

CREW Bible Study

Message – What To Do When You Don't Know What To Do - - Week 5

- **BOTTOM LINE:** When you don't know what to do, pursue peace instead of payback.
- **GOAL:** To help students understand that payback may feel good in the moment, but pursuing peace is always better long term.
- **SCRIPTURE:**
 - *Genesis 45: 1-7 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. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. 3 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. 4 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! 5 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. 6 For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. 7 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: 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.*

MESSAGE

When I say the word, "payback", what immediately comes to mind?

Is it money? Like you're in line at Taco Bell and come up short on cash. A friend chips in for you and covers it, and you say, "I'll pay you back!"

Or is it more like revenge? Like when someone shares a secret about you or starts a rumor about you, or hurts you in some way and you think, "How dare you? Game on. Just wait. Payback is coming."

It's this version of "payback" that we're talking about today as we wrap up this message series on what to do when you don't know what to do.

For most of us, payback comes in one of three ways:

- **Public payback** – when we do to them what they did to us in an obvious way. We talk bad about them just like they did to us. Or we roast them, then say, "just kidding!" But really, not kidding.
- **Passive payback** – when we make subtle comments that aren't obviously hurtful, but could be interpreted that way. We post it on social media. Or

maybe we roll our eyes when someone talks, or just give them the silent treatment.

- **Imaginary payback** – when we have an argument with them in our minds and destroy them. We have a better comeback to whatever they say and crush them. It takes over our thoughts – sometimes for days or more - but we never actually DO anything. It's all in our minds.

Paying someone back for tacos is simple. This kind of payback gets complicated. And like we said last week, when life gets complicated and we don't know what to do, it's helpful to look at situations that other people have gone through to help us learn what to do. And that brings us back to the life of Joseph.

In this series, we've been journeying through the life of Joseph whose story is found in the book of Genesis. His story is wild, one where oftentimes he had no idea what to do next.

Early in this series, we talked about how Joseph knew he was his Dad's favorite and rubbed it in his brother's faces. Joseph also had dreams where he was in charge of the whole family. He rubbed that in their faces too. His brothers found him to be super annoying and they actually plotted to kill him. Somewhat lucky for Joseph, the brothers decided to make a little money instead by selling him off as a slave.

And from there we've seen Joseph taken away as a slave to Egypt, accused of a crime he didn't commit, thrown in prison, and then taken out of prison to help Pharaoh by interpreting his dreams. Because he interpreted the Pharaoh's dreams so well, he was given a job again and eventually moved up the ranks to second in charge over all of Egypt. Pretty amazing for a guy who was sold out by his brothers!

But at this point in the story there comes a huge plot twist. After Joseph reached the rank of second in charge of Egypt, there was a food shortage back where his family lived in Canaan. Joseph's Dad, Jacob, sent the brothers to Egypt to ask for food because their country was out and the family was starving. Now, at this point in the story, Joseph's Dad and family thought that Joseph was dead, so of course they weren't thinking about the possibility of seeing Joseph when they got to Egypt to ask for food. But that's exactly what happened. Joseph ends up being the one who meets them when they get to Egypt. They don't recognize him, but he definitely does recognize them! And a huge drama unfolds.

This part of the story begins in Genesis, chapter 42, but we're going to pick it up in chapter 45, verse 1. Hear this.....

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. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.3 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.4 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! 5 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. 6 For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. 7 But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

Wow. This totally set Joseph up for an awesome payback moment. He could refuse them food and let them starve. He could accuse them of something and have them thrown in prison. At this point, he had the power to do all of that and more. But instead of taking this moment for payback and revenge, Joseph takes this moment for something else. He takes this moment and uses it for forgiveness. He uses it to bring his family back together – to reconcile with them.

There's really only one reason Joseph had the inner power to respond the way he did. He didn't try to get payback because he had already let go of the idea of revenge. He had already done the hard work of forgiving them. How do we know that? Because as this scripture tells us, Joseph looked into the eyes of the ones who caused him the most pain and says, *"Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here."* He had the capacity to care about how they were feeling. He could acknowledge *their* wrong and *his* hurt without causing *more* hurt. Only someone who had forgiven them could do this.

Somewhere between being sold into slavery and being reunited with his brothers, Joseph did the hard work of giving his hurt to God. It didn't make what his brothers did okay. It didn't lessen the hurt and pain that Joseph felt. It just took that hurt and pain out of center stage. It put God in the center instead. And that made forgiveness possible. Forgiveness was not only for his brothers, it was freedom for Joseph too – freedom from his hurt and pain.

Joseph went on to tell his brothers to go get their father, Jacob, and move the entire family to Egypt. This way his family would be safe and not suffer during the famine. And then we hear this in Genesis chapter 45, verse 15:

And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

It's more than a hug-it-out moment. It's a moment of true peace. This family was able to come back together - to bring peace where there was a ton of hurt – all because of forgiveness.

When it comes to other people hurting us, we have the opportunity to be like Joseph and choose something better than payback. When you're hurt and you don't know what to do, pursue peace instead of payback.

Here's two things to remember.....

1. **When you pursue peace, you fight for the relationship.** In other words, you can fight to win, fight to be right or fight to make a point.....or you can fight for peace. But you can't do both. Look for what God can do with you and through you in this situation to gain peace for yourself and for the relationship.
2. **When you pursue peace, you let go of your right to get payback.** You let go of revenge, you say goodbye to your desire to get even. And instead, you hold on to God and let Him guide you on the path to forgiveness.

Why do this? Because living your best life and being the best version of yourself means that you have peace with others, and you have peace within yourself.

FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are some low-key ways that people try to get payback?
2. What are some reasons why we would rather have payback than forgive someone for what they did?
3. What are some ways that we justify payback?
4. Why can pursuing peace, instead of trying to get payback, be difficult?
5. Describe a time when someone else pursued peace with you instead of payback. What did they do? Were you surprised?
6. Read Matthew 5:9. What do you think it means to be a peacemaker?
7. Some may think that pursuing peace instead of payback means you are weak. Have you heard this? Have you ever felt this way?
8. What's the difference between pursuing peace and forgiving someone? What's the difference between pursuing peace and becoming friends again? Can you have peace in a relationship without completely reconciling?
9. Some steps you can take to pursue peace include choosing not to "pay back", refusing to gossip, making time to have a difficult conversation, asking for forgiveness, and acknowledging the hurt you feel. Describe a situation where you have used one or more of these steps to pursue peace. Is there a situation you are currently facing in which you need to take these steps? Share.