

INTRODUCTION

In this series on the life of Joseph, I've been teaching that you can travel down God's road to success, but before you can be successful, you've got to realize the true Bible definition of success: Success is finding and following God's will for your life. Even when you're on the road to success, you will encounter plenty of frustrating situations. There are speed bumps, sinkholes, stop signs, and detours. But one of the greatest dangers is the temptation to give in to road rage.

Am I the only one, or does it seem traffic has gotten much worse over the past few years? It's not just our imagination. According to the American Highway Alliance between 1999 and 2004 the number of traffic bottlenecks increased 40%. It's crazy out there! Every time I drive I think I'm surrounded by a bunch of idiots. I sometimes feel like the guy who was driving home from work during rush hour. His cell phone rang and his wife said, "Honey I'm calling to warn you. I just heard on the news that there is an idiot driving the wrong way on your highway." He said, "There's not just one, there are hundreds of them going the wrong way!"

The growing anger of drivers has created a new term in our vocabulary: road rage. Road rage is commonly defined as a societal condition where motorists lose their temper in reaction to a traffic disturbance.

Road rage is nothing new. In 430 B.C. the philosopher Sophocles wrote in "Oedipus Rex": "As this charioteer lurched over towards me I struck him in my rage. The old man saw me and brought his double goad down upon my head. As I came abreast, he was paid back and more! Swinging my club in this right hand I knocked him out of his car, and he rolled on the ground. I killed him...I killed them all." When I read that I thought it sounded like people trying to leave the Green Acres' parking lots after church on Sunday! I never leave our church property until everyone is gone on Sundays, but I've been told by more than a few that some folks express some road rage when they're leaving our parking lots. Of course, I don't believe it, because I'm certain that after hearing me preach all you are so full of love and kindness that you're never in a hurry to leave and you're always allowing the other person to go first. "After you. No, please I insist, after you."

It's strange how normal people are sometimes transformed into maniacs when they get behind the wheel of a vehicle. I heard a funny story about a nice old lady who had been cruising a crowded parking lot in her Mercedes looking for a parking place. She saw a car leaving, so she patiently waited for the parking place to come open. Just before she pulled in, a young girl in a VW Beetle zipped in and took the parking place. As the young girl got out, the lady rolled down her window and said, "That was my parking place!" The young girl just laughed and said, "That's what you can do when you're young and quick, so deal with it, sister." As the young girl was walking away, she heard the sound of a crash and she turned back to see the lady in the Mercedes ramming her VW, then backing up and ramming it again. The young girl ran back crying, "What are you doing?" The lady rolled down her window and said, "That's what you can do when you're old and rich, so deal with it, sister."

Our hero, Joseph, suffered an incredible amount of frustration on the road to success. He could have easily become the poster child for road rage. When we left Joseph in the last message, he

had just been brought out of jail to interpret a couple of dreams for Pharaoh. Joseph told Pharaoh Egypt would have seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Then Joseph suggested Pharaoh stockpile the surplus food during the seven years of plenty, so they would have food stored up when the famine came. We pick up the Bible text at Genesis 41:37:

Genesis 41:37-41. “The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. So Pharaoh asked them, ‘Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?’ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.’ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.’”

Wow! One day Joseph was suffering in a dungeon and the next day he was put in charge of the greatest nation of the world at that time! The story continues a few years later. The famine has come, but the Egyptians have food. But in Canaan, where Jacob and his 11 sons were living, they ran out of food. So ten of the brothers travel to Egypt to buy food.

Genesis 42:6-9. “Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph’s brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them, ‘Where do you come from?’ he asked. ‘From the land of Canaan,’ they replied, ‘to buy food.’ Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Then he remembered his dreams and them and said to them, ‘You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.’”

In this message we can learn three important lessons about revenge. The first lesson is:

1. A DESIRE FOR REVENGE IS A NATURAL HUMAN RESPONSE

How many times do you think Joseph relived that day when his brothers attacked him and tossed him into a pit and then sold him into slavery? Twenty years later the perfect opportunity for revenge presented itself. Joseph had the means—he had unlimited power. He had the motive—these were the guys who had mistreated him. And he had the opportunity—they were bowing down before him and didn’t even know who he was. If this had been a movie made in Hollywood, Joseph would have had them all tortured and thrown to the crocodiles in the river.

He could have gloated in his revenge and said something like, “How do you like me now? Now that I’m all in style? Do you still think I’m crazy? Well, meet my crocodile. I couldn’t make you love me, but I always dreamed about one day gettin’ even, so how do you like me now?”

Like all of us, Joseph was tempted to get even. At first, he spoke harshly to them and accused them of being spies. The desire to extract revenge is just part of our sinful human nature. It’s a natural response. In the Merchant of Venice, William Shakespeare has the villain Shylock ask, “If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge?” (William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, Act III scene 1)

Just because revenge is a natural instinct doesn’t make it right. The natural response is not to just get even—if someone hurts us, we want to hurt them more. I heard a story about a woman who was mad because her cheating husband had just left her for a younger woman. As she was walking along a beach, she found a magic lamp. She cleaned it off and as she rubbed it, the proverbial genie came out and said, “Since you have freed me, I will grant you three wishes. But I must warn you, that whatever you ask, your ex-husband will get twice as much.”

