

Genesis 44-45

Do you want to be set free?

The hardest truth you'll ever face is the truth about yourself. Most of us do whatever we can to keep from facing hard truth about ourselves. *It's always easier to pretend and play games.* It's never easy to come to grips with your failures.

Truth rightly told ultimately leads me to God who is Truth. God does not lie, and no liar can stay in his presence (Revelation 21:8). Since that verse in Revelation speaks of liars going to the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, the stakes are high.

After being in the ministry for almost 18 years, I have concluded that the first step in solving personal problems is having the courage to tell the truth. The people who dare to tell the truth about themselves are the people who begin to get better.

Is it painful? You bet!

Is it scary? Of course!

Is it easy? No way!

But those people who swallow their fear, endure the pain, and decide to take the hard road of truth are the ones who get better. I have seen marriages saved by truth-telling, and I have seen marriages crumble because of inner deception, my first was one of them.

When anyone has a serious personal problem, and we don't cover up the truth, and we don't try to blame anyone else for our own stupidity. *When we simply and honestly tell the truth.*

"You are 90% of the way home. The hardest part is deciding to tell the truth. It's going to get better from this point.

Why We Don't Get Better

How about this as a truth learned.

Jesus in John 8:32, **"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."**

I'm going to put this saying to you with an added phrase: "The truth will make you free . . . but it will hurt you first."

Possibly we aren't getting better because I don't want the truth to hurt me first. It's easier to avoid the truth because the truth about my own life is too painful to bear.

Most people have trouble growing spiritually.

It's not because we don't know the truth.

We hear the truth at church, on the radio, on the Internet, from our friends, from books and CDs and seminars and concerts.

And we get it straight from the Bible.

But the problem runs deeper than that.

We know the truth but we don't want to let it hurt us so we deflect it, ignore it, deny it, attack it, argue with it and in general avoid it in any way we can.

Our approach is like a spaceship being attacked by aliens.

We put up the force field so we can deflect the incoming salvos of truth.

After a while we get so good at deflection that the truth never gets through to us at all.

And that's why . . . knowledge is not our problem, it is because:

We're still angry

We're still stubborn

We're still bitter

We're still greedy

We're still arrogant

We're still filled with desire

We're still self-willed

We're still unkind

When you are finally willing to be hurt by the truth about yourself, you will be set free.

In every story there comes a moment when the truth must come out. (Genesis 44:16).

This is the account of the brothers before Joseph

Now the truth comes from the mouth of Judah. Speaking for all the brothers, he admits their guilt:

What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves?

God has found out the guilt of your servants.

Here at last is what Joseph has been waiting for. Not just an admission of guilt, but an acknowledgment of God.

Now think of this next phrase as a truth:

“You're only as sick as your secrets.”

“If you've got a lot of secrets, you're really sick.” *Secrets have a way of festering on the inside until we are soul-sick and don't know why or what to do about it.*

If you've been hiding some dark part of your past because you can't bear to deal with it, you are sicker than you think.

At some point, you've got to come clean if you want to get better.

The brothers have been sick with the guilt of their sin for a long time. *Keeping it secret has kept them in bondage to fear for many years.*

One final step remains. In Genesis 44:18-34 Judah makes the longest individual speech in the book of Genesis in which he pleads that they be allowed to take Benjamin back home to Canaan.

At the end Judah offers himself as a replacement for Benjamin:

Please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers (Genesis 44:33).

This is the loyalty test: *Do you love your brother more than yourself?*

In the old days the brothers would have abandoned Benjamin and left him as a slave in Egypt. But all is changed now.

They will not leave Benjamin in Egypt.

They will not abandon their brother in the hour of his need.

They are a true family now.

Once a team of rivals, now they are a band of brothers.

Grace has done a deep work in them.

They are about to be set free.

Repentance to God was their pathway to being *free indeed*, and which opened up for an amazing account to take place much later.

We will leave the brothers at this point and catch up briefly with them later.

So far I've talked about:

The hardest truth you'll ever face is the truth about yourself.

And that "The truth will make you free . . . but it will hurt you first."

And that: In every story there comes a moment when the truth must come out.

How one family needed to face their lies, their secrets so they could set free from themselves.

Most of us think freedom is the right to decide our will. For example, we think about freedom of speech, freedom in how we parent and where we live, the right to vote, freedom to hang out with whoever we want, that kind of thing.

