Week 8: *Genesis 42-43*

**Hook**

Main Point: Instead of seeking revenge, believers are to show compassion and generosity to those who have hurt them, especially in their times of need.

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A survey by American Express found that three in four Americans believe that regifting presents is “socially acceptable.” To help those regifters, Dave Ramsey has 10 rules when it comes to passing a present along:

1. *The gift should make sense.* Only regift an item that you would have potentially purchased for the recipient.
2. *Take off the gift tag.*
3. *Don’t regift gifts you have received from meaningful people.*
4. *Don’t regift family heirlooms.*
5. *Avoid regifting within the same circle of friends.*
6. *Do not regift an item to the person who gifted it to you.*
7. *Give the gift sooner than later.*
9. *Rewrap the gift.*
10. *If you are caught regifting, be honest and own it.*

Q: What is the funniest thing that you have regifted to someone else or had regifted to you?
Q: Are there any gifts that you’ve received through the years that you wished you could regift?

Q: Put the idea of regifting aside; what is the most thoughtful gift that you’ve given to someone? What prompted you to give that gift?

*Transition:* Today we will discuss Joseph’s decision to demonstrate compassion and generosity to the brothers who had sold him into slavery. Instead of regifting them the pain that they delivered to him, Joseph demonstrated kindness in his brothers’ hour of need.
Week 8: *Genesis 42-43*

**Book**

**Main Point:** Instead of seeking revenge, believers are to show compassion and generosity to those who have hurt them, especially in their times of need.

**Text Summary:** Jacob hears there is grain for sale in Egypt, so he sends Joseph’s brothers there—all but Benjamin. When they arrive, they bow to Joseph, fulfilling the dream he had told them about long ago. Joseph accuses them of being spies and tells them they can prove their innocence by sending one brother back to get Benjamin. He throws them all in jail. After three days, out of fear of God, he says they can all go back to get Benjamin and to bring grain to their families, except one—he will keep Simeon. The brothers discuss their guilt regarding throwing Joseph into the pit. Joseph weeps secretly. He sends them home with provisions and puts their money back in their sacks. When they return home, they are afraid to go back to Egypt because of the money. Eventually, the famine gets so severe that they have to return and they bring Benjamin with them. When they arrive, Joseph throws a huge feast for them at his house. His steward assures them that no one thinks they stole the money.

**Genesis 42-43 [Read]**

Rarely do we read this much at one time, but with the way this narrative is written, it is most helpful to read it all at once to get the full effect and then discuss different points in more depth. Break up the passage and ask different class members to read sections.

**Talking Point 1:** Believers are not to seek revenge on those who have harmed them.

**Q:** Why did Joseph put his brothers’ money back in their sacks?

**Q:** Joseph wept several times in this story. What can we learn about Joseph from the things that moved him to tears?

It has been more than seven years since Joseph became Pharaoh’s viceroy and 21–22 years since his brothers had thrown him into the pit and sold him into slavery. Yet, Joseph hasn’t attempted any sort of reconciliation with his family or even try to contact them to let them know he was still alive.iii

It’s famine time, and Joseph’s brothers have come to Egypt to buy grain like the other nations, but Jacob won’t let Benjamin go with them because he is afraid of losing him (42:4–5). The several-week trip was dangerous, and as foreigners, they couldn’t be sure how they would be
received when they arrived. Benjamin is the youngest son and Jacob’s favorite, now that Joseph is gone because he is the only other son born to Jacob’s favored wife, Rachel, who died in childbirth with Benjamin (Gen. 35:16–20).

Immediately in this chapter, we see Joseph’s dream from when he was 17 coming true—his brothers bow down to him (42:6). The text even emphasizes how far they bowed, “with their faces to the ground” (42:6). Bowing all the way down to the ground, completely prostrate, was the standard show of respect and homage in Egypt. Another reminder of God’s sovereignty—that He is in control; He has a plan; and He is orchestrating all events for good.

Joseph’s response to his brothers is interesting. At first, he just seemed angry. He spoke roughly to them, accusing them of being spies looking for Egypt’s military weakness— “the nakedness of the land” (42:7–9), insisting three times (42:9, 12, 14). But then, after he heard their authentic guilt concerning what they did to him, he was moved to tears (42:24). Imagine the rollercoaster of emotions he must have been going through! But how he chooses to act shows his true character. We can’t choose our emotions, but we can choose how we act on them. Joseph changes his plan with his brothers three times:

- Original plan/test – send one brother back to get Benjamin, Joseph will keep the other nine in prison (42:15–16)
- After keeping them in prison three days, “out of fear of God,” Joseph changed the test, allowing his brothers to go back but leave only one brother in custody, Simeon (42:18–19)
- After hearing their guilt over the way they had treated him, Joseph gave orders for them to be given grain and provisions for the journey, and for their money to be replaced in their sacks (42:24–25)

So Joseph had two different motivations for loosening his test of the brothers:

1. Fear of God
2. Recognizing that they felt guilty about what they had done

Even before he was moved with compassion for them because they showed that they felt guilty about what they had done to him, his heart toward them was softened out of “fear of God” (42:18). If he let nine of them go back, they could bring grain to their households (42:19).

