

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

WHEN CHARACTER IS PUT TO THE TEST, PART II

THE FINAL EXAM

GENESIS 44

God Allows Tests to Reveal Our Heart

Genesis 44:1-13 NKJV And he commanded the steward of his house, saying, “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. ² Also put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his grain money.” So he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken. ³ As soon as the morning dawned, the men were sent away, they and their donkeys. ⁴ When they had gone out of the city, *and were not yet far off*, Joseph said to his steward, “Get up, follow the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid evil for good? ⁵ *Is not this the one* from which my lord drinks, and with which he indeed practices divination? You have done evil in so doing.’” ⁶ So he overtook them, and he spoke to them these same words. ⁷ And they said to him, “Why does my lord say these words? Far be it from us that your servants should do such a thing. ⁸ Look, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord’s house? ⁹ With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord’s slaves.” ¹⁰ And he said, “Now also *let it be* according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and you shall be blameless.” ¹¹ Then each man speedily let down his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. ¹² So he searched. He began with the oldest and left off with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack. ¹³ Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey and returned to the city.

- Genesis 43 ends with Joseph and his brothers enjoying a wonderful meal at Joseph’s house
- The brothers leave Joseph in great spirits
- They were treated well, their sacks are full of food, Simeon is out of prison, Benjamin is with them, and Jacob’s fears of something bad happening to them were not realized
- Even though the dinner ended on a happy note, Joseph is planning a new test
- Joseph tells his steward to fill the brothers sacks with food, as much as they can carry and their money in the sacks as well, and Joseph’s silver cup in the Benjamin’s sack
- Why? Because Joseph is recreating the circumstances of Genesis 37
- In Genesis 44, Benjamin is the favored younger son.
- Joseph is testing if history will repeat itself
- Joseph’s brothers left his house at daybreak, heading back to Canaan
- The steward goes after the brothers and accuses them of stealing Joseph’s silver cup
- The steward says to the brothers, “Why have you repaid good with evil?”
- The steward said the silver cup was used by Joseph for divination
- The point not about divination at all, it was to make the brothers aware that the cup was “special”, and taking it would be a terrible crime
- The brothers say they would never do such thing
- The brothers said search our sacks and if you find the silver cup, put that person to death and we’ll be your slaves
- The steward said whoever has the silver cup will be his slave and I’ll let the rest of you go

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- The steward searches through all the sacks starting with the oldest brother and ending with the youngest
- In Benjamin's sack was the silver cup
- According to their oath, Benjamin should die and they would've gotten rid of *the other* favorite son
- The brothers tore their clothes in grief and went back to the city
- When Joseph was taken as a slave, the brothers allowed him to go and they thought nothing of it
- This time, they didn't leave Benjamin behind
- This is a significant change of heart and attitude for Joseph's brothers

True Repentance Accepts Responsibility

¹⁴ So Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, and he was still there; and they fell before him on the ground. ¹⁵ And Joseph said to them, "What deed *is* this you have done? Did you not know that such a man as I can certainly practice divination?" ¹⁶ Then Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; here we are, my lord's slaves, both we and *he* also with whom the cup was found." ¹⁷ But he said, "Far be it from me that I should do so; the man in whose hand the cup was found, he shall be my slave. And as for you, go up in peace to your father."

- The brothers come to Joseph's house and they immediately bow down before him
- They have been wronged, false evidence has been planted, but they didn't come demanding justice, they are bowing for mercy
- Joseph asks the brothers, "what have they done?" Don't you know that a man like me can find out the truth by divination?
- Judah says to Joseph that, "God has found out the iniquity of your servants", in Judah's mind their sins have caught up with them
- Judah believes that they will spend their rest of their lives as slaves because of what they did to Joseph over 20 years ago
- Judah insisted that he and his brothers would stick with Benjamin as slaves
- They brothers were willing to live as slaves so that they would not abandon Joseph, despite being men of wealth and status

