

## RUF Bible Study – The Gospel in Genesis

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### Genesis 40-45 – How God Melts the Brothers Hearts<sup>2</sup>

Gen. 44:18 Then Judah went up to him and said, “O my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord’s ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself. 19 My lord asked his servants, saying, ‘Have you a father, or a brother?’ 20 And we said to my lord, ‘We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother’s children, and his father loves him.’ 21 Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.’ 22 We said to my lord, ‘The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.’ 23 Then you said to your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.’

24 “When we went back to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. 25 And when our father said, ‘Go again, buy us a little food,’ 26 we said, ‘We cannot go down. If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down. For we cannot see the man’s face unless our youngest brother is with us.’ 27 Then your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons. 28 One left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces, and I have never seen him since. 29 If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.’

30 “Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy’s life, 31 as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. 32 For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.’ 33 Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. 34 For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father.”

45:1 Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, “Make everyone go out from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3 And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

4 So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near. And he said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9 Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. 10 You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. 11 There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.’ 12 And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. 13 You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” 14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

These long chapters are essentially the same story, so it’s difficult to break them up into chapter-sized messages. I’ll take the approach that this is one long narrative, but we’ll look at it in two parts. We’ll focus on Joseph’s brothers and then on Joseph. The third week, we’ll look at the end of the passage and try to draw some conclusions.

What we most want to look at this week is what God is doing in the hearts and lives of the brothers. Next week, we’ll consider Joseph’s life and ministry.

Let me ask you again – how do people change? Or think of it this way: Someday you’ll have children, God willing. How will you help them love God and love others, how will you nurture them to bring about the righteous life that God desires? How do we pursue godly parenting in order to help our children walk with God? How did your parents do this? Did they try?

There are two really bad approaches. The first is the crackdown. There are a thousand rules, and the breaking of any will result in swift and harsh punishment. This person desires to confront all sin with justice, teaching the child that rule-breaking brings about bad living. The parent who exemplifies this example puts his children in military school and runs his house like a bootcamp. The other is permissiveness. There are very few rules, if any, and breaking them results in no consequences whatsoever. This parent desires to teach love and acceptance, hoping that natural affection of the parent will result in a good life and behavior of the child. The parent who lives this way eventually calls the SuperNanny.

Most of us have grown up in a mixture of these two extremes, but we may veer to one or another. You won’t really know your tendency until you have children of your own, but for broad brush strokes, those of you who like control and rules will move toward the disciplinarian and those of you who are more free floating will move toward the permissive.

So if we’re not living in these extremes, where are we? Good question.

We’re in Hebrews 12: *“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” 7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”*

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<sup>2</sup> Sources: Waltke, Kidner, Wenham, Alter, Calvin, Gibson and DeGraaf.

In this passage, the writer of Hebrews talks about the discipline of God. In Greek, this word is *paedia*, and discipline is a good word, but we often think of punishment. *Paedia* is love with teeth. It's thoughtful love that seeks to change our hearts. And when we realize that that is what God does for us, we can see that that is what we need. That we too often misunderstand discipline in our lives, misinterpret it, don't appreciate it. God disciplines us because he loves us.

One quick note then on parenting. We must discipline our children, and we should look to see how God disciplines his children as our model. All sin brings death. Sin always has consequences. When we discipline our children, we are bringing the consequences of sin into a quicker order than what is normally natural. In other words, when you lie, you sin. When you lie, it hurts you. When we spank a child for lying, we are bringing what will be a further-down-the-road consequence into a present reality in order to teach the child that lying is wrong.

Unfortunately, we go wrong when we spank a child out of pure anger and wrath in order to ONLY bring judgment and punishment. (I have heard of people doing this...) However, we go equally wrong when we ignore the problem, don't deal with it, and hope it will correct itself. God disciplines his children. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Jacob's sons had been badly parented. Their earthly father had not trained them well, had not disciplined them properly. Their hearts were in extreme danger. They had sold their brother into slavery and lied about it, and we don't have any indication that they have dealt with this in any way. They don't appear to be talking about it together, though we might suspect that they can't help but feel shame about it. They don't appear to be confessing this sin to God either, since it's not until Gen. 42:28 that God comes up in their conversation. Though they have said his name before, God can mean "fate" or "nature" or "destiny" or "happenstance." This is the first glimpse of recognition that God is at work in their lives. They, for the first time, appear to feel guilty about Joseph but don't know what to do about it. What we see is God is putting them through a similar sequence of events like when they sold Joseph in order to spur their memories and make them deal with themselves.

