

How To Have A Right Attitude

In the past few years there's been an explosion of books and material about positive thinking. If you search amazon.com for "positive thinking" you get over 25,000 choices of material you can buy. Why? Why the deluge of everything from religious to secular positive thinking stuff?

I believe that part of our obsession with positive thinking comes from the fact that we live in a world of wars, famine, natural disasters, injustice, crime, confusion. No wonder it's appealing to people to buy into the idea that if we could get rid of negative thoughts and have positive attitudes that the world would be a better place.

The problem with a lot of the positive thinking stuff is, it doesn't challenge us to face up to the harsh realities of life.

This morning I'd like us to develop a right attitude by learning to see life God's way.

We're in a study of the first book of the Bible, the Book of Genesis. Genesis literally means "beginnings." Genesis tells us how things came to be and how God developed His plan.

At this point in Genesis were studying the life of a man named Joseph. Joseph is the great grandson of Abraham. Abraham was the first in a series of men to whom God made some very special promises.

God promised Abraham that he'd have multitudes of descendants, that they'd possess the land we call Israel and Palestine today, and that all the world would be blessed through his seed.

The New Testament gives this explanation: *Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.* (Galatians 3:16)

Jesus Christ would be the descendant of Abraham who would bless the world by offering salvation through His cross.

Joseph lived 1800 years before Jesus. At the time of Joseph God was consolidating and protecting His people so they could grow into a great nation.

Last week we looked at Genesis chapter 42. There we saw God working in the hearts of Joseph's own brothers. His brothers had abused him and sold him into slavery 20 years before this. Now God had a plan for them. It was to bring them down from Canaan to Egypt to be protected and preserved so that in time the 70 individuals that made up the family could grow into the nation of Israel.

When we study the Bible we recognize that God uses what we call “progressive revelation” to explain things to us. You don’t get all the truth at once. God progressively builds our faith by revealing more about Himself and His plan as time goes on.

When we learn about Jesus we start off slowly. In Genesis He’s the seed of the woman that will crush the serpent’s head. Later that individual is narrowed down by family. By the time Jesus comes in the incarnation hundreds of details about Him have been given to us.

Joseph's revelation to his brothers was the result of a progressive revelation on his part. He didn't pop in the first time he met them and say “I'm Joseph your long lost brother.” Joseph's brothers needed to be brought by God to a place of special sensitivity and Joseph was the willing, yielded tool to get the job done.

One of the most important things that Joseph's brothers needed to do was to admit the wrong that they had done to Joseph in selling him into slavery 20 years prior to this. So Joseph put pressure on them, not for seeking revenge, but to bring them to that place when they recognized their wrong.

God does the same thing to us. Not to seek the satisfaction of making us suffer but to bring us to a right understanding of ourselves as well as Him.

We're not going to detail all that took place in these chapters because there's a lot of narrative here. I'd encourage you to read over this on your own if you are not familiar with the details.

Joseph was a son in a family of 11 brothers. The problem with all of these guys from Abraham on was that while some were more willing participants than others, all were sinners and all had to learn to live by faith.

And so God was at work in each man's life honing off the rough edges and preparing them for the task at hand.

Joseph at this point in Genesis was Prime Minister of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. He recognized his brothers after 20 years, but with his Egyptian clothes, his clean shaven face, his Egyptian name, and prestige as ruler they didn't recognize him.

God is using Joseph to bring his brothers to the point where they will be fit to fulfill their positions as godly leaders in their families and in the nation of Israel in its infant stages.

In chapter 42 we saw how Joseph dealt very harshly with his brothers and yet he didn't despise them or hate them for what they had done to him earlier. He even turned away from them and wept because of his love for them.

He kept Simeon there with him in Egypt and sent the others back to Canaan with a command to bring the youngest brother, Benjamin, back with them when they returned for more grain.

By chapter 43 the grain had run out and it is time to go back and buy food. And so after a lot of debate Jacob finally gives the OK for his sons to return to Egypt including Benjamin. So off they go with presents for Joseph along with double money to buy grain.

Open your Bibles to chapter 43 page 42

Again the brothers meet Joseph who they only know as the Prime Minister of Egypt. Joseph had sent them away last time with their money in their sacks of grain and they were returning it with fear and trembling, hoping that the Egyptians wouldn't think they stole it.

