

Max Lucado, in his book *Six Hours One Friday*, tells how the U.S. government in 1811 began collecting (and storing) letters like the following note dated February 6, 1974:

"I am sending ten dollars for blankets I stole while in World War II. My mind could not rest. Sorry I'm late."

It was signed: an ex-GI. ... And there was this postscript:

"I want to be ready to meet with God."

The U.S. government not only collects and stores these letters... but the Treasury Department established a fund... and labeled it the "*Conscience Fund*." Since its inception... the fund has grown to almost **seven million dollars**.

Human conscience is such a powerful component of our lives!

During the twenty years since Joseph's brothers selling him into Egypt... God was not only with Joseph... but was also working in the lives of his brothers. But it was in a very **different** way.... (You see... God never gave their consciences rest.) ... We can so easily perceive... that God was with **Joseph** in his forgiving his brothers... and in his brilliant handling of his brothers... But God was also with the brothers... as they worked through their guilt... which comes to a climax in today's passage.

During their first visit... (which we studied last week)... God **graced** the brothers with guilt, fear, and sorrow. When we were in that chapter... I purposely used the wording that "God **graced** them"... because He **used** guilt... fear... and sorrow - to bring them back to Himself.

And that is how He brings us all to Himself... when we have wandered away. He allows us to experience true guilt... and then a Godly fear... and then a genuine sorrow that leads to repentance. Without these graces... repentance is incomplete.

So... because of God's grace... the brothers knew they were guilty... Their fear was a trembling conviction that God was holding them accountable... and they mourned deeply with their father (Jacob) through his prolonged grief - over of the effects of their hidden sin. This was all leading them to repentance... which comes in today's passage. But the posture of grace and mercy had (already) begun to take shape in their lives.

As we take up Genesis chapter 44 today... we will witness a life-altering transformation of the brothers that will involve true repentance. ... (And please don't miss this)... Repentance always bears fruit. Repentance is more than a quick and easy... "*I'm sorry, God...*" ... And we will see an excellent example of it today. In this case... it will involve heart-felt sympathy... bold intercession... unexpected sacrifice... and a Christ-like substitution. ... (So let me say again... there will always be unmistakable evidence... whenever true repentance occurs.)

We are now in the 3rd chapter that concerns itself with Joseph inter-acting his brothers... without telling them who he is. Why is he delaying...?

Joseph had (within his ability) to grant his brothers HUGE blessings. ... But Joseph wisely knew it was not good to award men of bad character with blessings. ... (Why...?) ... Because bad men only become worse when they prosper.

So Joseph (wisely) wanted to know... if his brothers had the same attitude toward their father... and the **favoring** that Jacob shows... toward a preferred son.

So... after all the mercy that Joseph had poured out upon his brothers... the previous day... with the rising of the sun... the groggy brothers rose... saddled their donkeys... and set off for Canaan. ... How relieved and cheerful they must have been as they reminisced over the surprising day... and the party of all parties. ... *Ahhhh... Soon the pagan pyramids would be far behind them!*

Genesis 44:1-3

So... here's the set-up: The brothers had eaten and drunk to excess... thanks to Joseph's feast. ... So while they were sleeping off their merriment... Joseph and his steward set up a sting. The brothers needed to be tested further. (You see...) even though they had shown remorse over their sin... **prosperity** has its own unique way of testing people. It can even cause **penitent people** to return to their old ways.

Genesis 44:4-6

OK... So... what is this matter about Joseph's silver cup all about...?

The divining cup was a religious relic. It was used in the prophesying of future events. ... But Joseph... (as we know from his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream)... relied on **God** ... (not this kind of dark magic). And the irony is that such Egyptian methods could not reveal the meaning of

Pharaoh's dreams. God revealed it to Joseph. ... So... it is very unlikely that Joseph actually participated in this pagan superstition!

However... Joseph did use this cup for divining. (Another word for "divining" is ... "discerning" something.) The divination that Joseph was doing with it... had nothing to do with Egypt's magic arts. Joseph used it (here) as a prop... to "divine" (or discern) what the character of his brothers was.

Genesis 44:7-8

So sure were the brothers of their innocence that they defended themselves passionately. For one thing... they argued... they weren't the kind of men who went around stealing things. Hadn't they proved their honesty by telling the steward about the money they found in their grain sacks? ... If they were actual thieves... they would have kept the money... and said nothing. ... *Come on, Mr. Steward!*

The brothers were so certain of their innocence that they volunteered an extreme punishment on themselves...