Joseph said twice that if they proved they were telling the truth, it would keep them from being put to death as spies (42:18, 20). Traders and merchants who regularly traveled from country to country in caravans would often be recruited by one country to spy on another for them, to find out where they had military weaknesses. Proving whether a foreigner was a spy (or wasn’t) was a challenge, and it would explain why Joseph was asking them so many questions about their family and their homeland (43:7). It would also explain why he asked them to bring Benjamin to him (42:15).
If Joseph was seeking revenge, he could have simply accused them of spying and had them killed (42:18, 20), but he gave them a chance to prove their trustworthiness, even before he learned that they felt guilty about the way they had treated him. Later, in the Mosaic Law, God would tell His people, “Vengeance is mine, and recompense,” but Joseph understood this even then (Deut. 32:35). He didn’t seek revenge on his brothers, but left it all to God and His sovereignty. Joseph trusted that God had a plan and all of this was part of it.

Q: Why is it not helpful to seek revenge on those who have harmed you? How can it actually do more harm than good?

Q: Read 1 Peter 3:9–14. Why should we seek peace instead of repaying evil for evil? How can we be blessed for that, even if it means suffering for us?

Q: Read Romans 12:17–21. How did Joseph exemplify this passage? How can doing good overcome evil?

Talking Point 2: God can even redeem our sinful choices – using them to accomplish good and to change us.

Q: Why do you think Joseph didn’t just confront his brothers from the beginning? Why did he take such a long, round-about route to reconciliation?

Q: How do Joseph’s brothers seem different from the last time we saw them?

Genesis also shows us a change in character regarding Joseph’s brothers. More than 20 years later, they are changed men. Instead of angry, jealous and vindictive, they are humble and repentant (42:21).

And we learn a new detail that we didn’t see in the original story in Genesis 37: “we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen” (42:21). This gives us insight into how much it pained Joseph to be rejected by his brothers.

The brothers have seen their father’s pain for 20 years, and have lived with the secret both of what they had done to Joseph and how they had lied to their father about his death. Whether they had talked about their sins with Jacob many times over the years or only felt guilty on the inside, they had enough feelings of guilt to immediately think their current situation was punishment for the way they had treated Joseph. God would use their guilt to discipline them and change their hearts.

Notice the change in the brothers below:

Reuben
Reuben reminds the brothers that he had told them not to hurt Joseph and that this was all happening as a reckoning for his blood (42:22). This is the moment that caused Joseph to weep (42:24).

Reuben offered to their father that if Benjamin didn’t come back with them from Egypt, that Jacob could kill his two sons (42:37). Thereby losing both of his heirs, cutting off his line.

Judah

As things became more desperate, the family had run out of the food Joseph had originally given them, and they really needed to go back to Egypt again, but Jacob still wouldn’t let Benjamin go (43:1–5). It had been long enough that Judah says they could have gone and come back twice by now (43:10).

Judah stood up to his father, saying they would not go without Benjamin (43:5). Then, he offered to be a pledge himself for the safety of Benjamin, saying he would bear the blame forever if Benjamin did not return with them (43:9). Judah had a leading role in selling Joseph into slavery. But now, instead of being jealous of their father’s love for Benjamin as he had been with Joseph, he would protect this brother at all costs.

The story even says their hearts failed them; they were trembling and asked, “What is this that God has done to us?” (42:28) implicating that this was further punishment being inflicted on them by God. This was why they were afraid to return to Egypt (42:35), but Jacob said, maybe it was just an oversight and Joseph would forgive them if they returned the money (43:12). Jacob asks God for mercy, that he might send them all back to him, including Simeon and Benjamin.

As the brothers return, Joseph provides a “test” to make sure they were telling the truth about who they were, to prove they weren’t spies, was, at least in part, a way for Joseph to get to see Benjamin. When Joseph saw him, described as “his mother’s son,” he was moved with compassion and wept (43:30).

At this point, it is worthwhile to note that he doesn’t tell the brothers who he is right away. Joseph is orchestrating his own plan to teach them a lesson. Wiersbe writes, “When I think of the way Joseph behaved towards his brothers, the verse that comes to mind is Romans 11:22 – ‘Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God.’ Joseph was certainly kind to his brothers in spite of the severity of his speech and some of his actions, and what he did was for their good. His motivation was love and his purpose was to bring them to repentance and reconciliation. We need to remember this the next time we think God is treating us unjustly.”

