

## Spiritual Transformation Looks Like This

Genesis 44

Twenty years after being sold by his brothers, Joseph is ruling Egypt. Not knowing it is him, they stand before him in need of food. Have their hearts changed? The tension reaches a fever pitch as Joseph instigates a test to determine if their spiritual transformation is real.

The Setting: Famine and Fortune in Egypt

Joseph's test: Will the brothers abandon Benjamin? (1-13)

Judah's plea: We are guilty; take me instead of Benjamin! (14-34)

What Spiritual Transformation Looks Like

- *Stop trying to justify yourself*
- *Admit your sin and repent*
- *Recognize God's just judgment*
- *Sacrifice self to bring healing to others*



Happy New Year! For many of you, like me, just saying “2020” sounds like some futuristic time. Well, welcome to the future! As we go through this year, I pray that we each will discover deeper intimacy with our Creator.

This morning we begin the ‘final lap’ in our trek through the fourth part of Genesis, the story of the life of Joseph. We’ve titled this series “Integrity Under Fire,” as Joseph displays godly character in times of persecution. But this morning we’re going to discover another way integrity is seen – when real *spiritual transformation* takes place in a person’s life.

We’re focusing on Genesis 44 this morning, but first we need to get our bearings. So here’s a quick review of the Joseph narrative to this point.

Joseph’s life unfolds like a wild roller coaster. It begins with him on a ‘high’: His father loves him the most of all his sons, gives him a many-colored coat, and he dreams of ruling over his whole family. Pretty heady stuff.

Then it all comes crashing down. His brothers, jealous of his favored status and disgusted at his dreams of ruling over them, sold him into slavery, dipped his cloak in blood and said he had been killed by wild beasts.

Then things improve. Joseph is sold to Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh’s bodyguards, and soon is put in charge of his house. But then, Potiphar’s wife falsely accuses Joseph of sexual assault, and he is thrown in prison. A slave, imprisoned in a foreign country. That’s pretty low.

But even in prison, he finds success. He is put in charge of all the prisoners, and when two of Pharaoh's officials are put in prison and have puzzling dreams, he interprets them. Surely this will be his break!

But the cupbearer, who he had asked to mention him to Pharaoh, forgot about him...and for two more years he languished in prison.

Then in one day, his life changed. Pharaoh had troubling dreams. The cupbearer remembered him. He was called, and interpreted the dreams: Seven years of plenty were coming, followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh put him in power over all Egypt, and for seven years grain was put in storage for the coming years of famine.

And so it is that twenty years after selling him as a slave, Joseph's brothers traveled 200 miles from Hebron in the land of Canaan to Egypt, bowed before Joseph without knowing it was him, but Joseph recognized them! Joseph took one brother, Simeon, as prisoner, requiring that they return with their youngest brother, Benjamin. Eventually, desperate for grain, they return.

### Joseph's test: Will the brothers abandon Benjamin? (1-13)

That brings us to Genesis 44. Joseph wants to be reunited with his brothers, but he needs to know if their hearts are changed. Are they truly sorry for their evil in selling him into slavery? Do they still harbor jealousy in their hearts toward their father for his favoritism? He has a plan. He gives his steward instructions.

### Genesis 44.1-12

*Then he commanded his house steward, 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. Put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph had told him. As soon as it was light, the men were sent away, they with their donkeys. They had just gone out of the city, and were not far off, when Joseph said to his house steward, "Up, follow the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good? Is not this the one from which my lord drinks and which he indeed uses for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.' " So he overtook them and spoke these words to them. They said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing. Behold, the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks we have brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves." So he said, "Now let it also be according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and the rest of you shall be innocent." Then they hurried, each man lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. He searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.*

Why did Joseph do this? Some twenty years earlier, his brothers' hatred and jealousy led them to sell him into slavery. Now their father's *other* favorite son was in the

dock, accused of stealing Joseph's silver cup. Would they abandon their brother this time?

