

## **“The Road to Reconciliation” (pt 1)**

Genesis 44:1-34; 45:1-15

Turn with me in your Bible this morning to Genesis 44. In our series of studies from Joseph’s life, we’ve now come to what is perhaps the most emotionally charged and moving passages in all of the Bible. Throughout these chapters in Genesis, we’ve had a front row seat to watch God work out His purposes in the lives of Joseph and his brothers. Over the last couple of chapters, we’ve seen these men humbled as they have experienced famine and hardship, all of which was designed to bring them to the feet of the one they had despised all those years ago. Some 22 years before these events of chapter 44, they had viciously sold Joseph as a slave and, in the years since, they had tried to live with the terrible secret.

### **Numbers 32:23—“Be sure your sin will find you out.”**

What we try to conceal, God will expose. But what we will expose, God will cleanse by the blood of the Lamb. And so God is working to bring their sin into the light, bringing them to repentance in order for reconciliation to happen. We’re going to walk with Joseph and his brothers down the road to reconciliation. And in doing so, we’ll consider important truth about repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation in our relationships with the people in our lives. (Read)

On June 17, 2015, during a Bible study at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston SC, a 21 year old Dylann Roof took a handgun and murdered nine church members as they bowed their heads in prayer. Just minutes earlier, they had welcomed with open arms and given him a place to sit among them in their Bible study. He responded to their kindness by turning their church into a crime scene. Nine people were senselessly murdered, and their families left in deep

grief, while the entire country asking why such evil? The internet exploded with support for the families of the victims as well as outrage toward the killer, who by his own admission had hoped to ignite a race war. Dylann Roof was convicted and sentenced the death penalty, and would soon be on death row. But something would happen in the courtroom that would shock the world. The families of the victims gave moving statements about their loved ones, acknowledging their anger and pain, but also praying for the soul of their killer and telling him that they forgave him. They didn't dismiss what had happened, nor was it automatic and easy on their part. A man named Anthony Thompson, whose wife was one of those murdered, said:

*"I would just like him to know that—I forgive him, and my family forgives him. But we would like him to take this opportunity to repent. Repent, confess. Give your life to the one who matters most, Christ, so that He can change him. And change your ways, so no matter what happens to you, you'll be okay."*

Anthony Thompson faced the man who murdered his wife and offered him forgiveness and grace. I suppose that if we were to ask people what they consider to be among the hardest things to say to someone else, the two at the top of the list would be "I am sorry," and "I forgive you." Our pride has a way of resisting both. We often will try to justify our wrongdoings where others are involved, and we often want to hold onto grudges when we've been wronged. We are reluctant to admit to being wrong, and we are resistant to granting forgiveness to those who seek it from us.

**Philip Schaff**—*"To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; to return good for evil is Christlike and divine."*

Of course, repentance and forgiveness is not a minor issue in the Christian life. We're not talking about something that is peripheral, but something which is at the very center of it. And both of these principles are illustrated for us here in the next couple of chapters in Genesis. Joseph's brothers come to a place of repentance, and Joseph is an agent of reconciliation and forgives those who had wronged him. It is one of the most touching stories in all of Scripture.

We can only imagine the range of emotions that Joseph felt the moment he saw his brothers waiting in line to buy grain. If we go back through the previous chapters, we can count up the number of times Joseph is said to weep:

- "Then he turned away from them and wept." (42:24)
- "Then Joseph hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there." (43:30)
- "Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, 'Make everyone go out from me.' So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud." (45:1-2)
- "Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them." (45:14-15)

Tears soak these pages which paint the vivid scenes for us, and is simply a reminder of the pain that is characteristic of everyday life and relationships in a fallen world. Hurts are very real, and in no way does the Bible downplay them as if it were make-believe. There is a sense in which all of us in this room are carrying around those scars which we have received from the hands of others.

Some of them are still very fresh, others we have carried for a long time, yet their memory remains. Can we forgive those who hurt us?

Brokenness, confession, repentance, and forgiveness are all necessary ingredients for reconciliation to take place. It is something that we see illustrated in the lives of Joseph's brothers. I don't anticipate we will get through all of these today, but I do want us to look at each of these individually:

### **1—BROKENNESS leading to confession (44:1-13)**

*“Then he commanded the steward of his house, ‘Fill the men’s sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man’s money in the mouth of his sack, and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain.’ And he did as Joseph told him...”*

I remember how I used to read this chapter and think that it was so unnecessary on Joseph's part to put his brothers through the ringer. I mean, you would think that he would have told them who he was at the end of chapter 43 while they were all celebrating around the table. Why additional conflict? I've since come to believe that this is one of the most important details in the story thus far.

