibility of something growing inside of you to warn us to be careful about the choices we make and what we allow to occur...
- our lives are anything but static and disconnected – there are things growing inside of us for either good or ill...
- here's a positive one... **Hebrews 12:11 - All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.**
- what that means is that if you're working on spiritual discipline in your life for the glory of God – even though it's hard – something is growing inside of you right now – do you see it – "the peaceful fruit of righteousness."...
- but not surprisingly—there are negative possibilities as well...and here's one from later in that exact same chapter in Hebrews...
- **Hebrews 12:14-15 - Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;**
 - did you see it in that passage?...bitterness...described here like a root of a plant...could be growing up inside of you...
 - a person doesn't wake up one morning and say – I think I'll pursue a lifestyle of full-blown bitterness today...no, it's a process that occurs over time...as a result of allowing something really bad...and really dangerous to grow inside of you...
- and did you notice one other important aspect of this...unlike cancer which is an individual disease that isn't contagious...bitterness is anything but that, is it?...
- but uncontrolled and unrestrained bitterness will spring up, cause trouble...and defile many...

- today and for the next five Sundays, we're going to be focusing on **Six Words Every Relationship Needs...**
- that's one of the primary purposes of the Scripture...to teach us how to love God and how to love others...
- and if you're here today for the first time, I'm so glad you've come...but I encourage everyone to invite those the Lord has placed around you – that's one of the reasons we do series like these – because they're just a natural opportunity to invite your friends...because who among us doesn't have problems with our friends?...
- now, to understand today's word – what is one of the strong antidotes to relating to others with bitterness?...the answer is – to choose to become a person of **Grace**...
 - see, bitterness chooses to hold a person's failures and injustices against them...and to replay those hurts over and over in an ever smoldering stew of resentment...and some people who will hear this message today are cultivating a heart that is like a crock-pot filled with spoiled, moldy, putrid ingredients and it stinks to high heaven every time you take the lid off...[and the lid, by the way, is frequently one's mouth]...but it's a heart that is overflowing with bitterness...
 - others may just have a few items in that crock-pot – the meal's just getting started...but it is inside of you...
 - and if it hasn't started defiling relationships yet...it certainly will...
 - what cleans that crock-pot out and removes the plug from the wall is a healthy cleansing of grace...
 - there's a word every relationship needs....choosing to become a person of grace...
- with that in mind, let me invite you to open your Bible this morning to Genesis chapter 39...page 30 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- there are many places in the Bible we could go to study this great topic because in many ways the Bible is a story of God's great grace...which motivated Him to make a way for sinful people like you and me to be reconciled to Him through acknowledging our sin and trusting in the shed blood of His Son...that's why the Bible even refers to the Lord as... **1 Peter 5:10 – "...the God of all grace."**
- so pick a page in the Bible and you're likely to find grace...
- but one of the greatest illustrations is the life on a man we're going to think about today...a man named Joseph.
- now I realize that some here have been studying Scripture for a long, long time...while others are brand new...
- it's amazing how many people say to me – I feel like I ought to go to SS with my child and learn all the Bible stories I missed growing...
- if that's your situation...please don't let that intimidate you...we all start somewhere...plus no one here fully understands everything there is to know about Scripture....so we're all at some place on the learning continuum...
- if you are new, here are two books I would encourage you to read and study right away...
 - **pic – God Wrote a Book** by James MacDonald
 - this will help you understand how we got the Bible and why we believe it really is the Word of God...
 - **pic – 30 Days to Understanding the Bible** by Max Anders
 - this provides a very helpful overview of Scripture – it gives you the skeleton on which to hang all the other Bible information you'll eventually accumulate...

- now here's the short version of Joseph's story since we're going to pick and choose from highlights of the tale this morning...
- Joseph was in the 4th generation of the patriarchs of Israel highlighted in the book of Genesis...
 - it started with promises made by God to Father Abraham...to make of him a great nation, and to give them a land, and to bless their seed forever...eventually we learn that the Messiah, the Son of God will be born of that nation and that in and of itself is a position of incredibly high honor...
 - then there was Isaac, Jacob...and now Joseph...
- Jacob had twelve sons...and God revealed to Joseph that even though he was one of the youngest...he would eventually have a position of leadership and authority over his brothers...
 - that started to come true...he was a natural leader and a person who could be trusted with all sorts of responsibilities...
 - that's why his father gave him a coat of many colors...the issue wasn't how colorful it was – that was a symbol of authority...it was the business suit, or the white shirt on the shop floor...he had been elevated to a position of leadership...
- and his brothers couldn't stand it...they were jealous and bitter...and so one day they actually threw Joseph in a pit and were planning to kill him...
 - instead they sold him into slavery and he ended up in Egypt...
 - while there, he prospered even as a slave under a man named Potiphar...and he was placed in charge of Potiphar's house...
 - Scripture also tells us that he was also a handsome young man, and Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him...and when he wouldn't give in...she falsely accused him and he was thrown in prison...
 - so he prospered there...and was given a position of authority in prison...
 - one day two of the king's servants who had also been tossed in prison had dreams which turned out to be true...
 - God allowed Joseph to interpret the dreams...and his only request to the men was that they remember him and report the injustice...
 - Joseph's interpretation came true – but the cupbearer who was restored forgot Joseph and he was stuck in jail for two more years...
 - then the king had a troubling dream...and finally the cupbearer remembered Joseph and told the king Joseph could interpret dreams...
 - So Joseph is hauled out of prison...and he interprets the king's dream by saying that God is warning their country that there will be 7 years of bounty followed by 7 years of famine...
 - so Joseph advised that a wise man be put over the economy and save from the abundance for the first 7 years so they are in a position of abundance for the following 7...and the king agreed – and put Joseph in that position...
 - the reason God wanted the Egyptians to know that apparently was that the Egyptians would be used to provide for his people the Jews when the famine affected them as well...
- which is exactly what happened...and 7 years later Joseph has led Egypt to be a position of great abundance and people from around that part of the world are coming to buy grain to feed their families so they don't starve to death...
- and surprise, surprise...one of the groups that comes to buy grain is comprised of Joseph's brothers...