It's hard to capture the utter terror the brothers felt when Joseph's cup was found in Benjamin's sack of grain. You need to recall what happened in chapter 43: The love of Jacob's life was his wife Rachel, who had two sons, Joseph and Benjamin, and died giving birth to Benjamin. As far as Jacob knew, Joseph was dead – eaten by wild animals. Only Benjamin was left. In order to allow him to go to Egypt, Judah pledged his life as surety for Benjamin's safe return. Now that was in jeopardy.

In v13 we read that the brothers *tore their clothes*. This is a sign of abject despair, of utter anguish. They all return to the city, without a hope in the world.

Let me just take a step back and highlight what God was doing. God's chosen people were a dysfunctional family. People who sell a brother into slavery aren't trustworthy! They are alienated from God, and each other. In order to become a great nation, they will need to undergo a heart transformation. They need to be reconciled to God, and reconciled as a family. God is using Joseph to break their pride, and prepare them to become His people. Judah is the leader of the brothers, and in the rest of Genesis 44, he shows that their hearts are changed.

Judah's plea: We are guilty; take me instead of Benjamin! (14-34)

When they get back to Joseph, he shows no mercy: *What is this deed that you have done?* Judah responds in v16:

*So Judah said, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; behold, we are my lord's slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found."*

The brothers are now united – if one is guilty, they all are guilty. They readily admit their sin, and accept God's just judgment on them. They are transformed spiritually. But Joseph presses them again in v17:

*But he said, "Far be it from me to do this. The man in whose possession the cup has been found, he shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father."*

Judah now stands as the leader of the brothers, and lays his own life on the line. His speech to Joseph in vv19-34 is the longest speech in Genesis. In it, Judah explains that their father Jacob didn't want Benjamin to go to Egypt. We need to notice something in vv27:

*"Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons...'"*

How many wives did Jacob have? 4. How many sons did they have? 12. But Rachel was his love, and she had only two sons, and the other sons now honor their father, and accept his special love for Rachel's two boys.

Judah ends his speech in vv33-34 by offering himself in the place of Benjamin:

*“Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me – for fear that I see the evil that would overtake my father?”*

What a transformation! Pride and jealousy is gone, and in its place is unity. Where once they lied to cover their sin, they now confess it and accept God’s judgment. Where once the family was fractured and dysfunctional, it now acts in unison and harmony. Where once they would sacrifice a brother for their own advantage, now they will sacrifice themselves for the good of all.

The reconciliation of the family, a truly stunning reversal from their lives twenty years before, is coming, and we’ll see it next week. But before we leave Gen 44, we need to recognize four factors in true spiritual transformation.

#### What Spiritual Transformation Looks Like

- *Stop trying to justify yourself*

Since the Garden of Eden, when sin entered the world, we’ve been justifying ourselves. Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the serpent. The serpent didn’t. Satan never says that he meant to do the right thing. He knows he is evil. Demons never try to excuse their evil actions by saying it’s the way God made them. But self-justification is part of human depravity. Any parent of two or more kids has heard it: *It’s not my fault. He made me do it!* God hears that a lot from His ‘kids,’ too. I know it’s not popular to talk about sin. It’s like the pastor who was met by four church members in his office. They presented

him with a clipboard filled with sheets of signatures. “This petition,” they said, requests that you change the term ‘sinner’ to ‘person who is morally challenged.’

We don’t like it, but we all have to deal with it. *All of us.* Scripture states, *Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins* (Eccl. 7.20). Spiritual transformation begins with a recognition of our sin. Don’t excuse it, or justify it.

- *Admit your sin and repent*

Instead, admit it. Confess it. Proverbs 28.13 says:

*He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper,  
But he who confesses and forsakes them will find  
compassion.*

1 John 1.9 tells us to confess our sin. Confession means ‘acknowledging sin and God’s right to punish it.’

- *Recognize God’s just judgment*

That’s the third thing we see in Genesis 44. Judah admits their sin, and that God is justly punishing them for it. We fail to see God’s persistent love in His chastisement of us. *Whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives* (Heb 12.6). It took Joseph’s brothers 20 years to learn that lesson. Have you accepted God’s just judgment in your life?