Read verse 23

Quite the contrary they are told by Joseph's steward "your God has given you treasure in your sacks." Then he unites them again with Simeon.

Read verses 26 - 30

At last they meet Joseph again. And as Joseph lays eyes on Benjamin for the first time in 20 years he has to go out of the room and weep again.

As the chapter closes Joseph serves his brothers a feast. And just to see how far they

have come spiritually he gives his youngest brother 5 times the amount he gave all the others.

If they were still hateful and jealous it would show in their attitude toward this obvious favoritism. But look at the last sentence in Chapter 43 *So they drank and were merry with him.*

Obviously something had changed in their attitudes and God was at work bringing that change about through Joseph.

By this point two very important things have happened.

#1. Their consciences have been awakened. They are finally beginning to deal with the reality of what they had done to their brother 20 years before.

#2 They have confessed their guilt to one another. They talked to each other about selling their brother into slavery, not realizing that Joseph could understand their Hebrew language.

But there is still one more step they have to take. These men belong to God. They are part of His plan and purpose. But they have to make that last total change.

Before we can be used of God there has to be more than an awakening of the conscience and a personal admission of guilt. Those are foundationally important but they have to result in a changed life. We can't stubbornly hang onto what is wrong and expect to accomplish anything lasting for Jesus Christ.

And so in chapter 44 we find Joseph putting his brothers to their greatest and final test.

I. Having A Right Attitude Starts With A Sensitivity Toward God

Read 44:1-6

Now obviously they didn't expect this. So they answer...

Read verses 7 & 8

"We are not thieves. We even brought back the extra money that was in our grain

sacks last time. How could anyone think we'd do something like this?'

So with great confidence they make an offer. **Read verses 9 - 12**

Now here's where we find out, if these men are changed or not. Remember these men have murdered, committed incest, hated and despised Joseph and sold him into slavery. These are the men who were so self-centered that they were willing to allow their own father to go through 20 years thinking his son was dead.

Now verse 13

That verse was the first indication that the brothers had truly changed. They refused to abandon Benjamin.

The cup had been found in Benjamin's sack. The order was Benjamin was guilty and the rest blameless.

They could have immediately abandoned him. They could have let him become a slave just like they did their younger brother Joseph and gone home safely. But they refused to abandon him.

So they went back and entered into the presence of the governor. Judah is the spokesman in verse 16 and as he speaks you see the second indication that there has been a change of heart.

Read verse 16

Judah speaks as representative for the group identifies with Benjamin in his guilt.

"We're all guilty. God has found out our iniquity."

Now they are thinking of the stealing of the cup, but I have to wonder if in the back of their minds is the way they have lived in the past and the fact that God is kind of bringing it all down on them. Their sins have found them out.

There has been a change.

But now Joseph gives them one last test. The supreme test. Will they hold up under pressure?

I. Having A Right Attitude Starts With A Sensitivity Toward God

II. Having A Right Attitude Develops A Sensitivity Toward Others

Read verse 17

See what Joseph is doing? He puts Benjamin in the same plight that he had been in 20 years earlier to see if his brothers hearts had really changed. Would they do the same to Benjamin. If it meant their skin or his would they bail out and go back and tell Dad Benjamin was gone?

Is there any strengthening of the family? Is there any love and respect for the father at home? Has there been a change?

There has. The last part of the chapter gives Judah's speech before Joseph.

God has been at work all along changing these guys thinking. Changing their attitudes, through the pressure of guilt, through the pressure of the famine, through the pressure of Joseph's heavy hand.

Remember now Judah is the same man that stood beside the pit where they had thrown Joseph and said "come let us sell him to the Ishmaelites." He was the same man that helped dip Joseph's tunic in goat's blood and give it to his Dad so he'd think Joseph had been killed by wild animals. He was a hardened, callous man. But now listen.

I want to read you a paraphrase of this passage by Chuck Swindoll:

My Lord, may I speak without your becoming angry. You are equal to Pharaoh. You asked us if we had a father or brother. We told you we did; an old father and a little brother who was born in his dad's old age. This boy's brother is dead (referring to Joseph), and this child is his only surviving son by that marriage. His father loves him. You said to us, "Bring him to me so I can see him."

We protested but you said that unless we brought him to you, we'd never see your face again.