Previous to this, they have worked together, but only for evil. Think of their extended efforts and teamwork in the massacre at Shechem (Gen. 34) and in the selling of Joseph (Gen 38). But now they are forced to work together for good, and to save each other. They recognize that "God has done this!" God is working on melting their consciences through the fire and ice of Severe Mercy. He is bringing about things in their lives that will make them change. That's what he does.

Let's look at how he does this, how he disciplines this family of the covenant, the ones through whom the promise will come. What we see is that God is squeezing them, taking control away from them and they hate it.<sup>3</sup>

#### ***The pinch of material want – famine<sup>4</sup>***

"Worldwide famine creates the backdrop for the family drama that is about to unfold. God is the prime mover here."<sup>5</sup> The narrative moves forward through the hunger of the family. We're set up for this because of Joseph's rise to power and the fulfillment of Pharaoh's dreams. No one has food. Jacob's family has held out as long as possible, but now they are desperate and have to avail themselves to a foreign ruler.

We read of Jacob's reaction to this in 42:1: *When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" 2 And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." 3 So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. 5 Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.*

Jacob can't help himself. He accuses his sons, commands them and then holds back Benjamin because he doesn't trust them. The story moves forward because of an external circumstance brought about by the Lord.

Are you in material want? Are you hungry? Has your car died and you can't buy a new one? Are you experiencing trouble? Perhaps these are from the hands of the Lord and you should consider what he is teaching you through this.

#### ***The pain of harsh treatment***

The brothers band together for the first time in a long time to do something to save their family. They must feel good about themselves, even though they're engaged in a long trek. Yet, when they encounter this Egyptian ruler they're accused of being spies. The brothers are not used to such blows to self esteem and pride. This gets them all the more out of their rut of normalcy.

Have you been treated harshly? Have you been accused of something? Have you entered a new situation and been stripped of all your position and found yourself at the bottom of the totem pole? Perhaps these are at the hand of the Lord and you should consider what the Lord wants you to learn about your true position.

#### ***The press of solitude***

Simeon first and then the others began to think because they were forced to.

And what did they then consider? Their consciences must have been burning within them, for they immediately made the connection with Joseph. Gen. 42:2: *Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw*

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<sup>3</sup> See Boice, 1021

<sup>4</sup> The points that follow have been gleaned from Boice's Genesis commentary.

<sup>5</sup> Fox, *Beginning*, 173 found in Waltke, 542

*the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.*" Once forced to be still and think, they started to move in a new direction.

Are you seeking solitude and quiet? I'm afraid most of us are not. You've been trained to have a short attention span by Sesame Street and Barney. You can only handle a subject for fifty minutes. You need half-hour television shows. You were shuttled from activity to activity throughout the week – soccer, swimming, awanas, violin, dance, basketball and chess club. You think that this is the virtue of being well-rounded.

We are consumed by our media outlets. We cannot fathom going for a run without an ipod so we can listen to music. If you walk through campus, you'll see that most people don't walk from class to class without earphones or a cell phone in their ears. We go home and watch television until bed.

We need to get away. Get away to listen to God, to hear what He might be telling us if we were listening. You may struggle with this at first, but in order to change us, we have to slow down at least at times and make time for solitude. We need to cultivate a life of contemplation, for God speaks to us in the quiet, does He not? Be aware that God might slow you down in sickness or in seclusion one way or another.

### ***The proof of God's presence in little things***

It was the inexplicable return of their money that made the brothers first consider God's hand in this. This was Joseph's gift to them, and yet they immediately became suspicious. They noted the presence of another's hand, however.

Do you see God at work in the little things in life? Do you note that He is good to you in ways you do not deserve?

