

# LIFE GROUPS

## Genesis 44

### INTRODUCTION

**As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.**

**ICE BREAKER QUESTION:** Do you think forgiveness is a feeling or a choice? Explain why you feel the way you do.

Most people struggle to some degree with forgiveness. In our natural tendencies, we are prone to nurse a grudge. But God calls His people to forgive in the same manner we have been forgiven. Joseph had justifiable reason to be angry and even fearful of his brothers. Selling him into slavery was a despicable thing to do. But with God's help, Joseph had forgiven them. However, when his brothers traveled to Egypt to buy grain during the famine, Joseph wisely chose to move slowly and test their character before he extended his trust to them.

**Read back through the passage before going through the questions.**

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What is your biggest takeaway? How was your experience with the Life Tool's this past week?**
- 2. READ GENESIS 44:1-13. What was Joseph's plan with this test? What does their response to the planted cup in Benjamin's sack show about their changed hearts?**

A silver cup was, of course, valuable. But its use here involved Joseph's personal recollection that his brothers had sold him into slavery for twenty pieces of silver, so

that “now he harasses and tests them with silver” (Sarna). This nuance indicates how carefully calculated Joseph was.<sup>1</sup>

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.

Actually, Joseph was interested in one man, Benjamin, and in what choices his brothers would make over him.<sup>2</sup>

No words are recorded, but the brothers’ actions tell all: “Then they tore their clothes” (v. 13a). Wenham remarks, “When Joseph disappeared, it was only Jacob who tore his clothes (37:34); now all the brothers do, the first sign of fraternal solidarity.” Something new was taking place. They were changing. What would they do now? Would they surrender Benjamin and save themselves? No; they would not abandon their father’s favorite son. They were not the same men who once so blithely sold their favored brother into Egypt. So it was that the brothers tore their clothes and went back weeping to the house from which they had just departed rejoicing.<sup>3</sup>

**3. READ GENESIS 44:14-17. What evidence of change do you see from Judah in his response to this situation? What can we learn from Judah’s response with our sin?**

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).

As Judah admitted their guilt, he understood that it was not the viceroy who uncovered it but God! Though innocent of stealing the cup, they were guilty—ever so guilty, guilty, guilty! It was God who was assaulting them at their most vulnerable point—Benjamin, the one whom their father had entrusted to them with so many misgivings, all of which were due to their sins against the earlier favored son, Joseph. Thus, through Judah’s declaration of guilt they all accepted that God had uncovered their sin. And since they

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 510.

<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 510.

<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 511.

had all offended together, they committed themselves to suffer together—“We are my lord’s servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found” (v. 16b).<sup>4</sup>

According to a higher moral order an exact relationship exists between their distress and their crime. They acknowledge that the men who act against them are only tools of higher justice. God is the true judge. Their public profession of this and acceptance of the verdict is their repentance and greatness. [*First Book of the Bible*, pp. 297–98]<sup>5</sup>

**4. How does Joseph’s response create a challenging ethical test for the brothers? How do we see similar challenging ethical decisions before us today?**

The conditions were all perfect for a second betrayal, but at a more enticing price than twenty pieces of silver. The lure was their liberty. For men who had valued their own well-being above all else, the temptation to walk away was appallingly tantalizing.<sup>6</sup>

There are many examples of difficult ethical decisions all throughout our world. I have attached an article with 34 examples and would encourage you to share a couple of those with the group.

**5. Read Genesis 44:18-32. What do we see in Judah’s Intercession? How does Judah’s actions mirror how God wants us to approach Him in repentance?**

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.

The rest of the chapter is the lengthy appeal of Judah, in which he showed himself to be a man fit for leadership. His intercession on behalf of Benjamin, a fine and moving appeal, demonstrated great love for his brother and great concern for his father. This was not the Judah of old.

The final words show that a genuine change had come about. Judah appealed to Joseph on the basis of the evil (*bārā*) that would come upon (*yimšā*) his father if he returned without Rachel’s son—he would die (*wāmēt*). Before, they had not considered that consequence and were overwhelmed when they could not console Jacob over his son. It

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 512.

<sup>5</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 667.