Changed Priorities; Judah Intercedes for Benjamin

¹⁸ Then Judah came near to him and said: "O my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's hearing, and do not let your anger burn against your servant; for you *are* even like Pharaoh. ¹⁹ My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' ²⁰ And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a child of *his* old age, *who is* young; his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.' ²¹ Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.' ²² And we

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said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for *if* he should leave his father, *his* father would die.' ²³ But you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.' ²⁴ "So it was, when we went up to your servant my father, that we told him the words of my lord. ²⁵ And our father said, 'Go back *and* buy us a little food.' ²⁶ But we said, 'We cannot go down; if our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we may not see the man's face unless our youngest brother *is* with us.' ²⁷ Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; ²⁸ and the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he is torn to pieces"; and I have not seen him since. ²⁹ But if you take this one also from me, and calamity befalls him, you shall bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave.'

- Judah asks Joseph for permission to speak on behalf of his brothers and simply tells of how they got to where they were
- You asked before if we had a father and a brother, and we told you our father was an old man, and his youngest son was a child of his old age
- Judah has become attentive to the emotional impact of his decisions on other people.
- That's character growth
- Judah tell Joseph, "You told us to bring Benjamin to you so you could see him with your own eyes, and we said the boy couldn't leave his father because his father would die"
- We told our father what you said, and he told us to go back and buy more food
- We told our father we can't go back unless our younger brother is with us and we will never see the Egyptian's face again unless the boy is with us
- If you take his brother away from me and any harm comes to him, you'll send my father to his grave
- Judah is no longer thinking only about himself
- That's a significant change from Genesis 37
- Judah has moved from *self-centeredness* to *other-centeredness*
- Paul says in, **Philippians 2:4** "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."
- Judah could have saved himself and left Benjamin behind, but he doesn't
- Character doesn't abandon people when staying becomes inconvenient
- Judah had a history, but he didn't have to repeat it
- Your past may *explain* some of your behavior, but it doesn't have to determine your *future* behavior
- Judah's speech reveals a dramatic transformation and teaches us some powerful lessons:
 - Genuine repentance changes behavior
 - Spiritual growth changes how we treat others
 - Love for people becomes greater than love for ourselves

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Sacrificial Love Reflects God's Redemption

³⁰ “Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad *is* not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life, ³¹ it will happen, when he sees that the lad *is* not *with us*, that he will die. So your servants will bring down the gray hair of your servant our father with sorrow to the grave. ³² For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him *back* to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father forever.’ ³³ Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. ³⁴ For how shall I go up to my father if the lad *is* not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?”

- Judah pleads with Joseph and says he can't go back home without Benjamin because Jacob's life is tied up in him
- Judah tells Joseph that he *guaranteed* his father that he would take care of Benjamin and if he didn't bring him back, he would bear the blame forever
- Judah offers *himself* as a slave instead of Benjamin, so that Benjamin can return to with his brothers, **vs.33, “...please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers.”**
- Judah has develop sacrificial love
- Judah goes from “Benjamin shouldn't be punished”, to “punish me instead.”
- That's quite a transformation
- Repentance produces *self-giving* instead than “self-preservation”
- Judah becomes a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ
- Just as Judah offered himself for his brother, Jesus offered Himself for sinners. **Romans 5:8**
"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."
- The greatest evidence of Christian maturity is sacrificial love
- Throughout Genesis 44, we see evidence of how God changed hearts of Joseph's brothers and they demonstrated sacrificial love.
- We are called to serve, give, forgive, and lay down our own interests for the good of others
- Judah and his brothers passed their final exam because they refused to repeat Genesis 37:
 - Genesis 37: Joseph is in trouble; the brothers *leave* him
 - Genesis 44: Benjamin is in trouble; the brothers return *with* him
- That's transformation.
- Their response was different
- And that's one of the clearest definitions of character development:
 - The same offense doesn't produce the same reaction
 - The same opportunity doesn't cause you to compromise
 - The same pressure doesn't make you become the person you used to be