### ***The pattern of necessity***

God uses nature, people, and circumstances to bring about change in the brothers. He uses these secondary means to break us down and discipline us. The famine doesn't relent. This might apply to us that we might bear up under the temptation for awhile and yet it doesn't relent right away. The illness lingers. We're out of employment for six longer months. We don't get into grad school yet again.

And our community doesn't go away. We have to face our facts because our friends, family and church won't allow our retreat from it. We keep bumping into our sin. Or do we? Too often we retreat from our community because we know that this very point will be true if we keep engaging. We come around less often, but just enough to not arouse suspicion. When we are around, we don't talk about what's really happening so that no one will really know.

Community is necessary. The brothers need each other, they need to work this out in the context of the family, in the context of relationships. The fact that they were unable to return to business as usual is what ultimately brings about their salvation. God is messing with them. Allowing them a temporary retreat until he turns up the heat a little more.

### ***The power of genuine affection***

The brothers are forced to return to Egypt and stand again in front of this strange ruler. And what happens? They are smothered with unmerited kindness that they could not miss though they could not fully understand. Martin Luther's mentor Johann Staupitz said to a young and oppressed Luther: "God is not angry with you; do not be angry with him."

When you are the child of a loving father, you may receive discipline that you don't like in the short term, but you know that it is offered in love. The brothers supposed that this man (Joseph) wants to do evil to them; this is often the way because in fact we don't trust our loving father. We don't think he wants what is best for us. We're suspicious of his motives.

They were reassured about their money by Joseph's steward, but this doesn't seem to relieve much of their anxiety. The steward brought out the unharmed Simeon, thereby proving that Joseph was practicing truth and love together. You see, just truth, just judgment would have been that all of the brothers were put in slavery and sold. That is what they deserved, wasn't it? But would they have changed? Just forgiveness would have been that nothing would have happened. But that wouldn't have garnered change either. He, by the grace of God working through him, is showing them truth and love together in order to have them see that they need repentance.

The brothers were given fresh water to wash and food for their donkeys, which were signs of respect and courtesy. Then Joseph arrived and spoke kindly, asking how they were and how their father was. They ate an elegant feast when they were starving. The steward even tried to allay their fears, calling Shalom, Peace to you!

The brothers enjoyed the Joseph's benefits without knowing who he was. Do you think that that might be true of you? Many of you enjoy the benefits of God without even knowing Him. God is gracious even to nonbelievers. Charles Spurgeon calls us all to repentance this way, using the theme of Jonathan Edwards:

"To the awakened sinner, this is also a part of his misery, that he is entirely in the hands of that very Christ whom he once despised; for that Christ who died has now become the judge of the quick and dead; he has power over all flesh that he may give eternal life to as many as his Father has given to him. The Father judgeth no man; he has committed all judgment to the Son. Does thou see this, sinner? He whom thou despised is thy Master. The moth beneath thy finger, which thou canst crush and that cannot escape from thee, may well fear; but thus art thou beneath the fingers of the crucified Son of God. Today he whom thou hast despised has thee absolutely at his will; he has but to will it and the breath is gone from thy nostrils and while yet in thy seat thou art a corpse. And more, at his will thou art in hell amidst its flames. Oh! What an awful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God, for even our God is a consuming fire!"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Spurgeon sermon, found in Boice, 1055.

In Romans 2:4, Paul puts it this way: *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*

Friends, do you presume upon the grace of one whom you do not know? God does not owe you anything. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He holds your very life and everything about you in the palm of his hands, and he is very, very good. But there is a time when His patience will run its course. Will you avail yourself to not only know the effects of his goodness to you, but also to know Him?!

### ***The purge of self-confidence***

There they were, and yet Joseph was not finished. He pressed even further, setting up the very scenario that they had done to him. With the ruse of the stolen cup in Benjamin's sack, Joseph gave the brothers the opportunity to do the same thing again. All they had to do was leave Benjamin and they would go free.