We know that God can use the bad things in our life to grow us, shape us, and mold us into who He wants us to be. Scripture tells us that suffering produces good things in us—endurance,
character and hope (Rom. 5:3–5). Not just the bad things that happen to us. But God can even use the bad things we do to mold us. Even self-induced suffering, our own sins and failings. For Joseph’s brothers, God didn’t only use their sins for good to save many people from the famine. He also used their sins to change them—to soften their hearts, to humble them, and to help them learn to love. When we sin, God disciplines us (Heb. 12:6). And through rebuke and correction by God’s Word, we grow in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Q: How has God changed you since you became a believer? What sins or struggles has He redeemed? What ways has He disciplined you or grown you?

Q: In what ways are you still struggling? What does God still want to change in you?

Talking Point 3: Believers are to be generous to others, even generous to those who have harmed them.

Q: If you were the brothers, how would you have felt when the Egyptian viceroy who had previously accused you of being a spy invited you into his home for a feast?

Q: How was this different from what they expected to happen when they came to Joseph?

When Joseph’s brothers came back to Egypt the second time, Joseph prepared a feast for them. This would have been absolutely shocking in the midst of a worldwide famine. Of course Joseph was one of the few people who had the means to host a feast in the midst of a famine. It would have shown that Joseph had no fear of running out of food even though the famine was “severe in the land” (43:1). His words, “slaughter an animal and make ready” are strikingly similar to what the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son says, to kill the fattened calf. This was a meal of celebration.

Inviting someone to a feast in the ancient Near East was a great show of hospitality, of welcome, of honor. People typically only invited guests of their own social status. But in the Bible, God encourages His people to show hospitality to all, even welcome the poor or foreigner into your house (Isa. 58:5–7). The brothers’ invitation to this feast was so unusual that they worried they were being tricked (43:18). Who were they to be invited to a feast with the second in command of Egypt? All they were asking for were the basics and Joseph lavished them with generosity. Scripture says that they looked at each other in amazement (43:33). This was so much more than they ever would have expected.

To calm the brothers’ fears that they were walking into a trap, Joseph’s steward answered them that they had nothing to be concerned about. Their debt had been paid, and it was God who had restored their treasure to their sacks. Our story shows that this God of justice and mercy is
also a God of generosity. He is sovereign over all things and giver of all things. Note also that the steward emphasized “your” God (43:23). This was not just the God of Joseph; He was the God of all of the brothers. They may not have been as faithful to Him as Joseph had been, but He was still their God. He cared for them and had been caring for them all along. This is the consistent witness of the Old Testament—God was always faithful, even when His people were not.

Next week, we will see the actual reconciliation moment, but for now, we see Joseph’s love, care and generosity toward the very brothers who had not only mistreated him, but broken his heart. By this, Joseph proved that he really was a man of God, as Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” (Matt. 5:43–47).

Q: Imagine yourself in Joseph’s shoes. Could you have thrown a feast for these brothers who had so mistreated you?

Q: Silently think specifically of someone who has harmed you in your past. How can you show generosity toward that person? What might it accomplish?

Q: How can we show generosity to others in general? How can we share our blessings from God with others? Think both material blessings and spiritual blessings.

Q: If we remember that all we have is a gift from God, how will that change our attitude toward our material possessions? How will it change our attitude toward giving to others?
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**Took**

**Main Point:** Instead of seeking revenge, believers are to show compassion and generosity to those who have hurt them, especially in their times of need.

Whether on a grand scale, as Joseph’s providing aid to the brothers who betrayed him, or on a smaller level, such as letting someone in your lane who cut you off in traffic a few lights back, repaying good for evil is tough. However, Scripture certainly calls us to it (1 Pet. 3:9; Matt. 5:39).

Teacher, challenge the group to think through the effects of revenge. On the board, write down how seeking revenge affects the Christian and the kingdom of God. Next, challenge the group to consider the effects of repaying good. On the board, write down how demonstrating godliness instead of seeking revenge affects the Christian and the kingdom of God.

**CHALLENGES:**

**THINK:** *How can you show compassion to those who have hurt you?* How can you be generous to those who have hurt you? Think of specific people who have hurt you in your life. Why might they need compassion? How might it change their lives? How might it change your heart? How is God leading you to reach out to them?

**PRAY:** *For a spirit of mercy and grace* – Pray that God will help you to see people as He sees them and to love them as He loves them. To show them the same grace, mercy and compassion that He has shown you.

**ACT:** *Reach out* – Identify someone who has hurt you in the past or someone who is just difficult to love. Reach out to that person: call, e-mail, text, ask him or her out for a cup of coffee, write a note, or buy a small thoughtful gift. Reach out to the person in some tangible way this week with the love and compassion of Jesus.

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[i] https://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/8-items-commonly-regifted-holidays-article-1.2472667
[ii] https://www.daveramsey.com/blog/10-rules-of-regifting