Week 9: *Genesis 44*

**Hook**

A “Mulligan” is a golfing term used to describe a “do-over,” a second chance after failing. Legend says that the Mulligan goes back to the 1920s and an amateur golfer, David Bernard Mulligan. He was a prominent member of several clubs. One day, while playing with a regular foursome, he made a shot off the first tee—and it was bad. This was particularly frustrating because Mulligan’s hands were numb from some rough car driving. Mulligan was so upset that he put down another ball to try again. When the other three asked the man what he was doing, he said that he was taking a correction shot. When pushed again by his partners, asking what that rule was called, the man replied “I call it a Mulligan.” It worked out well, and in that foursome, it became an unwritten rule that you could take an extra shot on the first tee if you were unhappy with the original.

**Q:** If you had the opportunity to go back in time and address a problem again, what would it be?

**Q:** How would you address the problem differently?
Week 9: *Genesis 44*

**Book**

**Main Point:** Those who have hurt us can repent and even change.

**Text Summary:** After the feast, Joseph sent his brothers home with their sacks full of food and again, returned their money to their sacks. But he also put his own personal silver cup in Benjamin’s sack. Then he sent his men after them and accused them of stealing it. The brothers pleaded innocence and said if it were found in anyone’s sack, that man should die. The cup was found in Benjamin’s sack, and they all tore their clothes and returned to Egypt, where Joseph said they could all go home—except Benjamin. He would have to stay in Egypt as Joseph’s slave. Judah explained the situation to Joseph about Benjamin and their father and then offered to take Benjamin’s place.

*Genesis 44 [Read]*

Like last week, it is best to read this entire story at once and then go back and examine different points in more detail. In fact, some commentaries lump all three of these chapters together as one story. Certainly this week is a continuation of the story from last week’s lesson. It can help us focus during the story as it’s being read aloud if we pay attention to a few things as we listen:

- How the steward and Joseph are both gracious to the brothers, even while testing them
- How the brothers in general react to the situation
- How Judah reacts to the situation and why
- How Benjamin reacts to the situation (trick question, he doesn’t!)

This week, we’re going to look at this story from three different character’s perspectives, pulling one talking point from each one:

1. What Joseph did
2. What the brothers as a group did
3. What Judah did

**Talking Point 1:** (What Joseph did) God can change anyone.

**Q:** Why is Joseph testing his brothers? What does he hope to learn about them?

**Q:** How had Joseph treated Benjamin up to this point in the story? How may that have also tested the brothers?
After the feast, during the night, Joseph’s steward prepared the brothers’ donkeys to leave and put the silver cup in Benjamin’s sack. He also included food—“as much as they could carry”—and their money again (vv. 1–2). Just like last time, they left for home and just like at the feast, Joseph was incredibly generous to his brothers, even though they had mistreated him so much in the past. They left very early in the morning, which was typical for travel days, so that when they returned with the steward Joseph was still at home; he had not yet reported to the palace (44:14).

The cup that Joseph’s steward planted on Benjamin was not only important because it was financially valuable, but because it was considered sacred. Divining by means of a cup to find out the future (similar to reading tea leaves) was a widespread practice in the ancient Near East. It is unlikely that Joseph used the cup for magic - the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not allow magic or divination (Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:14).

In the ancient Near East, the theft of a sacred object was a serious one, the typical penalty for which was death. Joseph’s test for the brothers was to see how they would react when their brother Benjamin was found to be guilty of stealing a sacred object from the viceroy of Egypt. Joseph had heard them talking about their guilt in the way they treated him when he was young (42:21–23). He was moved to tears by their confession (42:24), but he still decided to test them to see if they had really changed, or if they were “all talk.”

First, Joseph tested them by sending the money back with them in their sacks the first time (42:28). They were honest and brought it back with them and tried to give it back, but he wouldn’t take it (43:15–23). Then, he tested them by showing Benjamin preferential treatment at the banquet (42:34), just as his father had shown him when they were young, which is what had made them so angry (37:3–4). They didn’t show any envy or anger toward Benjamin’s larger portions. But he wanted to test them one more time, to see what they would do when Benjamin, the new-favored son, was singled out for punishment. Would they abandon Benjamin? Maybe even secretly be happy they could get rid of their father’s new-favored son so easily? Or would they somehow try to defend or protect him? In other words, would they treat Benjamin the way they had treated Joseph, or had they changed?

