

What to Do When You Don't Know What to Do / Week 5

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. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. 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 (Genesis 45:1-3 NIV).

"I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! 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. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. 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 45:4b-7 NIV).

And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him (Genesis 45:15 NIV).

Imagine someone buying you something you wanted, but couldn't afford? Maybe it was something as simple as a taco from Taco Bell. You say, "Thanks! I'll pay you back." And they reply, "No need, You're good!" This person picked up your tab without asking for payback.

Not asking to be paid back is kind of heart-warming when it comes to borrowing money for tacos, but other times it can get kind of complicated.

Outside of paying money back to someone you owe, the idea of payback also comes up when someone hurts us. For example, ...

- When someone talks about us behind our back... we want payback.
- When someone doesn't fulfill a promise they made to us... we want payback.
- When someone disappoints us... we want payback.

And in those moments when we've been hurt, we want payback. Ok, maybe you don't go all scary movie and get terrifying revenge or write a song about them (like literally every pop star ever), but we all try to get payback in one way or another. We want *them* to feel the pain and hurt we felt. We want *them* to be embarrassed the way we were embarrassed. Our first reaction is almost always to get even! Or at least get *something* in return, even if it's just knowing our shady snapchat/social media comment/post was actually about them.

And isn't it true that the closer we are to a person, the more we want payback?

The people who are closest to you and the people who know you best have the most potential to hurt you. So, they're the most likely to be on your list of people who owe you payback.

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

- **Public payback.** This is when we do to them what they did to us in an obvious way. We talk bad about the person who talked bad about us. We clap back loudly. Or, we roast them and say "just kidding."
- **Passive payback.** This way is more subtle. We make comments that aren't obviously hurtful, but could be interpreted that way. We put that subtle post on social media. We roll our eyes when someone talks. Or we ignore someone's texts.
- **Imaginary payback.** Personally, I'm an expert at this kind. Imaginary payback happens when we have an argument in our mind, and we destroy them. We have a better argument, a

better comeback, and we annihilate them. It takes over our thoughts, but we never actually DO anything.

And then, there's perhaps the most satisfying payback of all: **Enjoying watching them fail.** Like when...

- Our ex broke up with us for someone else, and then he or she got dumped.
- Our mom snapped at us and hurt our feelings, and now she's crying and apologizing. It's the perfect setup for us to put an exclamation mark on her regret.
- That guy who made fun of us in third grade (and we for real still hate him) face-plants during a pep rally game.

In those moments, it feels like justice, doesn't it? It feels good to see someone get what's coming to them, whether that's good... or bad.

And that is exactly the sort of situation Joseph found himself in as we wrap up his story.

In this series, we've been journeying through the life of Joseph whose story is found in the book of Genesis. And his story is a WILD one—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—and then told his older brothers about it. Not exactly the most self-aware guy, right?

And, since Joseph was super annoying, his brothers plotted to kill him. (Which seems like a slight overreaction.) But instead, they saw a group traveling through town, and they decided to make a little money by selling Joseph as a slave.

The rest of this series has covered...

- Joseph as a slave in Egypt.
- Joseph as a slave *in prison* in Egypt.
- And Joseph as the man who interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh, who was the ruler of Egypt.

Joseph was eventually placed in charge of *all of Egypt*. Second in command to Pharaoh. Not a bad outcome for a kid who was sold into slavery by his brothers!

But then there's a plot twist. After Joseph was second in command, there was a food shortage where his family lived. So, Joseph's dad, Jacob, sent the brothers to Egypt to ask for food because their country was out and they were starving. At this point in the story, Joseph's family thought he was dead, so of course they weren't even thinking about the possibility of seeing Joseph when they get to Egypt to ask for food.

When they arrived in Egypt and saw Joseph, not knowing it was Joseph—a huge drama unfolded. You can read some of the interactions between Joseph and his brothers in Genesis 42-50. Trust me, you don't want to miss it. Reading through the back and forth, knowing the backstory, is like being in a movie.

Let's pick up in Genesis 45.