We went home to Canaan and told our dad your words. When he told us to travel again to Egypt to get more food, we told him we couldn't unless we brought Benjamin

to see you. He resisted because he had already lost one son. He said, "If you take him and he is harmed, you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow."

This time, if the boy is not with us when we come to our father, he will die, for his life is wrapped up in this child. I told my father that I personally would be responsible for Benjamin's well-being, saying "If I do not bring him back, then I will take the blame forever." Please let me remain in his place, let him go home. How can I go back and watch this evil overtake my father?

Judah who once wanted to sell his brother as a slave, was willing to become a slave.

Judah originally wanted to kill Joseph 20 years earlier. This time he came to his younger brother's defense. Before, he and the others didn't care if their father grieved. Now they did. They really had changed. They passed this test as well.

Joseph saw that his brothers were genuinely different men.

With their thoughts laid bare, their commitment to one another strong, their remorse over their past sin expressed, their concern for their dad's feelings, Joseph could see that the brothers were changed men.

God's objective had been reached through Joseph. God had wanted to give perfect peace and rest to these brothers. He wanted them spiritually sensitive and full of respect for Himself. See all of that was impossible as long as their was unconfessed sin in their lives. God used the avenues of consciences and fear to bring about change.

That's exactly what God wants to do in our lives. We fight it. We don't like it. We try to avoid all the pressure. But God has ordained that we be like Christ and he uses all things of life to bring that about.

Well, now try to picture yourself as Joseph at this point. It's been an intensely emotionally time for him but now he can't contain himself any longer.

He's seen all his brothers, including Benjamin - the only brother born to his mother Rachel. He's seen them change and soften.

Now he's just listening to Judah talk about the agony that had ripped his father apart when he was told that Joseph had died. As Judah spoke of his father's broken heart, Joseph's heart overflowed.

- I. Having A Right Attitude Starts With A Sensitivity Toward God*
- II. Having A Right Attitude Develops A Sensitivity Toward Others*
- III. Having A Right Attitude Leads To Forgiveness And Mercy*

Chapter 45, verses 1 -3

His brothers must have thought “What is going on? Is this another test? Isn't this Zaphnath-Paaneah, lord of Egypt?”

No, it was Joseph! Talk about an emotional moment. Joseph cried so loud they heard him all over the palace.

All up until this point Joseph has been speaking through an interpreter. Now in Hebrew he said, “I am Joseph.”

Have you ever had a surprise party thrown for you? If you have you, know that first moment when everybody pops out and yells “Surprise?” You know how it takes a while for your mind to grab onto what’s actually happening?

Eighteen years ago the church got together and arranged for Sandy & I to go to Aruba for our 20th anniversary. They kept it an absolute secret. Our kids were 14, 11 and 8 so they didn’t even tell them. They didn’t want it to slip out.

On a Sunday morning I’m up front and Caribbean music starts playing and Steve Bond kind of dances in with a flowered shirt and a straw hat. He comes up front and says “Ed, we appreciate you and Sandy so much that we’re going to drive you out of this church. In fact we’re going to drive you all the way to BWI and put you on a plane for Aruba.”

Everybody starts clapping. They’re waiting for me to jump up and down like I just won the showcase on the Price is Right and I just stand there. All these thoughts are going through my mind. “Are they really sending us to Ocean City? What’s going on?”

I finally realize that they’re serious and then they said, OK we have to do this again in the second service when Sandy is here so don’t tell her. In between services she must have seen the stunned look on my face because she says, “What’s wrong?”

I said, “Oh nothing!”

So the next service we do it all again. The hat, the music, Steve calypsoing down the isle. Now they figure there'll be some excitement. So Steve explains it all again and Sandy just stands there with a blank look on her face. Finally, she leans over and whispers to me, "Is this for real?"

That's how Joseph's brothers' brains must have been responding. They probably had blank looks on the faces thinking, "Is this for real?"

Had they been dealing with Joseph all the time? Were they under the authority of the brother they had despised?

When Joseph identifies himself they're speechless. *They were dismayed in his presence.* *Bahal* in Hebrew means, "to be terrified."

No wonder. Their long lost brother was standing right there in front of them as one risen from the dead.

Joseph could have them drawn and quartered on the spot. He was their master. They stood helpless in his presence. They couldn't think of anything to say because any excuse they could come up with would be so lame it would only make things worse. If things could get worse.