**William Philip** — *“So have these brothers—for all their chastening by God, and conviction under His gracious probing of their lives—[have they] really changed? People can hear the gospel, respond to it, seem genuinely contrite about the past, chastened about their sin, even committed to the church yet have no real root. The steward’s trap is a test to reveal whether change in the brothers is not just words, but real.”*

Their examination

We've seen how Joseph puts his brothers through a series of tests in these chapters. First, there was the test of them being kept in confinement for three days. We can call it the 'honesty' test. Then, there was the test of keeping Simeon while sending the rest of them on their way, along with the understanding that they bring their brother Benjamin back with them to Egypt. Call it the 'honor' test. Now, there is the test of the silver cup. This is the 'humility' test. Joseph has his own silver chalice secretly put into Benjamin's sack of grain, and then sends them on their way. Only to have his steward overtake them and charge them with stealing it.

**Robert Sacks** — *“Joseph has now decided to put his brothers to the final test. He will place them in a position where they will be strongly tempted to treat Benjamin as they had treated him. The point of Joseph's trial is that repentance is only complete when one knows that if he were placed in the same position he would not act in the way he had acted before.”*

You might be tempted to think that Joseph is only playing a cruel game of cat and mouse. But that's not what is going here. Instead, he is bringing them to a breaking point. Will they cut tail and run out on Benjamin like they had done to him all those years before? Or will these men demonstrate that they've been changed, and are not the same men that they used to be? The point of the test is to determine if the brothers are truly repentant. Joseph is discerning whether or not they are different, whether or not they have begun to acknowledge God in their lives.

The covenant promise that God had made to Abraham had said that He would bring blessing to the world through the descendants of Abraham. They would grow from a small tribe to a mighty nation. But for that to happen, there would need to be reconciliation among the brothers. And Joseph is setting the stage for

that to take to place. Yet before they can be reconciled, they must come to grips with what they had done and admit their own guilt.

### Their confrontation

Notice what happens once the steward overtakes them and accuses them of stealing the silver cup. They say to him in verse 7, “Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing!” Their logic is that they had returned the money which had been found in their sacks of grain. So why would he think they would ever tried to steal from him? It didn’t make sense. Notice they are so sure that none of them had taken it that they say to him in verse 9, “Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we also will be my lord’s servants.” It is their way of protesting their innocence in the matter. But the test comes in what Joseph says next. Verse 10, “He said, ‘Let it be as you say: he who is found with it shall be my servant, and the rest of you shall be innocent.’” There’s no need for all of you to become my servants, only the one who is found with the silver in the sack! What will they do?

Circumstances very often bring guilt to the surface. We know that Joseph’s actions do that in his brothers, but one cannot help thinking that there are times when God does the same thing to us. In His providential care, He arranges our circumstances so that we are forced to face things we have long suppressed or tried to forget. These are things that we need to deal with honestly in order to move forward in our relationship with God. Joseph’s brothers are coming to a breaking point where they run out of options and cast themselves entirely upon the mercy of the man in charge.

What does it mean to reach your breaking point?

Coming to a breaking point means reaching the limit of your emotional, mental, or spiritual capacity—when the weight of pressure, pain, or circumstance becomes too much to bear. It's the moment when our self-sufficiency shatters, control slips away, and you're forced to confront the reality of your condition. Biblically and personally, it will involve the collapse of pretense. You can no longer fake strength or maintain appearances. The masks are taken off, and honest confession is made. Then it also involves the confrontation of truth. At our breaking point, the truth is what prevails. You can't deny it, distract from it, or delay it anymore. What has been hidden comes to light. And then it also involves the condition of total surrender. A breaking point is coming to the end of self and then the beginning of something new. When you come to the end of yourself, you may finally open yourself to the help, grace, or change you've resisted for so long. That's where Joseph's brothers are now finding themselves. Then notice:

#### Their resignation

Verse 13 says, "Then they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city." By tearing their clothes, they show an outward sign of their grief and sorrow. Whenever you see this in the Bible, when someone tears their clothes (also called "rending their garments"), it is a physical expression of deep emotion—most often grief, shock, repentance, or outrage. It wasn't just an impulsive reaction, but it was a well-understood cultural sign in those days. Everyone who saw it knew it meant the person was feeling something intense. For instance, it often meant:

- Grief or a sense of mourning

When a loved one died or tragedy struck, tearing one's clothes showed the depth of sorrow. Jacob tore his clothes when he believed Joseph was dead (Genesis 37:34).

- Shock over circumstances

Sometimes it expressed a person being overwhelmed by devastating or appalling news. Job tore his robe upon hearing of his losses (Job 1:20). Joshua tore his clothes after Israel's defeat at Ai (Joshua 7:6).

- Repentance and humility before God

Rending garments could symbolize brokenness over sin and a desire to return to God. King Josiah tore his clothes when he heard from the Law of God and realized how far the nation had strayed (2 Kings 22:11).

