

Sermon: Break Free From the Past
Series: Emotionally Healthy Spirituality
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Speaker: Kevin White

We're in the middle of a series called Emotionally Healthy Spirituality. There's a book that this series is based on - you'll never guess what it's called - Emotionally Healthy Spirituality. The book's main point is that it is impossible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.

The main image we've been using is the iceberg. Like an iceberg, often only part of us is visible. There's so much more beneath the surface that nobody sees. Sometimes not even us.

Today, we want to focus on breaking the power of the past. In order to do that we're going to look at our family of origin - we'll do that by looking at Joseph in the Old Testament - but first a question:

How do you feel when you hear that we are going to dig into your past in order to move forward?
- I'm 10 years old - I don't have a past!!!
- Do you feel excited, scared, confused, not prepared, not qualified, not interested?

Whatever you feel right now - I want you to give that to God - and make space for this journey that we're going to be on - if you're watching this live - put your feelings in the comments as a way of releasing them before we go to work. If you're watching this later, pause the video, and take a moment to take a breath, feel what you're feeling and give that to Jesus.

Why do we need to look at our family of origin? Because it affects us so deeply. Especially during this Covid-19 pandemic, many joys and pains have been exposed through our families. We've never spent so much time together. It has affected us in many ways. Many people blame the pandemic, but it really all it did was expose what was already going on but was below the surface.

How would you describe the family you grew up in or are growing up in right now? Critical, Approachable? Angry? Tense? Cooperative? Competitive? Close? Distant? Fun? Serious?

We're going to look at Joseph's family from the book of Genesis - very first book of the Bible. He's the 2nd youngest son of Jacob. Jacob had two wives - so that's already a recipe for dysfunction. He also had kids with his wives' servants. 12 brothers, 1 sister. Joseph is his dad's favourite because he was the first born of the woman his dad loved the most (Rachel).

It's in this scene that Joseph shares his two dreams - the first dream has his brothers bowing down to him - the other dream has his mother and father and rest of the family bowing down to him. Remember he's the second youngest out of 12 brothers!

The brothers don't like him - actually - they hate his guts. He flaunts his favouriteness in front of them - not very mature. How would you feel if you were Joseph? How would you feel if you were one of the brothers?

What about us? How do we feel about the family we are in? Everybody wants to feel loved. Everyone wants to feel special. It's not wrong. It's how God made us. But when we don't feel like that - all sorts of issues arise. The family is where that is supposed to be the most loved - and it often is. But it's also where we get the most hurt.

They say that hurt people hurt people.

Joseph's brothers must have been really hurt cause in the next scene they end up coming up with a way to get rid of him.

First, they were going to kill him but then they decide to sell him as a slave and then lie to their dad and say a wild animal killed him.

Imagine the dysfunction in that family? All 11 brothers have this huge secret from the rest of the family - they have a funeral for Joseph - his dad is depressed - this goes on for years and years while the brothers keep this huge lie.

Do you have anything that you are keeping from your family? Are there any elephants in the room of your family?

Meanwhile - Joseph is sold as a slave, he works for a guy in Egypt and we see this verse pop up (Genesis 39:2) "The Lord was with Joseph..." Even though he was away from his family. Even though he was a slave in a foreign land. God was with him?

Do you feel like God is with you right now with whatever you are going through?

But wait - it gets worse!

In Egypt, Joseph becomes a servant to a guy named Potiphar. Potiphar's wife wants to be with Joseph - like "be" with Joseph - Joseph says no - she lies and says that he tried to be with her - and then Joseph gets thrown in jail. For no reason!

He was sold as a slave, now he's in jail. But in Genesis 39:21 we read "The Lord was with him..."

Even when his situation goes from bad to worse - God was still with him. But we don't like that part of the story. We feel like - if God is with us, everything should go well. But God is with Joseph and things are not going well - in fact, it seems to be getting worse.

Joseph is in jail, some guys in jail have dreams, Joseph interprets them and they both turn out to be true. He asks them to remember him when they get out of jail. They get out of jail. And they don't remember Joseph. Joseph stays in jail for a couple more YEARS - then all of a sudden Pharaoh - the ruler of Egypt has a dream nobody can interpret - then one of the guys remembers, tells Pharaoh, Pharaoh gets Joseph. Joseph interprets the dream and then he not only gets out of jail but becomes second in command! Yay Joseph! He is responsible for all the food in Egypt because God revealed to him that there's going to a really bad famine - no food growing - so he wisely decides to save food for when that time comes.

