

# The Work of Reconciliation

The gospel leads us to work toward reconciliation with those who are alienated from us.



**GOD'S STORY**  
THE TRANSFORMATION FOR ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Genesis 44

March 15, 2020

(Gen. 44:1-34) <sup>1</sup> Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: "Fill the men's sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man's silver in the mouth of his sack. <sup>2</sup> Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one's sack, along with the silver for his grain." And he did as Joseph said. <sup>3</sup> As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. <sup>4</sup> They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, "Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid good with evil? <sup>5</sup> Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.'" <sup>6</sup> When he caught up with them, he repeated these words to them. <sup>7</sup> But they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that! <sup>8</sup> We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks. So why would we steal silver or gold from your master's house? <sup>9</sup> If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die; and the rest of us will become my lord's slaves." <sup>10</sup> "Very well, then," he said, "let it be as you say. Whoever is found to have it will become my slave; the rest of you will be free from blame." <sup>11</sup> Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. <sup>12</sup> Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. <sup>13</sup> At this, they tore their clothes. Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him. <sup>15</sup> Joseph said to them, "What is this you have done? Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?" <sup>16</sup> "What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied. "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup." <sup>17</sup> But Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace." <sup>18</sup> Then Judah went up to him and said: "Pardon your servant, my lord, let me speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself. <sup>19</sup> My lord asked his servants, 'Do you have a father or a brother?' <sup>20</sup> And we answered, 'We have an aged father, and there is a young son born to him in his old age. His brother is dead, and he is the only one of his mother's sons left, and his father loves him.' <sup>21</sup> 'Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself.' <sup>22</sup> And we said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die.' <sup>23</sup> But you told your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.' <sup>24</sup> When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said. <sup>25</sup> 'Then our father said, 'Go back and buy a little more food.' <sup>26</sup> But we said, 'We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' <sup>27</sup> 'Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. <sup>28</sup> One of them went away from me, and I said, 'He has surely been torn to pieces.' And I have not seen him since. <sup>29</sup> If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.' <sup>30</sup> 'So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father, and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, <sup>31</sup> sees that the boy isn't there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. <sup>32</sup> Your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. I said, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!' <sup>33</sup> 'Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. <sup>34</sup> How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father."

## COMMUNITY – CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER

- Have you ever lost something valuable? What was it, and did you ever find or replace it?
- What is the most intense fight you have ever been in—physical or non-physical—with a friend or family member?
- How did you reconcile your relationship with that person?

We all get into confrontations and fights that lead to a need for reconciliation, and that reconciliation always costs us something. Try to imagine what might have happened if Joseph had not been reconciled with his brothers, or if Jesus had not come to reconcile us to God. Reconciliation is critical to all relationships. Joseph's story shows us that, following God's leadership and depending on His timing and perfect plan, we can enjoy restored relationships, too.

## CONTENT – EXPLORING GOD’S STORY

Have a volunteer read Genesis 44:1-13

- Describe Joseph’s plan for reconciliation. What did he want to see happen, and how was he testing his brothers?
- Joseph continued to move toward his brothers in seeking reconciliation. How does his gift of the money they paid for the grain reveal the condition of his heart?
- How do the brothers respond when the planted cup is found in Benjamin’s sack?

Seeking reconciliation is very difficult when someone has wronged you. Yet Joseph continued to “test the waters” to see if his brothers had left their hateful jealousies and deceit in the past. Though Joseph was testing his brothers’ sincerity, God’s higher purpose of providing for His people was also served. Joseph commanded his steward to put his cup, the silver one, at the top of the youngest one’s bag, which was an astute way to discern his brothers’ true demeanors. Because Benjamin was Joseph’s only full brother, the way in which the older brothers reacted to this situation would reveal to Joseph whether they had changed or not. If so, true reconciliation could occur.

- The brothers obeyed Joseph’s commands at every step, even going beyond them to offer double for the grain. How can we discover the hearts of people with whom we are in conflict?
- How is seeking confirmation of others’ intentions and emotional conditions a part of reconciliation? How does doing so bring us closer to those from whom we are estranged?

Have a volunteer read Genesis 44:14-34

- What evidence of change do you see from Judah in his response to this situation? How would you describe his character?
- Look specifically at verses 32-34. What did Judah’s comments reveal about his being ready to reconcile the relationship with his brother?
- What other ways could Judah have responded? What would those responses have revealed about the potential for reconciliation?
- How do Judah’s actions here compare with his vow in 43:8-9? How great a sacrifice is he willing to make?

Genesis 44:18-34 reveals that Judah and his brothers had experienced genuine change, providing Joseph triple verification that reconciliation was possible. First, Judah exhibited integrity by telling the truth about his family (44:19-20). Second, Judah demonstrated a genuine concern for the welfare of his father Jacob (44:21-31). Finally, Judah assumed full responsibility for Benjamin’s welfare, offering his own life in place of his younger brother’s (44:32-34). Joseph received the confirmation he was looking for, seeing Judah’s tenderness toward his brother and father, but also seeing his remorse for past sins. Judah’s actions mirror the kind of brokenness God Himself desires to see in our hearts when we approach Him in repentance.

- How does Judah’s response compare with the way we should respond to God over our sins?
- Read Romans 5:6-11. Like Joseph, God had a plan to reconcile us back to Him. Why were we in need of reconciliation?