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. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. 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 (Genesis 45:1-3 NIV).

Imagine the tension and emotion of the moment: Joseph was face-to-face with the people who tried to kill him, his *own brothers* who sold him into slavery—the same brothers who ironically were asking *him* for help.

This, was a “get-what’s-coming-to-you” moment at its finest. Everything was been set up perfectly. Payback was dropped in Joseph’s lap.

Joseph could’ve refused them food. He could have had them thrown into prison and maybe give them a taste of their own medicine. He could have even had them killed—they were certainly willing to do that to *him*.

Pause. What would *you* do? I mean, don’t say it out loud, but in your own head be honest with yourself. What would you have done with all that power to hurt the person or the people who had hurt you the most? Honestly, I don’t know.

As the story continues, Joseph asked his brothers to walk over and stand close to him. You can imagine the terror the brothers felt in this moment.

And Joseph said this...

“I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! 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. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. 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 45:4b-7 NIV).

Now, there’s only one reason Joseph could have responded 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 forgiveness. How do we know that? Because Joseph could look in the eyes of the ones who had caused him the most grief, and care about how *they* were feeling. When Joseph said, “*Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here,*” **he was acknowledging their wrong and his hurt without creating more hurt.** Only a healed person could do this. Only someone who had forgiven could do this.

Joseph chose forgiveness over payback, and we see that in the moment when he had the greatest opportunity for revenge. **Somewhere between being sold into slavery and being reunited with his brothers, Joseph did the hard work of giving his hurt to God, and allowing God to be central in his healing.** That’s why Joseph was quick to acknowledge God in the area where his brothers had caused him the most pain. It didn’t make what his brothers did okay. It didn’t make Joseph’s pain any less. It just took the real pain and the real hurt and no longer put them center stage. It put God there instead. And that made forgiveness possible. Forgiveness was not only for his brothers—it was freedom from his own pain too.

Joseph went on to tell his brothers to go get their father and move the entire family to Egypt because the famine would continue and without making this move, his family would suffer. And then this happened...

And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him (Genesis 45:15, NIV).

That may be the only thing better than payback: reconciliation. **This is where we see God do the impossible in a relationship—bring peace—when there has only been hurt.** All because of forgiveness.

When it comes to other people hurting us, we too have the opportunity to choose something better than payback. In fact, here's a simple way to remember it...

WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, PURSUE PEACE INSTEAD OF PAYBACK.

When you pursue peace, you fight for the relationship. In other words, you can fight to win, to be right, to make a point... or you can fight the urge for payback and pursue peace, but you can't do both. Joseph preserved his relationship with all of his brothers because he chose peace. And he was only able to do that because he fought for forgiveness. And he was only able to forgive with the help of God. Joseph didn't have a super power that allowed him to do this. He just had the determination to do the work peace required and an understanding of God at work in his situation— which means, you and I can do this too.

When you pursue peace, you lay down your right to get payback. You let go of revenge. You say goodbye to your desire to get even. Instead, you choose the path of forgiveness. You choose God's story of reconciliation instead of your own story of payback and revenge. This is easier said than done, and something you may have to work at daily, but the ultimate benefit is for you. You not only have peace with them, you have peace in *you*.

Think about it: What do you have the power to do when it comes to pursuing peace? What do you need to decide? Who do you need to forgive? What offense do you need to bring to God? He can do incredible things in your story that you may not be able to imagine yet. So **when you don't know what to do, pursue peace instead of payback.**

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?
3. What are some ways we justify payback?
4. How can payback hurt others? How can payback hurt us?
5. Why can pursuing peace, instead of trying to get payback, be difficult?
6. Describe a time when someone else pursued peace with you instead of payback? What did they do?

7. Read Matthew 5:9, What do you think it means to be a peacemaker?
8. What's the difference between pursuing peace and forgiving someone? What's the difference between pursuing peace and becoming friends again?
9. What are some steps you can take to pursue peace? Some examples of steps. choosing to not pay back, refusing to gossip, making time to have a difficult conversation, asking for forgiveness, acknowledge the hurt.