All three of these reasons are reflected by the brothers and the rending of their garments. It is an expression of their grief, of their shock, as well as an evidence of their humility before God. God once told His people through the prophet Joel, "Rend your heart and not your garments" (Joel 2:13), meaning the external act should reflect an internal reality—true repentance, not just a ritual display. Brokenness is a matter of one's heart before God. Before there can ever be an experience of forgiveness, there must first be a sense of brokenness over our sin. While it feels like everything is falling apart, your breaking point is actually a breakthrough—because brokenness can become the very place where God does His deepest work. Sin can't be forgiven until brokenness leads to confession. But what is the nature of true confession? Well, notice it is:

## **2—CONFESSION leading to repentance (44:14-26)**



*“When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground. Joseph said to them, ‘What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination?’ And Judah said, ‘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; behold, we are my lord’s servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found.’ But he said, ‘Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant. But as for you, go up in peace to your father...”*

Brokenness leads to confession, and confession leads to repentance, without which there can be no forgiveness or reconciliation. These brothers have to come to the place where they admit their guilt before God. And I believe that Joseph, under the leading of God’s Spirit, is setting the stage to discover whether or not they will in fact admit their guilt before God. Had they not change, think about how they might have responded. On the one hand, they could have repeated history. They could have said, “We’re all about to end up as slaves! Let Benjamin take one for the team so that rest of us can go home. Let him be the slave while we go free.” Then on the other hand, they could have rationalized and said, “Hey, our families are starving back home. We have an aging father. We’ve got good enough reason to leave Benjamin here!”

But that is not what they do. In verse 14, notice how once they return to the house, Joseph says to them, “What is this that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me can practice divination?” We are not to assume that Joseph actually practiced divination. This was more than likely a statement to make it sound as if he were totally Egyptian, to scare them even further and raise the stakes. The first thing that they do is to throw themselves on the ground at his

feet. This is the fourth time in the story that the Bible mentions them bowing before Joseph. So that they fully understand how their lives and their future are in his hands. There is no pretense. All of their pride has been stripped away. In solidarity, the only thing they can do is confess their need for mercy. It is honest confession!

### Confession refuses to shift blame

Confession demands that we assume the responsibility for our actions, no longer making excuses, not simply seeking to escape the consequences. In verse 16, Judah speaks up for the group and says, “What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak?” In other words, there is nothing we can say or do to offer an excuse. They are in the position of complete vulnerability, and there is no one to blame for their situation but themselves.

The very heart of confession is owning responsibility for one’s wrong without excuses. When we try to shift blame—whether to circumstances, misunderstandings, other people, or even the devil—the confession rings hollow and doesn’t meet the standard of truthfulness. A confession mixed with blame is essentially saying, “I did wrong, but it wasn’t really my fault.” That’s not truth. It’s self-protection disguised as honesty. Genesis 3:12-13 says that’s what Adam and Eve did.

**1 John 1:9—“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to please us from all unrighteousness.”**

When you shift blame, the other person hears justification, not confession. Forgiveness and reconciliation can come when the wrongdoer says, “This was my fault,” without pointing fingers elsewhere. When blame is shifted, the real root of the problem stays hidden. You can’t repent from something you won’t

fully own. Honest confession says, “I have no defense. This was wrong. I did it. And I take full responsibility.” Friends, that’s the soil in which forgiveness and reconciliation can grow.

**James 5:16—“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”**

#### Confession renounces its bargaining power

Notice that Judah goes on to say in verse 16, “Or how can we clear ourselves?” In other words, we have nothing with which to bargain. We can’t buy our way out of this problem or talk our way out of this problem. The only thing left for us to do is confess that we are completely destitute and in need of your mercy. They have no bargaining power, there is no plan B to fall back on, and no ace up their sleeve. All they can do is fall down before the lord of Egypt.

#### Confession recognizes divine accountability

Look at verse 16 again, “God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord’s servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found.” This is no doubt the thing that Joseph has been waiting to hear—“God has found out our guilt.” They finally reach a point where they admit their guilt. I like how one person has put it, “There was a vertical awakening, a realization they had sinned against God” (Davey). Remember how earlier they had said, “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother” (42:21). And then in 42:28 they said, “What is this that God has done to us?” Coming to an open, honest confession is part of the cure in their lives. The same thing is true in our lives as well.

Confession is part of the cure for receiving forgiveness because it's the moment when the wound is finally exposed so it can be healed. It is getting things out in the light so they can be dealt with. Without it, sin remains hidden and festering beneath the surface, and the barrier between us and God (or us and another person) remains intact. Sin thrives in pride and secrecy. Confession requires humility, and humility opens the door to grace.