To live in true freedom, we must first hear the Gospel. **Romans 3:23** says we all are sinners who fall short of the glory of God.

No one is an exception to needing God's grace.

Believing Jesus died on the cross to save us, frees us from sin's control and allows us to repent.

Repentance provides victory over sin. **Romans 10:9** says, **“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”**

Now let's go briefly to just 4 things the Bible says about freedom.

These are some key ideas from the Bible about freedom—including how to find true freedom in your life.

1. People have been searching for it for thousands of years.

The quest for freedom is a theme found throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

Just three chapters into the story of God's creation, humanity gave up its freedom by choosing to rebel against God.

From that time forward, the perfect freedom God created was gone, and the long-term effects were both physical and spiritual.

The Old Testament of the Bible records how God's people lost their physical freedom time and again as various empires overtook them (most notably the Egyptians, as recorded in the book of Exodus).

The loss of physical freedom was often tied to spiritual disobedience like worshiping false gods.

But time and again, the one true God forgave His people and rescued them. When God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, He was foreshadowing the arrival of Jesus Christ, who came to free humanity from sin—the spiritual slavery that leads to death.

Today, many people are living in spiritual slavery without realizing it. They devote a huge amount of their life time chasing false gods of money, success, personal comfort and romantic love—only to realize they still have an emptiness that can't be filled by any of those things.

Everyone, everyone worships something.

2. God's answer to our loss of freedom has always been Jesus Christ.

When Jesus began his short period of ministry on the earth, He announced He was the One that God's people had been waiting for since the fall of humanity.

He did this by reading a particular passage from the book of Isaiah—a passage his listeners knew was referring to the Messiah, or the Saviour of the world.

The words had been written hundreds of years earlier and spoke of a new freedom that was coming in the future. When Jesus stood up to read, He was saying the future had arrived. Liberty would come through Him.

“And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives

and recovering of sight to the blind,

to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

And he began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'" (Luke 4:17-21, emphasis added).

I know personally that *Truth Brings Freedom. Many people don't.*

Many don't know the freedom that Jesus gives.

3. Jesus came to free us from death, sin and anything that enslaves us.

The core message of the Christian faith—the Gospel—is that Jesus Christ rescues us from the slavery of sin and offers true freedom in this life and beyond. This is what Jesus said:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The Good News—the best news ever—is that faith in Jesus frees us from the death we deserve for sinning against God.

While Christ followers still battle with sin, they are no longer slaves to it.

Through the power of Christ, His people can be set free from the bondage of greed, vanity, pride, pornography, addiction, abusive behaviour, excess, selfishness—and any other sin under the sun.

Here's what Jesus said about the freedom He offers:

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:34-36).

Now there has always been and it will continue where people say being a Christian, let's put it a lot closer than that label, being a disciple of Jesus you just don't get to choose.

Being on the other side of a door of course you don't know what it's really like.

We'll I know what it is like.

4. God gives us freedom to choose our own path.

You see, God created human beings, not robots.

We don't have to accept the freedom He offers us through Jesus Christ. He gives each person the free will to accept or reject His salvation. But the Bible warns that hell is a real place where real people end up when they knowingly reject the truth.

Anyway, those who choose Christ are not forced to obey Him at every turn. But God makes it clear: the best life is one that's devoted to honouring Him.

As the Apostle Paul explained to some of the first Christians:

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).

Now remember the brother's and Joseph from earlier on?

Joseph was a man who served God. *The rest of the story could not unfold until the brothers were set free by confessing and repentance, and the family reunited.*

God used Joseph to bring about a miracle of healing that would one day result in a Saviour being born in Bethlehem.

We all need to be set free as Joseph's brothers were set free.

The path to freedom is the same for us as it was for them.

If we are willing to face the truth about our sin and disobedience,

if we are willing to confess and repent of our sins,

if we will give up our anger and our excuses, then at last we will be set free to love one another.

Final thoughts on freedom

From cover to cover, God's Word points to freedom in Christ.

And God doesn't leave us wondering how to grab hold of the freedom He offers.

It starts with acknowledging our brokenness—and admitting we are slaves to sin. And it ends with choosing Jesus and following Him daily. Only He can break the bonds of slavery and lead us to true freedom, now and forever.

So we must ask the question of ourselves one more time, and ask also others:

Do you want to be set free?