<sup>6</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 512.

appears from this verse that the anguish of the father had been felt by all. Judah, exhibiting a self-sacrificial loyalty, requested that he be kept instead of (*taḥat*) Benjamin.<sup>7</sup>

That the sons of the hated wife Leah had come to terms with their father's special love for Rachel and her two boys was amazing. That Benjamin, the second of these children, should now be loved by the other brothers was astounding. And that Judah could reference his father's favoritism of Benjamin as the reason for freeing Benjamin meant that a transformation had taken place in his soul.<sup>8</sup>

**6. Read Genesis 44:33-34. How do Judah's actions model the great sacrifice is he willing to make? How does Judah's response show us how we should take responsibility for our sins?**

Here was the eloquence of true love.... Love so burningly manifest, so willing to take full responsibility before God, love which thought only of Jacob and Benjamin, melted the heart of Joseph. Such love moved Moses to ask God to blot his name out of the book of life (Exodus 32:32); such love prompted Paul to wish himself accursed for his brethren if only they could be saved. Judah was transformed by divine love.<sup>9</sup>

Yet it is in being willing to lose everything that Judah achieves greatness, for he will receive Jacob's greatest blessing — rule over the nation, Israel (49:8–12; [Matt. 19:30](#)). Judah's bold, selfless, and sacrificial love is a model for the nation and its later kings who, being sinners, are nevertheless able to exhibit such qualities if they are led by the Spirit ([2 Sam. 9](#)). In giving up his life, Judah actually finds it. Such is the way of our heavenly Father ([John 12:25](#)).

"It's clear that God's grace affected Judah, enabling him to love his family, both brother and father, in a sacrificial manner." – Kelly Keller

**7. How is the gospel shown in this passage? How might forgiving others turn into an opportunity to share the gospel?**

As God would have it, Judah's willingness to suffer as a substitute for his brother foreshadowed the substitutionary, vicarious atonement of his ultimate Son, Christ Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Allen P. Ross, [Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 667–668.

<sup>8</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 514.

<sup>9</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 515.

<sup>10</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 515.

As Westermann says, “There is a path that leads from the Joseph story right up to the very threshold of community; the healing of a breach is possible only when there is one who is ready to take the suffering upon oneself” (*Genesis*, vol. 3, p. 178).<sup>11</sup>

*God requires self-sacrificing love among believers, but such loyalty may need to be fostered through the uncovering of past sins.*<sup>12</sup>

“The heart of repentance is to stop grieving the Father and start loving the Son.” —  
Colin Smith

Still, there is One greater than Judah. One who had no sin and did not need to be convicted of His transgression to put Him in His place. Christ Jesus, Judah’s greatest son, gave up His life for our sake, only to be raised to new life and glory (Phil. 2:5–11).

“Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 16:25). Even if we are not martyred for the faith, we are to give our lives over to Jesus. This may mean having your children frown upon you when you demand they keep from doing what everybody else is doing. Or it may be that you must speak forthrightly regarding a friend’s behavior even if you might lose the friendship. Will you lay down your life for Christ this day?

**8. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 & Romans 12:1-2. How do we see this same transforming power in Genesis 44 and in your own life?**

We must never underestimate the transforming grace of God. Just as God was with Joseph and his brothers across those two almost silent decades, so he is with all his children. Transformation is concomitant with the gospel. In fact, it fairly detonates at conversion.<sup>13</sup>

And that is the universal experience of every believer. At the same time, conversion introduces a process of ongoing transformation until he appears, because “we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:2, 3).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 668.

<sup>12</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 668.

<sup>13</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 515.

<sup>14</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 515–516.

So, brothers and sisters in Christ, just as Judah and his brothers came to see that God was caring for them all the way along, so must we. God has always been, and still is, about the utter transformation of his people.<sup>15</sup>

“We are perfectly useless as Christians if all we do is conform to the world around us.” – John Piper

## **PRAYER**

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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.

Thank God for the grace He has shown His people. Praise Him for sending Jesus to the cross so we could be restored to Him and experience eternal life. Ask Him to lead each group member to be quick to forgive and extend grace in the same manner they have received it.



## **FURTHER STUDY**

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<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/judah-gives-himself>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/transformation-in-egypt/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/word-of-the-week/how-to-stop-grieving-the-father-and-start-loving-the-son/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/gods-kindness-judah-repentance/>

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/34-ethical-issues-all-christians-should-know/>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-renewed-mind-and-how-to-have-it>

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<sup>15</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 516.