You know, if this were all Joseph’s brothers did, it would still be a dramatic transformation. But it didn’t stop there.

- *Sacrifice self to bring healing to others*

The ultimate goal of God's spiritual transformation in our lives is that we will sacrifice ourselves – give up our own rights, sacrifice our own desires – to bring healing to others. A fissure of hatred divided Jacob's family, and it could have destroyed them. But God changed the hearts of Joseph's brothers. As Hebrew scholar Bruce Waltke puts it: *Judah is transformed from one who sells his brother as a slave to one who is willing to be the slave for his brother.* It sounds a lot like Christ, doesn't it? *He who knew no sin became sin for us!*

God wants to transform your life, and the lives of all of us at NBBC, in 2020. That 'spiritual renovation' begins inside each of us as we confess our sinfulness and admit that God is just in His dealings with us. Then we can begin to bring God's healing grace to others who are hurting from sin in their lives, too.

## Digging Deeper

1. Genesis 42-44 is a fascinating narrative: God choreographs a meeting between Joseph and his brothers twenty years after they sold him into slavery. He recognizes them, but they think he is dead! Joseph deftly exposes their guilt, and forces their hand. Hunger is a great motivator! In chapter 44, the tension reaches a breaking point. Why did Joseph instruct his steward to put his cup in Benjamin's bag? What attitudes (which led his brothers to sell him into slavery) is he confronting? Have you ever felt God exposing your sinful attitudes and actions?
2. In v13, after Joseph's cup is discovered in Benjamin's sack of grain, the brothers *tear their clothes*. What did this symbolize? In v16, Judah – speaking for them all – exhibits key aspects of spiritual transformation. The first of these is highlighted in the phrase, *How can we justify ourselves?* Nothing exposes sinful guilt like self-justification! Where is this *first* seen in the Bible? When we 'justify our sinful actions,' what do we *fail* to do that we *need* to do (see 1 John 1.9)?
3. A key to spiritual transformation is recognizing God's role in our daily lives. Christians can ignore God's plans and purposes for their lives, and when we do, we miss what He is trying to teach us, and how He wants to change us. Judah identifies God as the just judge for their sinful actions. While circumstances were forcing the brothers to reckon with their guilt, this is not always the case; often, we need to *voluntarily* and *intentionally* invite God to examine our lives (Ps 139.23-24). Have you done this recently?
4. Judah's speech (18-34) exhibits the brothers' changed attitudes. Contrast their earlier feelings toward Joseph with their feelings toward Benjamin. How would you describe Judah's offer in v33? Healing is possible when someone is willing to take the penalty for wrong on themselves. God did this for us when He sent Jesus to die for our sin. Who needs your sacrificial love and forgiveness today?

## What Spiritual Transformation Looks Like (44)

Joseph masterfully produces a crisis for his brothers, setting up Benjamin as a thief (1-17). His goal is simple: The brothers' resentment of Joseph as son of Jacob and Rachel (Jacob's favorite wife) had contributed to them selling him into slavery. Even though they feel guilty for that act, will they now abandon Rachel's other son – particularly since he is accused of a crime? No! The ten brothers stand together, insisting that all of them will become slaves if Benjamin becomes a slave.

Judah is the hero of this episode, exhibiting leadership and integrity befitting the one through whom the Messiah will come, and whose name will grace the One who ushers in the events of the end times (Rev. 5.5). His speech in vv18-34 is a marvelous expression of concern for their father, love for his brother (Benjamin), and unity within the family; after Joseph rejects the suggestion that all the brothers become slaves with Benjamin (16-17), Judah offers himself in the place of his brother (33). This test reveals that, having admitted the guilt of their previous sin with Joseph, they now react self-sacrificingly.