Cool story - but... what about his family? Joseph still had a painful past (he hasn't seen his family in decades) and his family still is living in a lie.

Look at how God is working behind the scenes. The famine is not just in Egypt - it's all over - Joseph's brothers have to come to Egypt to get grain.

When the brothers come, they don't recognize Joseph - it's been so long and he has his Egyptian clothes on - probably Egyptian cotton - get it :)

Joseph recognizes them though - they bow to him (remember his dream from when he was a kid?)

So now we'll see if this family is still living in dysfunction or not.

Now we get to see if this family is able to break free from the past

The brothers still don't know that it's Joseph. He gives them food and sends them home.

But - he gets his brothers back by setting them up, accusing them of stealing some stuff and then saying that they can go home if they leave Benjamin in jail. Benjamin is the dad's new favourite son - let's see if they act the same way and get rid of him or if they change.

Here's the brother's moment. Will they continue living in the dysfunction of the past?

They say that full repentance is shown when a person is subjected to the same situation in which they have sinned... only this time, they do not sin. How will they respond?

This time, they get it right - they tell the truth. They tell the truth about how Joseph is gone, how the dad loved him most and how the dad now loves Benjamin. They can't let the dad suffer again. One of the brothers offers to take Benjamin's place.

Joseph can't take it anymore. He tells them who he is. He starts bawling. (WILL SMITH CRY - MICHAEL JORDAN CRY) He cries so hard the Egyptians can hear him outside his palace.

All these years, all this pain. Bottled up inside. It finally came out. Just like it did for his brothers. Finally! They don't have to live a lie anymore.

What pains in your life are waiting to be acknowledged and grieved?

Pause

Look at what Joseph says in Genesis 45:7 (NLT)
God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors.
So it is God who sent me here not you!

Then in chapter 50:20 NLT
You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.

How was Joseph able to say that after all he went through? How was he able to break free from the past?

Pastor and author John Ortberg, says this about Joseph - "The Lord was with Joseph. Joseph is not alone.

What happens to someone who loses everything but God, then finds out that God is enough?

God wasn't at work producing the circumstances Joseph wanted. God was at work in bad circumstances producing the Joseph that God wanted."

You are not alone. God is at work - even in the bad situations - producing the you that he wants.

You can't change what happened in the past. But you can allow God to rescue and redeem it.

You can break free from your past - or you can let your past break you.

Someone I'm mentoring mentored me with this powerful truth. When you don't forgive you give the enemy a foothold - footholds give hold to stronghold.

Is there anything in your past that you need to break free from?

Someone you need to forgive?

A stronghold that you need God to break down for you?

Joseph gives us the key.

Somehow, Joseph felt the Lord's presence with him - even when it didn't seem like it. He showed his trust in God by making right choices in each MOMENT of need.

And that's what we need. As Dallas Willard says, we grow in our faith by trusting God in our moment of need. Not before that moment. Not after, but during. That's how we practice trust. That's how we show faith.

If you want faith, ask God - and when you ask, be willing to let him take you through what is necessary to prepare for what's to come. Do you trust God enough to follow him even when it doesn't make sense?

Joseph trusted God when he had the opportunity to sleep with Pharaoh's wife. He could've said - I deserve some fun - look how rough my life has been. It's my turn now.

Joseph trusted God when he was in jail. Serving the other prisoners

Joseph trusted God when he was second in command and his brothers showed up. He could have gotten mad - revenge - made them starve - but he did the right thing.

What moment are you in right now?

We think of faith as this big thing out there - but really - it's trusting God in the everyday moments that you find yourself in. If you are willing to do that, you will experience God who is so longing to bless you and fill you with all you need to make it through what you're going through.

Joseph's brothers were healed, Joseph was healed. His whole family was healed. If you go back to this family line - it was dysfunctional all the way through. His dad Jacob stole his brother's blessing and tricked him out of being the first born. Then Jacob favoured his youngest sons leading his older sons to all kinds of unhealthy patterns. His grandfather Isaac lied about his wife and was the favourite of his dad even though he wasn't the first born His great grandfather Abraham lied about his wife saying it was his sister because she was beautiful and he didn't want to get killed. All the way back to Cain who murdered his brother Abel and Adam and Eve who sinned in the garden of Eden.

Are we doomed? Since we inherit these dysfunctional patterns from our families of origin and from humanity's story of sin, is that it?