Genesis 44:9

Their response shows mutual responsibility... for the actions of just one. They were in unison. They offer that all of them will become slaves... even if only one of them has committed this theft. ... We are seeing that these events have brought them closer together as brothers. ... God was rebuilding the family to be His witnesses (to bear His promised seed – the Savior of the world.)

Genesis 44:10

The brother's offer was rejected... so that the testing of Joseph could continue. ... Would they forsake the guilty brother (as they had forsaken Joseph twenty some years before)?... Would they let him bear the penalty and enslavement alone? ... Or would they stand with him and do all they could to save him? ... The others were free to (just) go and return home. How tempting! ... How easy it would be to save their own necks.

Genesis 44:11-12

Reuben's bag was opened first... and the steward found nothing. ... Reuben folded his arms and scowled his resentment... The newly freed Simeon's bag was opened next with the same result... and then Levi's... and then Judah's. *Ha! Take that, Mr. Big Shot!* Then followed Dan and Naphtali and Gad and Asher. ... Again no silver cup. *Hmmmpf!* ... As the seemingly needless search continued... I can almost hear the brothers becoming more vocal with their murmurs... (They knew that no one had stolen anything.) ... Then suddenly... in a horrifying moment... the steward lifted the gleaming object out of the grain... and held the silver cup as it flashed in the morning sun.

Uh – Oh !

But hold on! ... The guilty brothers (who had sold Joseph into slavery)... were all free to go home... to their waiting wives and children... with much needed food. Benjamin alone was required to go back to Egypt... and serve as a slave. The cup had been found in his sack!

And... why should they stand by him? ... Just like Joseph... he was dad's favorite... which cause all kinds of problems. Most recently... Jacob had put all of them ... and their families at great risk of dying from starvation...

all because he did not want to risk sending **this** troublesome... favorite son... to Egypt. (Benjamin was the source of a lot of trouble for them. "Maybe its time to cut our losses and run. Sorry, Dad! ... This **must be** God's will!" ... "Should we allow him to destroy us and our waiting families back home? Why should my little ones perish... for the sake of Benjamin... who **might even** be guilty. Maybe he **did** try to steal it

But... surprisingly... this was **NOT** their response!

No **words** are recorded... about their immediate response... but the brothers' **actions** tell all: "They tore their clothes"

Genesis 44:13

When Joseph disappeared... it was only Jacob who tore his clothes. ... Now **ALL the brothers** do. ... (Tearing your clothes... was the ultimate sign of the most severe emotional suffering possible.) ... This is another indication of brotherly solidarity. ... Something new was taking place. They were changing. ... They were not going to allow even **one** member to be ripped apart from the family. ... They were becoming "the family of God."

Together... they loaded their donkeys... and returned to the city where the governor (Joseph)... was waiting. ... They went back weeping to the house from which they had just departed rejoicing.

As the brothers rode their donkeys into the city... the weight they were carrying... must have been **enormous**. ... Imagine the thoughts that raced through their minds... as they traveled back to the city. *How could they prove their innocence? ... Did Benjamin really do it? ... What would they say to their father when they returned home? ...* ... No doubt Judah was

preparing his appeal... and perhaps praying that the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob would give him success.

Genesis 44:14

Joseph was no doubt overjoyed to see them all together standing by the side of their brother Benjamin. He now knew they were committed to stand together as a family... every one of them. ... Except they weren't standing. ... They were flat on their faces... bowing lower to Joseph than any of the other times.

This bow was an act of abject... groveling... submission. ... Here were eleven frightened (and broken) men. ... It was the third time they had bowed before him... and this was the most extreme kind of bow. ... (Joseph's prophetic dreams had **more** than been fulfilled.)

Years earlier the brothers challenged the dreams of Joseph:

Genesis 37:8 (ESV)

*“Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?”
So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.*

Now... unwittingly... they are confirming the message of Joseph's earlier dreams. ... Sinners may challenge the Word of God with a great deal of sarcasm... but the day will come when they will confirm it.

Patti and I have a family member... who seems to enjoy ridiculing us for our Christian faith. Just this week... he was touting how Christianity is just for the **weak**. ... Our hearts go out to him. ... One day he will know... and we pray that it will not be too late.

Genesis 44:15-16

In his opening words... Judah made it clear that he wouldn't even try to defend himself and his brothers... for what could he say?

And in this scenario of amazing twists and turns... we come to a moment of truth that almost takes our breath. ... Finally... a public confession of sin by Joseph's brothers! ... Judah is at a loss to explain what has happened... and he does not know how they can clear themselves. ... His only explanation is that **God's hand** is behind these events... because of their guilt.