What would they do? Look at what happens when they're caught. They protest, counting on their word, their money and their integrity. Yet we know, as does Joseph, that this all rings extremely hollow. Their word? Ha. "Look what we found, father. Your sons coat of many colors. He must have died." They have no money, and we all know that people are driven to desperate measures by desperate times. And what integrity do they suppose they have? They sold their brother into slavery and lied about it! In fact, in chapter 42, Reuben offers his sons and not himself as a vouchsafe for Benjamin's safety. If something goes wrong, you can kill my sons. Nice. No integrity there. God will always uncover your iniquity, and God will uncover your pretend "righteousness."

And then, at this bleak moment, when the brothers are utterly undone, we see transformation. This is the climax of the story. Judah steps up and makes a moving speech. We see here that his relationship to God was transformed in 44:16: *And Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord's servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found."*

Judah repents of the whole story, telling this ruler about what they had done.

Judah eclipses Reuben as the family leader. Reuben cowardly and foolishly offers the lives of his sons to guarantee Benjamin's safety. Judah offers his own life. His speech to Jacob is so respectful, sober, and forthright that Jacob has no alternative but to accede to the force of his argument and send Benjamin with them. Judah's speech to Joseph is so truthful, cogent and straight from the heart that he enables Joseph to become authentic, to acknowledge his real self, by throwing off his Egyptian guise to weep and embrace his brother.<sup>7</sup>

"Judah emerges as the new leader. While he accedes to the patriarch's direction, he speaks forcefully, sensibly and soberly. The severe mercies of famine and Joseph's test coaxes the best out of him. Judah risks his own family fortune and life to save the rest of the family."<sup>8</sup>

Through this, their relationship to others was transformed. Joseph reveals himself to them at this point. Prompted by God, he has waited until he has seen something, until he has seen change in their hearts. Until he has seen – substitutionary atonement. Our father loves this son so much that I am willing to die in his place.

Remember Judah from Genesis 37? He was the one whose idea it was in the first place to sell Joseph into slavery. He hated his brother and did this tremendous evil to him. He then stood before his father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether this is your son's robe or note." But then we read the craziness of Genesis 38 and made the point that the purpose of that incident and its being recorded was to show us that something was going on in Judah. He was changing. When Tamar said "Please identify whose these are," Judah had to recognize himself. He had to see himself.

And now he stood before one of whom he didn't recognize, but he finally and completely saw himself. Saw himself as the one who had sold his brother into slavery, who had hurt his father beyond belief, who had demanded overpayment for his daughter-in-law. He recognized himself as a murderer, liar, thief, hider, adulterer, lover of other gods. And he said that he was unworthy of life.

And that gave him life. Joseph made himself known to his brothers. "I am Joseph!" Do you recognize me? They hadn't seen him since he was 17 years old. In the at least thirteen years since they had seen him last, so much had happened. He had been a shepherd boy. Now he was standing before them as the most powerful man in Egypt. And they saw him. Finally.

The family is reconciled, through the loving discipline of truth and love together.

What can we learn from this?<sup>9</sup>

### ***Weakening is strengthening***

When you go to the gym, do you realize that you are weakening your body in the short term in order to strengthen it in the long term? When you run five miles, your leg is saying, What is she doing? I'm getting weaker! She's hurting me! I don't have any strength left! But you, the master of the leg, know that the leg doesn't know what is best and that you are helping the leg.

So it is when God works in our lives. It appears to be to our hurt so often.

And yet, God disciplines those whom he loves. In Hebrews 12:11, the word that is translated "have been trained by it" comes from the root word, *gymnazo* – where we get the word gymnasium. That's where you train. Where you discipline yourself for a later good. Where you tire yourself out for a longer-viewed purpose.

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<sup>7</sup> Waltke, 541

<sup>8</sup> Waltke, 552

<sup>9</sup> Points that follow come from Keller.

Do not be surprised when God uses the same process on you. He may start you off on a lap so that you can swim a mile later. He may give you some dumbbells so that you can lift a heavy load in the future.

***Look inside for your false trusts and idols, for that is what God is exposing.***

When we encounter pain and suffering, we so often look to our circumstances and seek to alter them. However, we need to consider what God is doing on the inside, in our hearts, and that that is the ultimate purpose. You are in danger of your sins and idols for all will be stripped away. Pastor Tim Keller tells the story of a lumberjack who knew he was going to clear a forest the next week. As he surveyed the forest, he saw a mother bird making a nest for her unborn. But she made it in one of the trees that would soon be brought down. He reached into the tree and started tapping the nest with his ax. He tapped harder and harder until the mother stopped her building and left.