So the woman said, “Okay, I want five million dollars.” Poof. She had five million dollars. She said, “So my ex-husband just got \$10 million?” The genie said, “That’s right.” Next the woman said, “I want a five karat diamond.” Poof. The beautiful diamond appeared in her hand. The genie said, “Your ex-husband just got a 10 karat diamond.” The woman thought for a moment. She said, “I know what I want for my final wish. I want you to scare me half to death!” That’s just our nature. We want those who have hurt us to suffer more than we have.

Some people think the Bible teaches revenge. You may hear them say something like, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” But those Old Testament words are written in the context of a legal code that was to be applied by the judges of Israel. It was never intended for personal behavior. The Bible says, “If there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.” (Exodus 21:23-25) It may sound harsh, but this was actually a very progressive, lenient legal code. Our natural response is that if someone puts out one of our eyes, we want to put out both of theirs! Maybe you’ve heard, “The same to you and more of it!” But when God gave a legal code to Israel, He was presenting the principle that the punishment should always match the crime. When it came to personal behavior the Old Testament taught that revenge is wrong. The Bible says, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 19:18)

Now, back to the story of Joseph. Joseph continued to act suspicious, so he told them he was going to imprison one of them until they returned with their youngest brother to prove they weren’t spies. So they left Reuben and returned to Canaan. When they ran out of food again, they returned to Egypt again, and this time they had young Benjamin with them. Joseph decided to play a little trick on them to see if they had changed any since they mistreated him.

Genesis 44:1-5. “Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: ‘Fill the men’s sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man’s silver in the mouth of his sack. Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one’s sack, along with the silver for his grain.’ And he did as Joseph said. As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. They had not gone far when from the city when Joseph said to his steward, ‘Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid good with evil? Isn’t this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.’”

So the brothers were hauled back before Joseph.

Genesis 44:14-17. “Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in,

and they threw themselves to the ground before him. Joseph said to them, ‘What is this you have done? Don’t you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?’ ‘What can we say to my lord?’ Judah replied. ‘What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants’ guilt. We are now my lord’s slaves—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup.’ But Joseph said, ‘Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you go back to your father in peace.’”

The second lesson about revenge is:

2. PERSONAL REVENGE CORRUPTS GOD’S PLAN OF JUSTICE

Someone said that revenge is a dish best served cold. Let me tell you the true story of Dr. Janine Brooks. When Janine was a student in dental school, a man ran into her car and then drove away. He never identified himself, apologized, or offered to pay for her expenses. She got a good look at the man, and knew she would remember him if she ever saw him again. Three years later, Janine was a dentist, and guess who came into her office needing a tooth pulled? The man who had rammed her car. He didn’t remember her, but she remembered him. She smiled and told him to open wide and that this wouldn’t hurt. She lied!

In the story of Joseph, God was in the process of doing something important. Joseph didn’t have to prove their guilt. Judah said *God* had uncovered their sin. What sin? They were innocent of stealing. But Judah and the other brothers couldn’t help thinking about something that had happened 20 years later. If Joseph had thrown them in jail as soon as they came to Egypt, he would have messed up what God was doing.

Have you ever heard the expression about revenge being sweet? It isn’t sweet—it stinks. The idea of sweet revenge probably came from Homer who wrote: “Revenge is sweeter far than flowing honey.” (The Iliad, XVIII, 109) But anyone who has ever gotten revenge realizes it has a bitter aftertaste. The Christian writer John Milton wrote: “Revenge, at first though sweet, bitter before long back on itself recoils.” (Paradise Lost, IX, 1. 171) In fact, revenge is not only bitter, it is as deadly as poison. Sir Francis Bacon wrote: “A man that studieth revenge, keeps his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal.” (Essay on Revenge) The Bible says, “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” (Romans 12:19)

God will eventually sort out the business of rewards and punishment. When we try to be the judge and jury in regard to unpleasant treatment we’ve received, we usurp God’s plan.

Maybe someone you know has done something wrong and it seems as if they have gone unpunished. That violates your moral sense of justice. But just wait—there will be a payday someday.

Now back to the climax of our story. When Joseph told the brothers he was going to keep Benjamin, the youngest son, Judah knew it would kill their father if they returned. Judah was the very brother who suggested they sell Joseph as a slave. By now, he was a changed man. He gives

one of the most powerful speeches in the entire Bible. He is willing to sacrifice his life as a substitute for Benjamin’s. Sound familiar? That’s what Jesus did for you and for me. When we were guilty and facing punishment Jesus stepped in and took our place. As you trace the lineage of Jesus found in Luke 4; you’ll discover Judah is in the Messianic line.

Genesis 44:32-45:7. “Your servant guaranteed the boy’s safety to my father. I said, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life! Now, then, please let your servant remain here as my lord’s slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father.’ Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, ‘Have everyone leave my presence!’ So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh’s household heard about it. Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph! Is my father still living?’ But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Come close to me.’ When they had done so, he said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! 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. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.’”

