

February 24, 2019
Genesis 45:3-11, 15

“Nevertheless, Say ‘Yes!’”

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As I reflected upon the story of Joseph and his brothers, I found myself reading an online blog titled, “The worst thing my brothers, or sisters ever did to me.” Many of the stories were so bad I would not even recount them here. I began to realize exactly how tame my family has been. I think the worst thing my older brother ever did to me was allow his friends to hold me down and tickle me until I got upset. And honestly, I can’t think of anything I would consider mean that my younger brother ever did to me.

Joseph’s brothers and their story could have been in the hunt for award winning worst story on that website. Let’s review. Joseph was one of the 12 sons of Jacob and it was clear he was his Father’s favorite. Joseph would have these wild dreams which he would recount to his brothers about how he was going to be Mr. Big and his brothers would all be groveling at his feet. As you can imagine this did not endear Joseph to his brothers very much.

So his brothers got sick of his talk and planned to kill him. On their way they got sidetracked and ended up selling Joseph to some Egyptians, this way they would make some money and he would be as good as dead. To frame his death the brothers took his clothes and tore them to look like their brother had lost a battle with a wild cat, then they showed their father. Everyone was convinced Joseph was dead.

But Joseph was not dead, in Egypt, he began life as a slave. But because of his ability to farm and understand dreams; he worked his way up to Secretary of Agriculture and Chief Dream interpreter to the Pharaoh.

About that time a famine hit in Joseph’s homeland of Canaan. People came from far and wide because Egypt had big storehouses of food to share. International relief efforts were in full force. Among those who came to Egypt were Joseph’s brothers but when they encountered him, they did not recognize him because Joseph was speaking Egyptian and wearing Royal clothes.

After a few meetings hiding his identity and having a little fun with them, Joseph’s Spiritual maturity took over. His desire to become reunited with his family became stronger than his desire to get revenge on his brothers; so, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers. They were scared at first, frightened he was going to retaliate, but Joseph assured them it was ok; saying, “Come closer to me, . . . I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves because you sold me; for God sent me before you to preserve life. “

This is often preached as a story about the power of Godly forgiveness and this statement from Joseph to his brothers is a Pacific Ocean sized dose of spiritual maturity. Essentially Joseph is saying, “Hey brothers, don’t worry about trying to kill me, or selling me off to the

Egyptians as a slave, I am not angry, I forgive you and... in fact... I want to use my position as Royalty in Egypt to help you through the famine and I want to be reunited with you and Dad.

So Yes, the power of forgiveness to reunite is a part of this story. But if we take a closer look at Joseph, I believe we will see something else that can be of great value to us. I am going to call it "Nevertheless, Say 'Yes'."

If you spent any time studying philosophy, or psychology, you may have encountered a thinker by the name of Viktor Frankl. Frankl was an Austrian neurologist, psychiatrist and philosopher. He was a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp for four years. He was a slave laborer during some of that time. During his imprisonment he lost his wife and parents to the Holocaust.

Liberated by American troops in 1945, Frankl returned to Vienna and resumed his neurological and psychiatric practice. His book, Man's Search For Meaning was written that same year to describe how his concentration camp experiences shaped his philosophy and his radically new approach to psychotherapy.

Frankl writes, "Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you would become the plaything of circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity to become molded into the form of the typical inmate."

Frankl wrote his book in German, and when it was published in America the title lost some of its distinctiveness. The literal translation of Frankl's German title would be, "Nevertheless, Say 'Yes' to Life: A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp."

The 'Nevertheless' of Frankl's title refers to those daily horrors of life in the concentration camp. In spite of enduring these, the author maintains that a person still possesses the freedom to choose a meaning for his (or her) life—a reason to remain alive.

So, Joseph, in addition to a lesson on forgiveness, provides part of the Spiritual roadmap for times when we face suffering. Joseph saw his brothers and considering all harm they had done to him, he said, "Nevertheless, Yes." Yes, I will help you! Yes, I want to reunite with my family! Yes!

"Nevertheless, Say 'Yes.'" We get this power from Jesus Christ himself. Who in the face of ignorance said, "Nevertheless, 'Yes.'" – to life. In the face of mocking said, "Nevertheless, 'Yes.'" to life. In the face of rejection said "Nevertheless, 'Yes.'" To life. And even hanging on the cross dying said, "Nevertheless, 'Yes.'" to life.

Joseph saw a larger purpose for his suffering. Professor Walter Brueggemann imagines Joseph thinking to himself, "I became aware that my life was more than the sum of my little

fears, my little hates, and my little loves. My life is larger than I imagined, and I decided to embrace the largeness that is God's gift for my life."

I close with two quotes, first, Rachel Naomi Remen, author and teacher of integrative medicine says, "Wounding and healing are not opposites. They're part of the same thing. It is our wounds that enable us to be compassionate with the wounds of others. It is our limitations that make us kind to the limitations of other people... I think I have served people perfectly with parts of myself I used to be ashamed of."

And Richard Rohr, a renowned Christian voice said, "If we do not transform our pain, we will transmit it... If there isn't some way to find some deeper meaning to our suffering, to find that God is somehow in it, and can even use it for good, we will normally close up and close down."

Thank you God for examples like Joseph and Christ Jesus.

Amen