

## **A STORY OF GRACE/ WEEK 6 NOTES**

### ***Grace to Forgive/ Genesis 37 and 38***

Last week, we saw Jacob's surrender to God.... His life poured out as a drink offering, or libation. We also saw that his surrender did not shield him from difficult events like sorrow and loss. After Chapter 35, Jacob will not be the main focus of Genesis, but he is still very important. He is still the patriarch of his family, and he still has a major role in the plans of God. However, there is a shift in chapter 37, highlighting the life of Joseph, Jacob's eleventh son but the first-born son of Rachel. Chapter 36 is about Esau. *Note verses 6 and 8.* After Genesis 36, the man, Esau, is mentioned less than 10 times in the remainder of Scripture. Every mention of him is negative. The Edomites (Esau's descendants) are mentioned often in the Old Testament They were always an enemy of Israel.

Genesis 37 and 38 are hard stories. These accounts include hate, envy, conspiracy, violence, indifference, deception, abuse and incest. Both accounts, however, are magnificent examples of God's sovereignty and His grace. I will not commentate on every verse of these two stories. Read them for yourself. Ask the Lord to open your spiritual eyes to see His grace at work in the lives of Joseph and Tamar.

**Chapter 37.** If you have been in Sunday School for 5 minutes, you know the story of Joseph. Joseph is 17 years old when Scripture shifts the focus from Jacob to Joseph. (Remember! Scripture is revealing God to us through the lives of people and event. God is central in all of Scripture). Joseph is the favored son of Jacob and Jacob has made this known by giving Joseph a special coat...the coat of a ruler. The coat signifies that Jacob has chosen Joseph to be the primary heir, the future patriarch of the family. He sees Joseph as his firstborn, even though there are 10 other sons before Joseph. However, Joseph is first-born of Rachel, and to Jacob that is all that matters. The position of firstborn was of great importance in ancient cultures (and still is in many places of the world today). In Jacob's culture, the firstborn would become the patriarch after the father's death. The firstborn would inherit a double portion of the father's wealth. The firstborn would inherit the legacy and the responsibility of the entire family. It was a position of great honor and responsibility. (*Note for further study:* Jesus is referred to as the first-born of many things. When used in reference to Jesus, *first born* speaks to His supremacy and His divinity).

Joseph's brothers hated Joseph. Their hate gave way to murder and they conspired to kill him. Reuben suggested they throw him in a pit and let nature take its course. He planned to rescue Joseph later. Gen 37:23-25 is chilling. They stripped the coat from Joseph, threw him in a pit, heard his cries, and sat down to calmly eat a meal. Judah, the fourth son of Leah, made another suggestion—sell Joseph to merchants headed to Egypt. The others agree and Joseph is taken away to Egypt to be sold as a slave... lost forever to his conniving brothers. (so, they think). With callous hearts, the brothers dip Joseph's coat in blood and send it to Jacob for him to examine. Jacob concludes that Joseph is indeed dead. Grief overwhelms Jacob as never before. No one can console him. Those sinful brothers watch their father wither in sorrow for 22 years. But God is working. His sovereign plans will not be hijacked by the sinful deeds of men. Grace is at work. God is with Joseph even though Joseph does not know the end of his own story. He cannot foresee God's plans while being dragged to Egypt. He does not see clearly God's hand of favor as he is sold into slavery. He knows God is with him but the future is uncertain. BUT we know the end of Joseph's story. We know God uses Joseph to save his entire family: preserving the people who will become the nation that will birth the Messiah. Sovereign Grace is always working.

**Chapter 38** seems like an interruption in the story of Joseph. However, it is an important chapter that ties together the story of Jacob and the lineage of Christ. It is also an important chapter because Tamar's story reveals to us again God's ever-working grace.

To understand Chapter 38, we must remember the importance of the first-born. We must also become familiar with the custom, and later the Mosaic law, of *levirate marriage*. *Levir* is the Latin translation of the Hebrew for *brother-in-law or husband's brother*. If the first-born son dies with no male heir, his widow is given to his brother (the next to oldest) in marriage. The brother and widow of the oldest son produce a son who will be considered the first-born child of the deceased eldest son. This child will inherit a double portion of the patriarch's wealth, the patriarch's legacy, the responsibility of the entire family. The first-born male is responsible for securing the land (later, when God divides the Promised Land among family groups) and taking care of the women in the family.