**James 4:6—“But He gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”**

Confession acknowledges the wrong that was committed and signals repentance and a willingness to be restored. But without it, the offense remains unaddressed, and real reconciliation can't genuinely take place. God promises His forgiveness to the repentant, not to the unrepentant. The Bible says in:

**Proverbs 28:13—“He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”**

Confession is the expression of repentance—it's the way we surrender our defenses and open our hands to receive grace. But understand that confession isn't the 'price' we pay to get forgiveness—it's the 'place' where we finally stop running, face reality, and let the Great Physician apply His grace cure to our soul! Which then brings us to the third principle, and that is:

### **3—REPENTANCE leading to forgiveness (44:27-34)**

*“Then your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons. One left me, and I said, ‘Surely he has been torn to pieces,’ and I have never seen him since. If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.’ Now therefore, as soon*

*as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all of my life.' Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father."*

Brokenness leading to confession, confession leading to repentance, and now repentance leading to forgiveness. Again, Joseph has offered that the rest of the group could go free while only the one who had the silver cup would be kept as a slave. What's interesting to me is that Judah is the one who intercedes on Benjamin's behalf! Remember it was Judah all those years ago who had coldly suggested selling Joseph as a slave for a few pieces of silver. It was the same situation all over again. What will Judah do? He gives evidence of the fruit of repentance in his life. And the nature of Judah's repentance is seen in the heartwrenching way that he intercedes on behalf of Benjamin. Notice how it is:

### Selfless intercession

Beginning in verse 18, Judah goes back through all that the men had experienced. He recalls how they were asked if they had a father or another brother. Verse 20, "And we said to my lord, 'We have a father an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.'" They were asked to bring the boy down to Egypt, but to do so would result in the death of their father who loved him very much. What's interesting is that Judah wants the lord of Egypt to

see the situation through the eyes of Jacob their father. He wants him to feel his distress of losing his son, so he points out what both Joseph and Benjamin had meant to their father. So now Judah shows compassion for both Jacob and Benjamin.

### Sacrificial substitution

It would cause the death of Jacob if he were to lose his son Benjamin, as Judah says in verse 30, “Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, as his life is bound up in the boy’s life, as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down they gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol.” Then here it is in verse 32—“For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.’ Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers.” Take me instead of him! I’ll take his place! I’ll pay the price! I’ll bear the guilt so that he can go home!

This isn’t the same man that we met back in Genesis 37, but is instead a man who has been broken, a man who has been brought to the point of confession and repentance in his life. Some of you probably remember the song by Bill and Gloria Gaither that said:

*Today, I went down to the place where I used to go  
Today, I saw the same old crowd I knew before  
And when they asked me what had happened,  
I tried to tell them,  
Thanks to Calvary, I don’t come here anymore!*

*Thanks to Calvary I am not the man I used to be  
Thanks to Calvary things are different than before.  
And as the tears ran down my face I tried to tell them,  
Thanks to Calvary, I don't come here anymore!*

I think Judah could say something similar in his life. There had been a profound change in this man, and at no point is Judah more a type of Christ than in his willingness to be a substitute for his brother.

**1 Peter 3:18—“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.”**

Just as Isaac Watts wrote in the beloved hymn:

*Alas, and did my Savior bleed?  
And did my Sovereign die?  
Would He devote that sacred head  
For such a worm as I?*

Brokenness leading to confession, confession leading to repentance, repentance leading to forgiveness, and then:

#### **4—FORGIVENESS leading to reconciliation (45:1-15)**

*“Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, ‘Make everyone go out from me.’ So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. And Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?’ But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. So Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Come near*

*to me, please.’ And they came near. And he said, ‘I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life...”*

Now I have to stop here, and we will come back to this the next time. Judah is a picture of substitutionary atonement in Jesus Christ. And Joseph is a picture of the forgiving grace of God in Jesus Christ. He forgives his brothers and opens his arms to them! One of the dangers of approaching a passage like this is that we attempt to make it a moralistic story that we try to imitate. Joseph forgave his brothers, so I need to be like Joseph and forgive those who’ve wronged me, or so it goes. While he is an example of forgiveness in the practical sense, the more important truth is the way in which Joseph points us to Jesus. I am forgive others, not simply because it is the right thing to do, but rather on the basis of my having been forgiven in Jesus Christ. We forgive because we have been forgiven! The gospel of God’s grace is what frees me to forgive.

Anthony Thompson faced the young man who murdered his wife and offered him forgiveness, but he offered him some more—grace. And yet it is a grace that demands repentance in order for that grace to be realized. Just like being given a gift, you have to open your hand to receive it.

Ask yourself the question, “In my own life, has there been a brokenness that resulted in confession?” If so, has that confession resulted in real repentance? Not simply regret or remorse, but real repentance. Because repentance is what leads to forgiveness, and forgiveness then results in reconciliation.