- and Joseph treated them just like he had treated everyone else along the path of this incredible journey...with marvelous, abundance grace...
- let's dig into some of the specifics of the story now...and look for **4 places Joseph chose to show grace.**
 - and of course the question in the background for all of us is...do I show grace like that as well?...

- let's begin with...

I. Grace in the Office

- read Genesis 39:1-6...

- now, let's tease out what we just read...

A. The difference between “went down to Egypt voluntarily” and “had been taken” down to Egypt as a slave is substantial.

- sometimes we fail to factor that into our understanding of this story because of how well everything else is going...
- plus there are just so many details left out about how this arrangement really worked...
- but please make no mistake about this – Joseph was there against his will...and that was always in the background of this story...even in his mind...
- now you might say – how do you know that?...it actually comes up later with the baker and cupbearer... **Genesis 40:15 - For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon.**
- and please remember – he had to decide what he was going to do with that...
 - that could have been one big hunk of bitter meat tossed in the crock-pot of his heart and it could have been the lens through which he viewed his responsibilities at work every day...
 - responding to everyone around him with sullen bitterness...with a refusal to work hard or perform well because of the abuses he'd suffered...
 - but that's not what happened at all, was it...

B. His work ethic blessed his employer.

- **Genesis 39:3 - Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand.**
- **Genesis 39:5 - It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD's blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field.**
- there is no indication whatsoever that Joseph made Potiphar pay a price because he was in a less than ideal situation – no, it's quite the opposite...
- Joseph worked so hard, and so well...that his bosses' business thrived like never before...and what does that tell us?...

C. He chose to respond to an unfair situation with grace.

- and think about the way that would had affected relationships where he worked...
- he couldn't have been known as the bitter guy, as the complainer, as the lazy one who was mad about his circumstances even though he had plenty of reason to be...
- that's what grace does...it overlooks a fault...it refuses to make that the lens through which all other situations and choices and conservations are determined...
- have you ever noticed that with some people – it's just always about “that”...
 - that failure, that injustice, that hurt...it's always on the front burner with some people...not with Joseph...why?...

D. Because of his firm belief in the omnipresence and sovereignty of God.

- we read this great phrase repeatedly in this story...
- **39:2 – The LORD was with Joseph...**
 - Jehovah, YaHWeH – the God who had made promises to His covenant people and the God who would certainly keep them...
- even his master... **Genesis 39:3 - Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand.**
- there is only one possible way this man could have come to this conclusion...not that Joseph was successful, but that his success was due to the blessing of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...
- Joseph told him...
- Joseph's testimony is the principle to which the book of Genesis is pointing...
- God is powerful enough to sovereignly keep His promises...even when the final outcome is not yet clear...

- you could say it this way – there is a direct relationship between the depth of your belief in the omnipresence and sovereignty of God and your ability, even in the midst of disappointment and injustice, to respond to others around you with purposeful and marvelous grace...

- and of course that leads us to an obvious question....doesn't it?...when you wake up in the morning, do you set out on a one-person crusade to right every wrong before the end of business today – or do you speak to others with grace, and treat others with grace, and work hard to bless others because you see that as an opportunity for your God to be glorified...
- wouldn't it be something if the people with whom you worked had to, perhaps grudgingly conclude...God is with him...God is with her...
 - that's the only explanation for that cheerfulness...
 - that's the only explanation for that energy...
 - that's the only explanation for that effectiveness...it's from heaven...
 - if it could happen to Joseph – it could happen to you, because grace is one of the words every relationship needs...

- and I realize you might say...but PV, you have to understand...my job is like a prison...or my marriage is like a prison...my extended family is like a prison...did you say prison?...
- well, what's happens next?...because of Potiphar's wife's false accusations...that's where Joseph is thrown...so we can read about...