But Joseph wasn't there to condemn but to forgive. How? What made Joseph so different? What made him act in the opposite way his brothers expected?

Here it is, starting in verse 5. Joseph saw life from a divine perspective.

Read verses 5 - 9

Listen to what Joseph is saying. "You sold, but God sent. You sinned, but God was sovereign. You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."

God never disregards, or ignores the wickedness of people. But God is always at work. God allowed Joseph's brothers to do evil and out of it He brought good.

God works all things after the counsel of his own will. God brings good out of evil and order out of confusion.

In this story of Joseph God has seen fit to give us all that was behind the scenes so that we could see how He works, through what appears to be chaos and disorder, to accomplish His will.

This is what Donald Grey Barnhouse calls “supernatural, naturalness.”

Joseph saw the hand of God overruling the plans of his brothers.
And because of that he did what might have seemed impossible. He forgave them.

Whatever their intentions had been, God had used their wrong to accomplish His own gracious purposes.

How did Joseph forgive the guys that treated him so unfairly? He did it by having the right attitude. Not some phony positive thinking that says, “Just think happy thoughts.” Five times in 5 verses Joseph said, “God did it all. “

Why should we worry? Why should we get frustrated? Why should we want to give up on life? Why should we get angry and hold grudges?

Believe it or not, God is accomplishing His purposes through us!

The family of Joseph wasn't some insignificant ancient family in the land of Canaan. They were the objects of the special care of the God of all the earth.

And listen, so are we. We are children of the Father who causes all things to work together for good to those that love Him.

Joseph was testing his brothers through this but he was being tested too.

He hadn't become embittered by adversity and hardship. He hadn't become proud and self-sufficient by prosperity and power. He hadn't become vindictive toward his brothers or groveled in self-pity or bitterness. He had successfully passed the tests because He had God in view.

The message of this whole narrative can be summed up in one sentence: “Greatness is revealed not in vast displays of action and power, but in daily positive attitudes.”

Positive attitudes don't exist if our heart isn't right. The beauty of Joseph's life was, his heart was right, therefore his attitudes were right.

Right hearts and right attitudes come when we can see life divinely.

Do you want that kind of perspective? Then follow these statements through in your own life:

#1. When I'm able to believe that God has a plan for me, even when I can't explain how it's going to work out, then I'm getting the right attitude.

#2. When I'm able to believe that God has His hand in my situation, then my attitude is moving in the right direction.

#3. When I accept that both God's plan and God's hand are good, even when there has been hardship and suffering in the process, then my attitude is just where God wants it.

Where's your attitude today? Where's your heart?

Do you believe that everything in life, even the evil of others, can ultimately be used for good in God's hands?

On October 25, 1985 Bobby Petrocelli was asleep in his bed beside his wife. Suddenly, in an instant, a drunk driver veered off the road in front of his house and crashed into his bedroom, killing his wife Ava.

Just an hour earlier, Bobby said good night to his sleeping wife and kissed her on the cheek, "I remember lying in bed just thinking about how great my life was; how much I loved the Lord, my wife; the kids at school (he was a teacher)... and the next thing I know my wife is dead."

Six months after the accident, still struggling to overcome his own serious injuries and desperate heartache, Bobby hit bottom. He wondered how he could possibly go on without Ava.

Six months after the tragedy, on his 3rd wedding anniversary, he went to his wife's grave. He said, "I remember going out to the cemetery and crying out ... And I remember taking my Bible in the cemetery literally throwing it and falling on my face and just weeping and saying, 'God! ... At times I do feel Your presence, but I really need to know more than ever, God, that You are with me.' And I'll never forget. I felt

like somebody reached down, wrapped their arms around me ... And I literally felt something squeeze me tighter. I truly believe supernaturally that was God's way for me at that moment, to let me know that Bobby, you are not alone."

Today, 21 years after the accident that ended his wife's life and forever changed his, Bobby has a ministry he calls, 10 Seconds, Inc.,

Bobby is speaker who has shared the love of Jesus Christ with millions, including high school and college students, parents, church groups, civic organizations and even professional sports teams. His message? God is faithful.

Do you believe that this morning? God was faithful to send His Son to be our Savior? God is faithful. That's the right attitude to have. That's the truth that we need to focus on. Jesus said, *He that believes on Me has everlasting life.* (John 6:47)