Through his steward, Joseph was very gracious to his brothers. The brothers suggested that the punishment for taking the cup should be that they would all be made Joseph’s slaves and the one who stole it would be put to death (44:9). But the steward lessened the punishment substantially—no one would die, and the rest could all go free. Only the one who had the cup would become Joseph’s slave (44:10). But they all went back to the city anyway (44:13) and presented themselves as Joseph’s slaves (44:16). They would not leave Benjamin behind. They even joined him in his punishment, even though they were innocent. Then Joseph himself was directly gracious to them and said again that only the guilty one should become his slave.
Judah asked to take Benjamin’s place as Joseph’s slave (44:33). Judah, the very brother who had suggested selling Joseph into slavery in the first place was now sacrificially offering himself as Joseph’s slave to save his brother. The brothers really had changed.

Q: Have you ever known someone to change, from being terrible to you, to suddenly becoming humble and selfless? What changed the person?

Q: Some believe that most people never really change. How is that contrary to what Scripture says? (See 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 3:5–10; and John 3:1–8.)

Q: When we write someone off, when we refuse to believe that the person could change, what happens in our own hearts? What kinds of things may we miss out on?

Talking Point 2: (The Brothers) Actions naturally result in consequences.

Q: Why did the brothers go back to Egypt, even when the steward had said all but Benjamin were free to go?

Q: What does this say about how they had changed?

The brothers were actually innocent of the crime of which they were being accused, yet they willingly accepted the punishment anyway. In fact, when the steward told the other brothers they were free to go home, the others stuck with Benjamin and all went back to Egypt together. They offered themselves in slavery to Joseph even though they were innocent of the crime themselves.

Before the steward actually found the cup in Benjamin’s sack, they pleaded their innocence vehemently—“Far be it from your servants to do such a thing!” (v. 7). We brought back the money we found in our sacks; why would we then steal from you (v. 8)? They were so confident of their innocence that they said if he found the cup, the one who had it will die, and they would all become Joseph’s slaves. Yet, once the cup was found, they no longer protested. They mourned, “tore their clothes” (v. 13), but they did not protest. They loaded their donkeys and returned to the city. They accepted their punishment, even offered to take more than was required (v. 16), but they never tried again to plead their innocence.

They were innocent this time, but they knew they were guilty of horrible things in the past. Before, when they first came to Egypt, they had accepted what was happening to them as the consequences of their past sins (42:21–23). Instead of trying to get out of the punishment, they willingly accepted the consequences of what they had done years ago. They showed humility and maturity, and above all, love. They showed a love for their father that was not there before. Before, they were jealous of Jacob’s special love for Joseph and took it out on Joseph.
But now, instead of being jealous of Jacob’s special love for Benjamin, they had compassion on Jacob and they protected Benjamin at all costs, out of love for their father and guilt for what they had done to Joseph, which made their father cling so tightly to Benjamin.Ⅵ

Where before the brothers only had jealousy, they now had compassion. Where they only felt slighted by their father, they now cared deeply about how these things would affect him. They had seen for more than 20 years how hurt their father had been at the loss of Joseph. They would not let that happen again with Benjamin. They would accept whatever consequences they had to in order to protect him.

Q: Proverbs says that the righteous welcome discipline because they know God disciplines out of love (Heb. 12:6; Prov. 3:12). What difference would it make in your life if you accepted discipline from God instead of resisting it or protesting it?

Q: Is it hard for you to accept the consequences of your sins, to be confronted with your sins, or to even admit your sins? Why?

Q: Have you ever had an experience where you grew significantly from the consequences of your sin, and you were changed from that moment on?

Talking Point 3: (Judah) Godly love, agape love, is sacrificial.

Q: Why is Judah the one to step up and defend Benjamin? Why not Reuben?

Q: What is Judah’s motivation in doing so?