Judah is generally overlooked in this story. It’s important to note that he was the ringleader who originally sold Joseph into slavery. He has changed over the years and is now concerned for his father and brothers (Genesis 38 details the even God used to transform Judah).

Jesus descended from the Tribe of Judah, and Judah's actions here foreshadow Jesus. First, Judah is innocent of the crime of stealing the cup just as Jesus was innocent of our sins. Second, Judah offers himself to bear the punishment for Benjamin (Gen. 44:33), just as Christ offered himself for our punishment. This is the idea of "substitutionary atonement" – Jesus stood in our place to receive the punishment for our sin.

- **What lengths did God go to in order to restore our relationship with Him? Is there anything we could do in seeking reconciliation that would cost us more than it cost Him?**
- **How are we called to respond to God given the reconciliation we have received? What does that look like in your daily life?**

Most people will respond to gestures of genuine friendship. If Christians will pray for those who have wronged us, acting kindly toward them instead of being spiteful, and even recognize their meaningful accomplishments, perhaps over time they will see the need to reconcile and will then change their attitude. Reconciliation is hard, intentional work, but it is an effort that honors God. Like Joseph, we should be sensitive to see if others have changed to discern the right time when reconciliation is possible.

### COMMISSION – ENGAGING IN GOD'S STORY

- **What perspective does the gospel bring to any strained relationships you have?**
- **When is the last time you felt overwhelmed by the mercy God showed in forgiving you? How can you make that a more frequent part of your life?**
- **How might forgiving others turn into an opportunity to share the gospel?**

**PRAYER:** Close in prayer, asking God to help you seek reconciliation with others. Thank God for the joy of reconciliation and for His taking the initiative to reconcile us to Himself through the death of Jesus.

### CONTINUE TO JOURNEY THROUGH GOD'S STORY

Bible Reading Plan:

DAY 1 – Genesis 48-49  
 DAY 2 – Genesis 50 – Exodus 1  
 DAY 3 – Exodus 2-3  
 DAY 4 – Exodus 4-5  
 DAY 5 – Exodus 6-7

KEY VERSE: Genesis 50:20

H.E.A.R. Method:

Highlight a verse or two.  
 Explain what the text means.  
 Apply the verse to your life.  
 Respond to God.

Our team has put together Bible study resources to encourage and inspire you as you engage in God's Story. Visit [chetscreek.com/gods-story](http://chetscreek.com/gods-story) for videos, study guides, and more.

#### OUR VISION

To be a church  
 for the unchurched,  
 here and around the world.

#### ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Gospel-centered communities that aim to KNOW  
 GOD together and BE CHANGED by Him in a  
 way that will CHANGE THE WORLD.

**Genesis 44**

44:2. Joseph secretly put in place the ultimate test of his older brothers, ordering the steward to put his ceremonial silver cup at the top of Benjamin's bag. By watching the other brothers' response to Benjamin's trouble, Joseph was able to observe firsthand the other brothers' true character.

44:3-13. Joseph then ordered his steward to overtake the small caravan. Armed with a scripted accusation regarding the ceremonial cup, the steward confronted the group. Joseph mentioned divination as part of the ploy to make the brothers think this was a very valuable cup, but there is no evidence that he actually practiced divination. At a later time, divination was officially prohibited for Israelites in the Law (Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10).

The brothers responded with disbelief and disavowal to the steward's accusation. Quickly mounting a defense, they first provided evidence of their honesty: they had brought back the money found in their bags after the first journey. Next they proposed a harsh punishment for any of their number caught with the bowl— he must die. Finally, they offered the remaining ten of their group as lifelong slaves.

Rejecting their excessive offer, the steward indicated that only the guilty party would become his slave. Though the steward gave the innocent brothers permission to return home, they all returned to the city in a show of solidarity with Benjamin.

44:14-17. Jacob's most trusted son, Judah, spoke for the group. Bowing to the ground before Joseph (cp. 37:7, 9), Judah confessed that God had exposed the men's iniquity—a reference to the sins against Joseph that took place more than 20 years earlier (37:18-28). Second, Judah maintained the group's solidarity by indicating that all the brothers, not just Benjamin, would become "my lord's slaves." Joseph's immediate rejection of the offer would have likely added more tension to the situation.

44:18-29. Judah's speech, the longest in the Bible by any of Jacob's sons (218 Hebrew words), marks the turning point in the relationship between Joseph and his brothers. In a display of great humility, Judah referred to Joseph on seven occasions as "my lord," and on 12 occasions, referred to himself and members of his clan as "your servants." After a representation of three contentious conversations—one that the brothers had had with Joseph (vv. 19-23; 42:13-20) and two involving Jacob (vv. 25-29; 42:38; 43:2-7)—Judah said that his father would die of grief if anything happened to Benjamin.

44:30-34. Judah had once separated his father Jacob from a son of Rachel by making Joseph a slave in Egypt (37:26-27). To save the life of the clan, he had voluntarily made himself accountable to his father for the well-being of Benjamin, Rachel's only other son besides Joseph (43:8-9). Now Benjamin, like his older brother Joseph, was on the verge of being made a slave in Egypt. Knowing that he would always bear the guilt for sinning against his father if Benjamin did not return home, Judah volunteered to remain in Egypt as Joseph's slave.