II. Grace in the Prison

- read 39:19-40:8
- did you hear that?...that's the sound of grace...
- now let's back up just to be sure we understand how powerful this is...he had been...

A. Falsely accused.

Genesis 39:17-18 - Then she spoke to him with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside."

- but that's not all there was to the story...

B. God extended grace to him.

- **Genesis 39:21 - But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.**

- and Joseph knew that because he had eyes to see and ears to hear...
- his response to these events wasn't – I'm a great administrator...I'm really something...
- because had he done that – his bitterness might have intensified...how can a great person like me be experiencing these abuses?...
- no, he recognized that God was being gracious to Him – which is what allowed him, directed him, motivated him to be gracious to others....the bottom line is...

C. Joseph found ways to serve/glorify God even in that setting.

- **Genesis 40:8 - Then they said to him, "We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *it* to me, please."**
- don't you love that?...
- the crock-pot of his heart had been scrubbed clean with the cleanser of grace...and friends...

D. Grace is that powerful.

1. Because it's source is God Himself.

- Psalm 84:11 - For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.**
- Proverbs 3:34 - Though He scoffs at the scoffers, yet He gives grace to the afflicted.**

2. Because it's the essence of wisdom.

- **Proverbs 4:8-9 - Prize her, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a garland of grace; she will present you with a crown of beauty.**

3. Because our Savior is the personification of grace.

- **John 1:14-16 - And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' "** For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.
- this is why if you're here this morning and you've never trusted Christ...we would invite you to do so...because you can't live in the power of the grace of God until you've received and experienced the grace of God...

4. Because God wants His grace to reign in you.

- Romans 5:20-21 - The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

5. Because grace has a missional purpose.

- a very important part of this discussion occurs in 2 Corinthians 6...if you know your Bible, you know that 2 Corinthians 5 is that marvelous passage about God's people being ambassadors for Christ – begging people in Christ's stead that they would be reconciled to God...and right after that explanation Paul says these words...
- **2 Cor. 6:1 - ...we urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain.**
- wouldn't that be a terrible thing...if a person trusted Christ as savior and Lord...and then allowed a root of bitterness to grow up inside of them, like a cancer, like a piece of rotten meat in the crock-pot of their heart...

- and as a result allow that to poison all the relationships around them...
 - and because of that...miss opportunities like the one Joseph repeatedly seized...to be a living example of the wonderful grace of God...
 - "I choose to be gracious to you...even though everything isn't going my way right now...because God has chosen to be gracious to me in the ways that really matter."
- you know, that's what Faith West is all about...we hope one of the main entrances to the campus screams a message of the grace of God...
 - and please remember this – at one of the pivotal times in the ministry of the Apostle Paul – he looked at the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 and he said...
 - **Acts 20:32 - And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you up* and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.**
 - that's exactly what we're trying to do with this project...
 - let's check in on our progress, shall we...review the updated gift range chart
 - one of things I like about capital campaigns is that it allows questions to come to the surface, and ideas to be clarified...
 1. One question we've heard is – why should we invest in college ministry if these students are going to graduate and go off to other places...that's not going to benefit us...shouldn't we invest in ministries and facilities for people who are more likely to stay and support the church long-term?...
 - that's a fair question—I suppose...but it really lacks grace...
 - we don't do things for what we can get...we look for ministry opportunities and if we can win college students for Christ, and then train them with as much biblical truth as possible while they're here – they will be great potential church members in other places some day...and we in turn have been a blessing to other church families...
 - let's face it – we have a lot – and the more we can share with others, the better...that's what grace does...
 2. Think also about another ministry possibility...with international students...
 - one of the many ministries we plan to start at Faith West is to the wives and children of international students...
 - as we see such persons trust Christ, they can in turn go back to their countries of origin as leaders and have a much more effective, and much more efficient missions ministry than we could ever have...
 - and sure, this side of heaven, we may not see the direct benefit of that...but that's not the point...
 - there's other elements of this story that time won't allow us to fully cover...but there are several others ways this theme is played out in Joseph's life...

III. Grace on the Boardroom

- Joseph is eventually brought to Pharaoh and asked to interpret some troubling dreams he had...

A. Joseph was perfectly positioned to seek revenge.

- let me tell you the story of how unjustly I've been treated...
- but he left revenge to the Lord...

B. He chose to exercise grace and direct attention to the power and beauty of God.

- **Genesis 41:16 - Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.”**
- **Ephesians 4:31 - Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.**
- why?...because it takes attention off the Lord (did you see how mad she was)?...
- churches have to decide what they want to be known for – cf. the neighbor who said of the Faith West project – it’s almost too good to be true...
- that’s what happens when you ask people how you might be able to serve them...

IV. Grace in the Family.

- of course if you know the story at all, you know this part...
- at the very end, after their father had died...the brothers assumed Joseph’s grace was over...
- **Genesis 50:19-20 - But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? “As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.**