Judah’s motivation in offering himself in Benjamin’s place is his father:

• “… [my father’s] life is bound up in the boy’s life” (v. 30)
• “… he will die, your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol” (v. 31)
• “I fear to see the evil that would find my father” (v. 34)

Before, Judah resented his father’s favoritism toward Joseph. Now, Judah is empathetic to his father about his special love for Benjamin. Judah was the one responsible for his father’s losing Joseph. All of the brothers are responsible, of course, but it was Judah’s idea to sell him into slavery. We can hear Judah’s regret in his impassioned speech. Reading between the lines, we can see how responsible he feels for the pain he has caused his father. It is all about his father. Judah doesn’t say, “I can’t go back without Benjamin because my father will kill me.” He says, “If I go back without Benjamin it will kill my father.” It is not because he’s trying to protect himself from punishment, but because he is trying to spare his father the pain and sorrow.
This is a completely different Judah. He has changed so much since the 20 years before when he was a willing part of the brothers’ beating and almost killing Joseph. Then, sadistically suggested, instead of killing him, that they at least make some money off the deal (Gen. 37:26). What has changed in him?

Genesis 38 provides a heartbreaking picture of Judah and his family. Judah lost one son because of the son’s wickedness (38:1–7), another son because he failed to perform his duty (38:10), and Judah himself was caught in sin and a publicly hypocritical moment (38:24–26). So, by Genesis 44, Judah had experienced the death of two sons and – only having one left – the pain, sorrow and fear that causes. He had also experienced being shown how he had wronged someone and repentance. Judah had been humbled by his experiences and was a changed man going forward.

The Judah we meet here is so committed to honoring his pledge to his father that he is willing to sacrifice himself for Benjamin. In the New Testament, Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). The agape love of the Bible – the love that comes from God, godly love, is a love that lays down self (1 John 4:10), that puts others’ needs ahead of our own (Phil. 2:3), that is willing to sacrifice our own comfort, to deny ourselves, for what is right (Luke 9:23).

Q: Have you ever made a big sacrifice of your own comfort or happiness for someone else? Why did you do it? How did it make you feel?

Q: Has someone ever made a big sacrifice for you? Why did they do it? How did it affect you?

Q: How can sacrificing of yourself actually be good for you?

Q: How might God be calling you to sacrifice yourself for others – in your family, in your community, or even around the world?
Week 9: *Genesis 44*

**Took**

**Main Point:** Those who have hurt us can repent and even change.

If you perform a quick Internet search, you can easily find thousands of “cardboard testimonies.” A person simply takes a piece of cardboard and a magic marker. On one side he or she writes a description of life before Christ, and on the back, a description of life now with Jesus. This concept has gone even beyond the conversion experience, with Christians using this method to describe what God has brought them through during their Christian walk.

The most dramatic moment in these testimonies is the revelation, the moment that the cardboard is flipped and the viewer sees the transformation. Imagine if you were to simply write off those people who hurt you. Essentially allowing them to write the messy, sinful side on their cardboard and then you take away the marker. The Lord has the power to transform lives and as believers, we proclaim that truth not only in words but also in deeds.

**Q:** Think through those in your life in whom God has done a mighty work of transformation.

**Q:** Consider someone that you’ve written off. Pray that the Lord would do a work in your heart to transform your thinking, focusing less on how that person has hurt you and more on what God can do in them.

This week, commit to pray daily for those who you have written off. Ask the Lord for ways that you might encourage these individuals with the hope of Jesus.

**CHALLENGES:**

**THINK:** *How may God be calling you to give someone another chance?* Is there anyone in your life who says he or she has changed and needs to be given a second chance? Someone who may need forgiveness? Someone with whom you need to reconcile? No matter how long it has been – months, years, decades – how can you reach out to that person in love?

**PRAY:** *For God to change your heart* – In what ways does God want to change your heart? Are you like the brothers—the one who needs forgiveness, needs to change? Or are you the one who has been wronged and needs God to soften your heart toward the person who has wronged you? Pray for God to reveal to you how you need to change, and then to give you His strength to make those changes.
**ACT: Make a sacrifice** – Consider Christ’s sacrifice for us, how that showed His great love (1 John 3:16). How can you show sacrificial love for someone else or for God? What tangible things can you sacrifice? Maybe God is calling you to sacrifice money. Maybe you can give up your Starbucks addiction for a week and donate the money you saved to a ministry you care about. Maybe God is calling you to sacrifice your time. Maybe you can volunteer at a local ministry this Saturday instead of going out with friends. Or skip binge watching Netflix this weekend and read the Bible instead. Maybe God is calling you to sacrifice your pride or your bitterness or your anger or your past hurts. Only you know how God is leading you.

---