I know this is confusing. We have no parallels in our culture. It helps us to know that women had no rights in this day. They were dependent upon the family they married into. By custom and later by Mosaic Law, when a woman married into a family, she was the responsibility of that family for the rest of her life. She could not marry outside the family, and the family could not disown her (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

Genesis 38:1 is telling. Judah leaves home and goes to live with the Canaanites. It seems to me; guilt drives him away. It was highly unusual for a man to leave the home his father, but Judah leaves... perhaps he can no longer bear to see his father's grief over Joseph. Judah marries a Canaanite woman and they have three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah. When it is time to choose a wife for his oldest son, Judah chooses a Canaanite woman named Tamar. But the Bible says Er is wicked, and God killed him. Whew! No details in Genesis 38:7. Just an abrupt end to Er. But I wonder, how wicked was Er to Tamar? I imagine she endured abuse of every kind. Judah stood by and did nothing.

Since Tamar and Er had no children, no male heir of the oldest son, Tamar was given in marriage to the second son, Onan. The first son of this union would be considered the heir of Er, not the son of Onan. Onan refused his responsibility to produce an heir with Tamar. His neglect was an act of contempt for his dead brother and his father. It was an act of disdain and rejection of Tamar. Judah knew what was happening and he did nothing. Again, the Bible says Onan was wicked and God killed him (Gen 38:10). No details. While it may seem God is ruthless and reactionary, remember God is holy. Although he does not know it, Judah and his first-born heir have been chosen by God to carry on the lineage of Christ. God is sovereignly protecting His own plan, and God's grace is watchful over Tamar.

Judah will not give Tamar his third son in marriage. Instead, he sends her home to her father, under the pretense that Shelah is too young. He will send for Tamar with his third son is older. Sending Tamar back to her father's house is an act of cruelty and disgrace for Tamar. She will not be treated as a daughter in her father's house, rather she will be treated as a slave. She cannot marry outside of Judah's family. She will have no security or hope for the future without the protection and provision of Judah. Judah has morally forsaken his responsibility for Tamar. Furthermore, Judah has no intention of sending for Tamar when Shelah is old enough to marry.

Judah's wife dies and lonely Judah plans to attend a festival in Timnah. Tamar hears the news that her father-in-law Judah will be passing close to her home. She puts on the garments of a pagan temple prostitute, her face veiled, and sits alongside the road waiting for Judah. He sees her and asks for a sexual tryst, never knowing it is Tamar. He says he will pay her when he returns from Timnah. Tamar insists on security of payment asking for his ring, belt, and staff...each specifically identified with Judah. With impatience, he gives the items to Tamar, planning to collect them on his way home when he pays her with a goat. Judah has a one-time sexual relationship with Tamar, enough for Tamar to conceive. She goes home to wait. Judah goes to Timnah, unaware of the consequences yet to unfold. Judah's friend is sent back to the roadside to pay the prostitute who has his items. But the prostitute is not there. His signature items cannot be retrieved. Judah is put-out by the entire situation and brushes it off as a foolish indiscretion. Three months later, Judah receives news that his daughter-in-law Tamar is pregnant. Judah rages. He says she and the child she carries must be burned alive.

Why is Judah so angry? He did not want her in his house nor did he want her to marry his youngest son. Why does he care who she slept with or what she has done?

Because Tamar was married to Er, the first born of Judah. She is legally married to the house of Judah forever. The child she carries, no matter who the father is, will be considered the heir of Er, the first born. Her first son, no matter who the father is, will inherit a double portion of Judah's wealth, the legacy of Judah, the honor and responsibility of Judah's family....even if that child is illegitimate. Judah will not give "that woman and her child" everything he has. Judah has no idea he is the father. He sends his servants to burn her alive. In the chaos, she produces the ring, belt, and staff of Judah saying these items belong to the father of her child. Everyone recognizes Judah's signature items. Without a doubt, Judah is the father. When Judah receives the news, he remembers the roadside tryst. He makes an admission which sounds like repentance saying she is more righteous than he is because he forced her to take what he would not give her.

Interestingly, God does not condemn the actions of Judah or Tamar. In this uncomfortable story, the only wicked people are Er and Onan, and God kills both of them. We are not meant to glean moral lessons from the story of Tamar and Judah. We are meant to see God's magnificent and sovereign grace. Tamar never again has a sexual relationship with Judah. She moves back to the house of Judah but she does not marry the youngest son...there is no need to marry again. She has conceived twin sons through Judah. The firstborn twin is Perez. Tamar is listed in Matthew 1 in the lineage of Christ. Her son Perez is listed as well, the firstborn of Judah who will carry on the Promise of a Messiah. Do you see the grace of God at work in Tamar's life? ( I love this story!)

Both chapters of Genesis are hard stories. Both Joseph and Tamar were abused by people who should have loved and cared for them. So, I ask, what is your hard story? All of us have been wounded to some degree by someone who should have loved us. While every wound is different in degree of intensity and also different in the scope of consequences, we all carry hurts. How do we, as women of grace, surrendered to the Lord, respond to the wounds and to the people who have wounded us. Three things come to mind.