Absolutely not! That's why the story of the Bible is good news.

The way it is is not the way it has to be. The way it is is not the way it was supposed to be. The way it is is not the way it will be.

Jesus burst on the scene and changed everything.

Jesus lived the life we were supposed to live but don't - perfect truth and unity with God, others and himself.

Jesus died the death we deserve - as sinners we deserve to be separated from God but through Jesus we don't have to be.

Jesus' resurrection brings the new life that we can have.

So that's where we start. We start with trusting in Jesus. Trusting in God.

I can't lie to you. This Covid-19 pandemic has been an absolute disaster for me. On the outside, I've been working harder than ever, exercising, losing weight, doing music and I even took a course on becoming a travel consultant.

On the inside, I've been falling apart. All that's going on the world and in my life has just been too much for me. I started to shut down. I started to burn out.

Long story short, I've been reading like crazy, I'm going to counselling and I met up with a spiritual director.

What's the answer? Jesus.

You have to trust Jesus. The problem is. If we're honest - we have trouble trusting Jesus.

Imagine you're Joseph. You're the favourite of your dad. Would you trust Jesus then? Of course. Your brothers don't like you but - oh well.

How about getting sold into slavery. Would you trust him then? Not so easy now.

What about going to jail? Being forgotten about?

We kept reading in the story that God was with Joseph. But it sure didn't look like it. And I imagine it didn't feel like it either.

It might not feel like God is with you right now. But he is. You have to believe that. If you don't believe that - you're going to keep trying different things to fill your tank - but they just won't work. Only Jesus can fill that longing to belong. That longing to be loved. Humans aren't perfect. They will let you down. Your family will let you down. But Jesus never will.

God is always revealing himself to us - always offering to be present in our lives - to be with us. Joseph got it. And it changed everything.

Start there. Imagine Jesus on the cross. But imagine him dying for you. For the world yes - but for you. Imagine Jesus looking right at you.

At Cornerstone we talk about Establishing our identity in Jesus. That's where it starts. Somehow, Joseph was able to do that so that:

1. He didn't let his past break him
2. He knew that God was with him
3. He trusted and acted in the present.

So that's my challenge to you.

Don't let your past break you - own, know it but know that Jesus died for you and your past so it can be broken and new life came come.

Know that God is with you. Even if you walk through the darkest valley - God is with you.

Trust Jesus and act like it now, moment by moment

Whether it's your marriage, a struggling child, your health, your future, what's going in this world...

Break free from the past and don't let it control your present and affect your future.

Surrender the pains of your past (your sins, setbacks and your disappointments) today.

Today is the day. If you feel nudged by the Spirit (or even if you're feeling irritated or angry and you don't know why), that's a sign. Pay attention. Talk to a counsellor. A pastor.

Get the Emotionally Healthy book and go through it with someone. Join a small group and go through the study guide with them. Talk to someone to keep you accountable.

Keep on keeping on. God has given you to grace to be here in this moment, so that means he will give you the grace to keep going.

Prayer:

Father, I affirm with Joseph that you sovereignly placed me into my family, my culture and present circumstances. I cannot see all that you see, but I ask you to show me how, like Joseph, I can rest in your love and power - even when I can't see any good that you might be doing. Jesus thank-you that you passionately pursue us to free us and heal us and to make us fully the alive selves you've destined us to be. Give us the courage to go back with you and be healed, that we may move forward. Holy Spirit, lead us through the process of grieving and healing that we might live in joy and freedom and offer genuine kindness to those who have not been kind to us. Lord, forgive us for our sins as we forgive those who have hurt us. Help us, like Joseph, to join with you to become a blessing to many other people. In Jesus name, amen.

COMMUNION

Now let's prepare for the Lord's Supper.

Through the cross of Jesus, God gives us new life. As we celebrate communion, let Jesus' love in today.

The bread that we share in the Lord's Supper—the one loaf—is an emblem of the loving unity we share in Jesus as his church. Whatever your past, whatever your family, Jesus brings us all together now as one.

The bread is also an emblem of Jesus' physical body. And on the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, broke it, and gave it to his friends, saying:

This is my body, broken for you.

In the same way, after the supper, he took a cup of wine, and said:

This is my blood shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins.

Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, remember me.

At this time, let's celebrate Jesus, who laid down his life for us so that we could break free from the past, be with him now and enjoy his presence always.

Let's take a moment now to eat and drink together...