The next day, he went back to surveying the forest. He saw the mother bird building a nest in another tree, so he tapped and tapped until she left again, further to the edge away from this crazy man. What is he doing? Why is he doing this to me? Why is he persecuting me, she thought.

Again, she went to building and again he went to tapping. She left again, exasperated, but this time started building her nest in the rocks in the valley nearby. The crazy lumberjack didn't bother her, and the next day there were no trees in the forest.

God is tapping your trees my friends, for you're attempting to build nests in the wrong place. In your majors. In where you live. In your careers. In your boyfriends and girlfriends. In your marriages. In the way you school your children. In what you read and don't read. In your holy living. In your evangelism method. In your **\*\*whatever it is\*\***, you are seeking to replace a true loving relationship with the Father and Savior of your soul with something that only points to and approximates it. And God is committed to bringing that down, burning it, pulverizing it, scattering it and even making you drink it. (Exodus 32:20)

***God has a dream for your future, and he will fulfill it***

It should scare the beejebies out of you, and also give you great comfort to know that the greatest assaults on your dream will only serve to fulfill it. Just think about this story. The thing that the brothers most didn't want to happen was for Joseph's dream to come true. And yet, everything they did to destroy that dream actually fulfilled it.

This is good stuff. In my professional writing classes at OU, I have twice taken the class, "Writing the Novel." When you write a novel, you have to choose what to put in and what to leave out to make the story interesting and drive home the point you're aiming at. You have control over these characters thoughts, words and actions. And yet they also have control as well (as any author knows).

A bad story is one where the different parts never come together. A character introduced in chapter one never reappears. Something that seems so important and highlighted gets dropped. The antagonist and protagonist are never intertwined at all. However, in a good story, the antagonist undoes himself. He sows the seeds of his own destruction unknowingly and unwittingly.

Think of Satan and how he isn't all-powerful or all-knowing. He must have thought that getting rid of Joseph would be death to God's plan. He surely didn't suspect that Judah would be the one to carry the line of the Savior. And yet God worked through all of the schemes and plots to yield His own purposes.

We don't know what God is doing. At the very best we only get a teeny glimpse of how all things work together for the good of those who love God. Maybe 1%. Keller shares as an example his great-grandfather who had four wives. The first three died. Imagine how he must have struggled with God as he buried his third wife – God what are you doing? From these four wives, he had seventeen children. Keller comes from the seventeenth one. What is God doing? He's doing *me!*, Keller would cry if he could go back in time.

We don't know all that God is doing. We trust that He is all-powerful, all-wise and all-good. We'll look next week at how Joseph shows us aspects of this as he treats the brothers, but for now we have to trust that God is fulfilling his plan in us, that He uses the loving discipline of a Father.

The brothers had been hurt by the parenting of their father. God took over, as He does, as the loving, wise Father to bring about what they most needed – change and repentance.

So He does with us.

Derek Kidner puts it this way in his commentary on Genesis: "At first sight the rough handling which now dominates the scene to the end of chapter 44 has the look of vengefulness. Nothing could be more natural, but nothing further from the truth. Behind the harsh pose, there was warm affection, and after the ordeal overwhelming kindness. Even the threats were tempered with mercy, and the shocks that were administered took the form of embarrassments rather than blows. A vindictive Joseph could have dismayed his brothers with worthless sackloads, or tantalized them at this feast as they had tantalized him; his enigmatic gifts were a kinder and more searching test. Just how well-judged was his policy can be seen in the growth of quite new attitudes in the brothers, as the alternating sun and frost broke them open to God."<sup>10</sup>

Exactly. The alternating sun and frost. The cold judgment, the forcing of need, necessity, hunger, dealing with idols, breaking of self-righteousness. The warmth and sun of the gifts, the feast, the shalom, the embrace. This was all a part of God's plan in order to change them, to break them open to God.

Is God at work in your life? Is he using sun and frost? Do you see it?

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<sup>10</sup> Kidner, 199