**Recognize God's Sovereignty.** God is completely in control. His plans cannot be thwarted by the deeds of man. He will use sin, injustice, and hurt to accomplish His purpose. He is in control even in the difficult things of life. This is true on an eternal and worldwide level. It also true in our individual lives. (Proverbs 21:30, Daniel 4:35, Isaiah 45:6-7, Isaiah 46:10, Psalm 115:3, Job 42:2) God's sovereignty is on every page of Scripture, however, it is hard to understand especially when we are facing troubling circumstances. There is a perceived tension between our theology and our experience. Remember, God is both sovereign and good, He is love and He is just, He is holy and He is merciful. He does not lay down one characteristic to pick up another. He is all in all, all the time. We cannot evaluate God based on our emotions. If we do, especially in times of distress, we will have a negative assessment of God. Our view of God must be based on the Truth. (John 17:17). The Holy Spirit will always guide us into Truth.

God's sovereignty is not a place to get tidy answers to our pain or our painful questions. It is, however, a place to trust and rest, a place to lay down our questions and trust God's heart towards us. His ways and His plans are above us, but we can always trust His heart towards us. Regardless of how we "feel", God is always working. We cannot see the entire picture, but God can. He knows what He is doing. Though we live in a fallen world where people sin and bad things seem to randomly happen, God is always in control. Nothing comes into the life of a believer until it first goes through the loving hands of God. He is perfectly sovereign, perfectly wise, and perfectly love.

**Refuse Bitterness.** Scripture admonishes us to refuse bitterness (Hebrews 12:15). Bitterness is like a weed. It will spring up and defile everything around us. If God has said *do not be bitter*, then He equips us to live as He has commands us to live. (Philippians 2:13). Paul writes in Philippians 3:13-14... *forgetting what lies behind, and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on*. Paul is not saying he has amnesia and can't remember the pain he has inflicted nor the pain he has endured. He is saying we

cannot continue looking back at the pain. The past does not determine our future in Christ. “I cannot change the past, but by the grace of God, I can change the meaning of the past” (Warren Wiersbe). We have the ability through the Holy Spirit within us to choose wholeness. We choose to allow the Lord to redeem the hurts of the past, turning ashes in a thing of beauty. God may not restore all we have lost to sin and sorrow, but He redeems. He buys back and makes new.

The mind of the believer is very important as we are to press on, living victoriously even when we have suffered great hurt.

2 Corinthians 10:5b tells us to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Refuse to replay the hurts. In replaying, the old emotions are dredged up, becoming solidified in our minds, and eventually causing bitterness. *Frisk every thought at the doorway of your mind (Kay Arthur)*. This is not denial of the pain. It is refusal to continue living in it.

Philippians 4:8 is a wonderful list of replacement thoughts. A renewing of the mind that happens as we consistently plant God’s Word into our minds (Romans 12:2). When our mind is transformed, our living will be transformed as well. It is an “Inside out” work of the Spirit—not behavior modification which is “outside in”.

**Release a Blessing.** We are told to forgive, but how? Ephesians 4:32 references the word *forgive* twice. But in the Greek, they are two different words. The first means *to release or send away*. The second means *to pardon or cancel the debt of sin*. We cannot pardon sin. We cannot release a person from the debt of sin. But we CAN appropriate the forgiveness and grace we have received from God through Christ, and we can give it in the form of a release, a covering of grace. We are releasing the hurt to Lord, trusting His healing and His ways. We release the offender to the Lord as well, trusting the Lord to deal with the outcome. We cannot heal our own brokenness. Only the Lord can do that. We can cooperate with the Holy Spirit in forgiving/releasing. We offer grace...giving what is not deserved.

*It is imperative that we understand what Biblical forgiveness is NOT.*

- *Forgiveness is not a denial of the pain*
- *Forgiveness does not negate the consequences.*
- *Forgiveness does not guarantee restored trust or renewed relationship with the one who wounded you.*
- *Forgiveness is not a one-time event.*
- *Forgiveness does not wait to be asked.*

For a fuller exploration of these five truths listen again to this week’s video or read Tamar’s story in my book, *Women of Grace*.

What if the struggle is in forgiving ourselves for something we have done? Apply the same principles. You cannot pardon yourself or expunge sin from your own life. Only Christ can do that. You can, however, confess and repent of your sin, then by faith, RECEIVE the forgiveness He offers. By faith, live your life as a woman who has been forgiven and cleansed.

This lesson is not a collection of easy antidotes for the deep hurts in our lives. These are deep truths that apply to all of us, no matter how deep the wounds or how old the scars.