He does not specify what that guilt means... but everyone (including Joseph)... knows that Judah is referring to the way they sold Joseph into slavery. ... #1. In their confession... they declare their belief in God... and that He holds us accountable. ... And in their confession... #2. they admit that they were all guilty of sin. ... And in their confession... #3. there is a repentant heart. (They were now ready and willing to follow God's will... even if it meant being punished for their sins.)

Joseph's tests had proven successful so far. (He is almost through.)... But Joseph decided to test the sincerity of their confession...

Genesis 44:17

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.

Would they greedily forsake Benjamin and selfishly jump at the opportunity for personal freedom? ... At this critical juncture Judah stepped forward **and** ... **at great personal risk** asked the viceroy if he could speak further.

Genesis 44:18

Just imagine... this came from the heart of a man who had been so **mean** and sinful... so **immoral** and **evil**... that he had broken the heart of his father years before. ... Judah is a dynamic example of the glorious **mercy** of God. ... If Judah and his brothers could be saved... then any person can be saved.

Judah approached him... so that he could surrender **himself** as a slave (for life)... and allow Benjamin to go home with his brothers.

As Judah speaks... fourteen times... the name "*father*" appears in this plea. ...This **emphasis** on the father... shows conclusively to Joseph... that their attitude towards Jacob has dramatically changed.

Genesis 44:19-23

(What Chutzpah!!!) He subtly called the ruler's integrity and fair play into question. ... In essence Judah says... "*Benjamin is only here - because you (Governor) had **required** him to come. ... And if Benjamin hadn't come along... none of this trouble would have happened...*"

Next... having bravely implicated the powerful governor... Judah recounted his father's fear of losing Benjamin. ... Did Judah know that this powerful

Egyptian ruler before him had two young sons of his own... and was he hoping that his story would touch a father's heart?

Genesis 44:24-29

As Joseph listened... for the very first time... he learned what had happened at home... twenty years earlier... when his brothers returned without him. He learned of his father's heartbroken cry—"Surely he has been torn to pieces." — And Joseph saw that it - **still echoed** - in Judah's and his brothers' consciences.

Joseph **also** learned that Judah and his brothers now spoke differently about the favoritism shown to Rachel and her two sons. ... Judah's quoting his father as saying, "You know that my wife bore me two sons" ... was **blaring** to Joseph that Judah was accepting **his** own status of being **unfavored**. ... Their father only recognized **one** wife... and **two** sons... neither of which was **them** or their mothers.

That the sons had come to terms with their father's special love for Rachel and her two boys was **amazing!** ... That Benjamin would now be loved by the other brothers... was **astounding!** ... And that Judah could reference his father's favoritism of Benjamin... in Judah's heart-felt plea (as the reason for **freeing** Benjamin)... showed genuine transformation.

Genesis 44:30-32

Notice that his concern was not Benjamin's guilt or innocence... nor the freedom or enslavement of the brothers. Judah's concern was his **father**. He did not want the heart of his father to be broken. Judah loved his father so much that he did not even want him to suffer pain.

The brothers had repented of their sin against Joseph. They had forgiven the unfair favoritism of their father. ... They so loved their father and his favorite son... that they would not forsake Benjamin - even though the cost was immense. ... Repentance always brings change!

Genesis 44:33-34

The great climax of the plea was Judah offering himself as a substitute for Benjamin. ... Here was love so patently obvious... because it was so willing to take full responsibility before God... and it melted the heart of Joseph. ... Judah offered himself as Benjamin's substitute.

It is no wonder... that it would be Judah's tribe... that shall be blessed as the one through whom the Savior comes. Dr. Henry Morris states it well:

"In this willingness to give his own life in place of his brother's, for the sake of his father, Judah becomes a beautiful type of Christ, more fully and realistically than even Joseph himself, who is often taken by Bible expositors as a type of Christ."

It is a side of Judah that any reader of Genesis would never expect to see. It is a reminder that God can work a complete change in even the most selfish personality. ... But... such change can only happen where there is repentance of sin.

Christians often struggle with the desire to be more consistent in their walk with Christ. But the inability to reflect a life of greater spirituality... is usually connected to sin that has not been confessed... and fully repented of...

(LISTEN!) Everyday you and I have things that we need to confess and repent of., Confess on the run! As you go through your day and the

Holy Spirit pricks your conscience about something... confess it right away!
And then... repent fully.

A story about the late Christian song-writer Rich Mullins can teach us about the meaning of true repentance. (You see)... One rainy day he got into a blistering argument with his road manager (Gay Quisenberry.) ... Angry words were hurled back and forth... and Rich stormed out the door. Early the following morning... Gay was awakened from a sound sleep by the loud buzz of a motor outside her house.

Groggily... she looked out the window and saw Rich mowing her lawn!

Repentance always involves changed behavior.