Genesis 45:12-15: ““You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother, Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.’ Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him weeping. And he kissed his brothers and wept over them. Afterwards his brothers talked with him.”

The third revenge lesson is:

3. WHEN YOU ACCEPT GOD’S GRACE, YOU’LL BE “GRACE-FULL” TO OTHERS

What a great story! Instead of seeking revenge against his brothers, Joseph showed them kindness. He didn’t do what came naturally—he did what only comes *supernaturally*—he forgave them. Joseph had come to the realization that God had blessed him by putting him in Egypt and promoting him to be the Prime Minister. It was out of this gratitude to God that he found the strength to forgive his brothers.

Has there been someone who has hurt you? Have you been mistreated or wronged? Your natural urge is to get back at them. But if Jesus Christ has forgiven your sins, you have a new nature and because of your nature, you will want to forgive them. When Jesus taught His disciples a model prayer, He was also sharing a powerful truth about forgiveness. He taught us to pray: “Forgive us our trespasses as (in the same way) as we forgive those who trespass against us.” I like the way one little guy confused those words and prayed, “Lord, forgive us our trash passes as we forgive

those who pass trash against us.” In this life, there is a lot of trash being passed, and we need to be willing to forgive.

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:43-45) He also said, “If you do not forgive neither will your heavenly Father forgive your sin.” (Mark 11:26) Don’t confuse what He was saying. God’s forgiveness is not dependent on your forgiving others—if it was, then that would be a way of *earning* His forgiveness. Instead, Jesus is saying if you have truly been the recipient of God’s grace and forgiveness, you *will* be willing to forgive others, because you are a child of God. If you *refuse* to offer grace and forgive someone who has sinned against you, that sinful attitude is proof you’ve never truly received God’s grace. The only person who can afford the luxury of unforgiveness is the person who doesn’t need to be forgiven.

The best definition of grace I know is: Grace is God giving us what we need, not what we deserve. We are all sinners by nature and by choice and we *deserve* death and hell. But God in His grace gives us His mercy and forgiveness—we need it, but we don’t deserve it.

CONCLUSION

You may need to experience forgiveness in one of three areas today. First, do you need God’s grace and forgiveness? He is waiting to offer you grace and forgiveness. The Bible says, “The Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!” (Isaiah 30:18)

I read recently about a Christian attorney who got involved in a small group Bible study with some other men. God began to move in his life, and after studying some scriptures on grace; he decided to forgive the debts of all his clients who had owed him money for more than six months. He sent out 17 letters by certified mail telling the clients their debt was forgiven. Imagine his surprise when 16 of the letters came back unsigned and undelivered. 16 of the 17 clients must have been afraid that the attorney was suing them for their debts, so they refused to accept the letter. That’s pretty amazing, but what’s even more amazing is the God who created you is offering to cancel your sin debt and to forgive you. And yet some people won’t even open the letter that announces their forgiveness.

The second forgiveness scenario possible is that you are at a place where you need to forgive someone else. Maybe someone has treated you as badly as Joseph’s brothers treated him. They have wounded you, and you still feel the pain. Give up on the desire for revenge. Instead offer them your forgiveness. You may object, “They don’t DESERVE to be forgiven.” That may be true, but neither do we deserve to be forgiven by God—that’s what grace is.

There’s an ancient legend about two friends walking across a desert wilderness. They began to argue and one of the men slapped the other. The man who had been slapped didn’t strike back. Instead he wrote these words in the sand: Today my friend hurt me. A couple of days later they were in mountainous terrain and one friend slipped and fell and was hanging onto a ledge. The same friend who had slapped him two days earlier reached out and pulled him to safety. The

rescued friend took a chisel and chipped these words into the rock wall: Today my friend rescued me. The other friend was puzzled. He said, “Two days ago, when I slapped you, you wrote about it in the sand. Today, when I rescued you, you wrote about it in the rock. Why?” The grateful friend said, “The secret to joy in life is this: Write all your insults in sand where the winds of forgiveness can erase them. But write all your praises in stone so they will remain for all your life.

There may be a third area of need in your life when it comes to forgiveness. Perhaps you have wronged someone and you need to ask him or her to forgive you. Don’t try to justify what you’ve done. Don’t put it off. Go to them and say the seven words that can transform any broken relationship: “I was wrong. Will you forgive me?”

Forgiveness is one of the greatest needs in the human heart. There was a British novelist and noted atheist by the name of Marghanita Laski. Before she died in 1988 she made a statement of surprising honesty. In a candid interview with the BBC she said: “What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness. I have nobody to forgive me.”

How sad it is to come to the end of your life, and have nobody to forgive you. You don’t have to. You can find God’s forgiveness right now if you’ll turn to Him in faith.

So remember, on the road to success there will be many times when you get so angry you’re ready to express some road rage. But don’t lose your cool. Because God has forgiven you, be quick to forgive others.

OUTLINE

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“If there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.” *Exodus 21:23-25*

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.” *Leviticus 19:18*

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“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” *Romans 12:19*

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Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven.” *Matthew 5:43-45*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes