**Joseph Digging Deeper Week 5**

Last week we ended with Simeon in prison in Egypt and the rest of the brothers at home with Jacob. They begged Jacob to let them return to Egypt with Benjamin but Jacob refused. It was a pretty bleak place for all of them – Simeon with no hope of release and the rest of the family still struggling with the severe famine in the land. We are going to go from one extreme of emotions to the other this week – from despair to joy as we continue our journey into the life of Joseph today.

We are going to be looking at Genesis 43-45. In the teaching, we summarized parts of the story and I would suggest that before you even begin this lesson that you read through those three chapters in their entirety so you can have a full grasp of the story.

We are going to start at the beginning of these passages.

Genesis 43:1-2 Now the famine was severe in the land. **2**And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, “Go again, buy us a little food.”

Do you remember how long the famine was supposed to last? (Genesis 41:30)

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It is important for us to remember that this famine was not a fleeting thing – it was long lasting. At this time they were only about two years into the famine. So, while the sons had returned with supplies and grain from Egypt, the famine remained and would continue to remain for years to come.

Knowing that, the fact that they had run out of grain was problematic because there wasn’t any to be had around them. Not only that, the only place that had grain was Egypt and after their last encounter in Egypt, they wouldn’t be able to simply buy grain there. What was required of them in order to be able to purchase grain?

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So, Joseph asking his sons to , “Go again, but us a little food” was no small ask and Judah makes this clear in the next few verses.

Genesis 43:3-5 But Judah said to him, “The man solemnly warned us, saying, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.’ **4**If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. **5**But if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, ‘You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.’”

Judah knew what would happen if they returned to Egypt without Benjamin – they would face certain death or imprisonment. Speaking of imprisonment – what about Simeon? He is still in prison in Egypt and that doesn’t really seem to have crossed anyone’s mind. Jacob and his ten sons are focused on their own difficult situation of running out of grain and don’t seem to be concerned about Simeon.

It’s easy for us to get so wrapped up in our own difficult circumstances that we ignore the struggles of others**.** Have you ever been so focused on your own difficulties that you were oblivious to the needs of others?

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While we can and should focus on our own issues at times, we need to not be so self-centered that we forget that others are struggling as well and SOMETIMES opening our eyes to the struggles of others helps us put our own difficulties into perspective. How have you had your own circumstances put into proper perspective when you saw the needs or struggles of someone else?

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The flip side to not recognizing the suffering or struggles of others is to get into a suffering competition – to compare your suffering to others or to have others do to you. There is no need to compete for martyrdom in our struggles and suffering. That is what the enemy would have us do – to get into a comparison game where no one wins because we can’t actually compare our circumstances, struggles or difficulties with others – we are not them and regardless of how much we think we know about their situation, we don’t know everything. How have you fallen into the comparison or competition trap or how have you seen others do it? If it has happened to you, pray that the Lord will give you proper perspective and compassion and if it has happened to someone you know, pray the same for them.

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Judah continues to try and persuade Jacob to let him take Benjamin with him to Egypt.

Genesis 43:8-9 And Judah said to Israel his father, “Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. **9**I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.”

Can you recall when the brothers returned to Jacob which of the brothers made an offer to Jacob in order for them to be able to return to Egypt and what the offer was? (Genesis 42:37)

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What Judah did was different than what his brother did. Judah is saying HE will be responsible for Benjamin. Judah was basically offering himself and would personally accept the blame if anything happened to Benjamin. Can you recall a time when you said you would be responsible for someone else or someone else’s actions? After the situation played out, did you accept the responsibility?

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Genesis 43:11-13 Then their father Israel said to them, “If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. **12**Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. **13**Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man.”

Here we see Jacob finally relents. Jacob sends his sons – including Benjamin back to Egypt and tells them to take double the money and gifts. Jacob is trying to persuade ‘the man’ with his gifts. Have you ever done the same thing? When have you tried to persuade or smooth things over with gifts?

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Jacob doesn’t merely send his sons away with gifts, he also sends them away with a prayer.

Genesis 43:14 **“**May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.”

Jacob knew this was not going to be easy for his sons and he feared for their lives. Out of his fear, he seeks the Lord. In this we see his faith in God. Jacob knew there was nothing HE could do to protect his sons but he knew the One who could. When have you prayed for the safety of others or that someone else would have a favorable outcome from an interaction?

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The Hebrew word for God Almighty is El Shaddai. RC Sproul says, “A foundational meaning of El Shaddai may be ‘the overpowerer,’ which emphasizes God’s power to achieve all His purposes.” Doesn’t that bring such comfort – that God has power to achieve all His purposes?

My daughter, Allison bought a devotional for she, Emily (my other daughter) and I to do together during this time while Emily is being treated for Leukemia as a way for us to remain focused on the Lord and to share with one another. The devotional is “Unshakable” by Christine Caine. The devotional for February 21 is based on the following Scripture.

 Luke 18:27 What is impossible with man is possible with God.

Here is what Christine Caine says about this verse: “It is not enough that God is big in stature if He’s not big in you. So make God and his truth bigger than anything staring you down.

 There’s no problem He cannot solve.

 There’s no question He cannot answer.

 There’s no enemy He cannot defeat.

 There’s not difficulty He cannot overcome.

 There’s nothing our God cannot do. Impossible is where He starts. Miracles are what He does.”

Joseph knew those things to be true about his God – about El Shaddai. What about you? Which part of that quote speaks to you? Who do you know that might need to hear a bit of that encouragement today? What are you facing that you need to be reminded to make God big in you?

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Genesis 43:15-18 So the men took this present, and they took double the money with them, and Benjamin. They arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph. 16When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, “Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to din with me at noon.” 17The man did as Joseph told him and brought the men to Joseph’s house. 18 And the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph’s house, and they said, “It is because of the money, which was replaced in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may assault us and fall upon us to make us servants and seize our donkeys.”

Can’t you just hear the guilt in their voices? Their automatic response to being invited to Joseph’s house was fear – they were afraid they were in trouble for the money that was returned into their sacks on their previous trip to Egypt. They were operating out of fear and guilt – not guilt because of stealing the money but guilt out of what they had done to Joseph and perhaps guilt of leaving Simeon behind in Egypt and even residual guilt over what they had done to Joseph. Have you ever operated out of fear and guilt? Are you operating out of fear or guilt right now? Is there something you need to confess to the Lord and seek His forgiveness?

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They brothers explain about the money that was returned to them and look at how the steward responds.

Genesis 43:23 He replied, “Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money.” Then he brought Simeon out to them.

The steward attributed the money in their sacks to God – the God of your father. That would be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – isn’t that strange for an Egyptian steward? It makes me wonder if Joseph had shared his faith with this steward. We never know how someone will respond when we share our faith – it is one of the beauties of doing it – you never know if you are the one planting the seed or perhaps the one watering a seed planted by someone else. Who does the Lord want you to share your faith with today? Have you shared your faith recently with someone – how did it go?

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Hollywood has nothing on this next scene, you can almost hear the music playing in the background– when Joseph sees Benjamin for the first time.

Genesis 43:29-30 And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, “Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!” **30**Then Joseph hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there.

Warren Wiersbe in his commentary on Genesis says this, “Joseph’s sensitive heart was a miracle of God’s grace. For years dead Egyptian idols and the futile worship given to them had surrounded Joseph, YET he had maintained his faith in God. He could have hardened his heart and nursed grudges, BUT he preferred to forgive and leave the past with God.” So what about you? Do you allow your faith in God to keep your heart softened? Are you nursing grudges or are you forgiving and leaving the past with God? Spend some time and allow the Lord to examine your heart. Allow Him to show you where it has become hardened and to reveal to you grudges that you may be holding onto. Record what you learn from the Lord and take some time praying about it. This is an easy part of the lesson to skip and think you will come back to. I encourage you to fight against the urge to skip it and truly take the time with the Lord. You won’t be sorry!

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After the meal, Joseph sends his brothers on their way and as in the past he instructs his steward to put their money back in their sacks but he goes a step further this time and has him place Joseph’s silver cup in Benjamin’s bag. Look at how the brothers respond when they are confronted by the steward for stealing Joseph’s cup and ‘repaying evil for good”.

Genesis 44:7-9 They said to him, “Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing! **8**Behold, the money that we found in the mouths of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? **9**Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we also will be my lord's servants.”

This is a bold suggestion that the one with the cup would die and the others would become Joseph’s servant. Clearly they were confident that none of them would have stolen the cup. Even the steward found this to be too serious a consequence and said that the one with the cup would be Joseph’s servant and the rest should be innocent.

Genesis 44:12 And he (Joseph’s steward) searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.

Because the brothers were confident that none of them would have stolen the cup and the search was by birth order their confidence was confirmed as the steward checked each bag until Benjamin’s bag was opened. Of all sacks, the cup is found in Benjamin’s. This brings a visceral reaction from the brothers.

Genesis 44:13a Then they tore their clothes,

Why do you think the brothers had such a strong reaction to the cup being found in Benjamin’s sack?

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The brothers were completely devastated because they had just agreed that the one with the cup would become the servant of Joseph. How could they possibly go back home without Benjamin? What would that have done to Jacob? What would it have meant for Judah?

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Genesis 44:13b and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city. – The brothers didn’t return home but went back to Egypt with Benjamin.

The brothers didn’t return home – instead they went with Benjamin. How different is this than the way they treated Joseph? Remember how they plotted to kill him when they saw him approaching from the distance? How we later learned that Joseph begged them not to sell him into slavery and how they would not listen.

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Perhaps we are seeing the brothers have learned a lesson. Can you think of a time when you have been faced with a similar situation and you learned your lesson and the second time around you responded very differently?

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Genesis 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.”

Once again we see Judah stepping up as the leader of the brothers. “God has found out the guilt of your servants” this guilt is much more than the stealing of a cup. Warren Wiersbe says, “This phrase doesn’t refer only to the discovery of the grain money or to the silver cup. The statement also refers to their hidden sins, the way they had treated Joseph and their father years before.”

Just like one lie leads to another to cover it up – confession can be like that – confession of one sin opens up our hearts for the Lord to reveal other sins. Has that ever happened to you? Have you been confessing something to the Lord and the Lord reveals other sins that you had yet to confess, seek forgiveness or repent of? It is why it is so important for us to confess our sins to the Lord regularly – once we confess we never know what floodgate of sins the Holy Spirit will reveal to us. Take some time today, especially in this season of Lent to allow the Lord to began a flood of confession so that your heart can be purified.

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Joseph’s response to Judah.

Genesis 44:17 But he said, “Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant. But as for you, go up in peace to your father.”

This seems like a kind thing for Joseph to do on the surface, but knowing what we know about Jacob and his relationship with Benjamin we know that this is like a knife in the hearts of the brothers. There is no way they could possibly return to their father in peace without Benjamin.

In the next verses – Genesis 44:18-30-34 we see Judah making a great plea on Benjamin’s behalf. Warren Wiersbe suggests that the 13 times Judah uses the word father or referred to Benjamin had an impact on Joseph. He says Judah “was reaching the heart of the man who held their future in his hands.”

Genesis 44:30-33 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.

Such foreshadowing here as Judah offers to take the place of Benjamin. Remember that Jesus comes from the tribe of Judah and He ultimately takes all of our places on the cross.

Romans 5:8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us

What does it mean to you that Jesus took your place on the cross, that He took on your sins?

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Judah’s speech certainly had an impact on Joseph.

Genesis 45:1-2 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.

Joseph is so overwhelmed by emotions that he can’t control himself. Can you think of a time when that has happened to you?

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We have now reached the climax for this part of the story where Joseph finally reveals himself to his brothers!

Genesis 45:3 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.

Can’t you just hear him cry out I AM JOSEPH! And at shock and awe of his brothers.

Genesis 45:4-5 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.

God sent joseph and not only did God send Joseph to Egypt but He did it to preserve YOUR lives! What a mighty work of God that Joseph saw God’s hand in all of this. Joseph saw the providence of God.How have you seen the providence of the Lord play out in your life? How have you seen Him provide for you?

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Genesis 45:8 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.

Joseph makes it crystal clear that it was all God. GOD – not you – sent me and only God could bring about the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers. God is in the business of reconciliation. Is there someone you need to be reconciled with? Pray and seek the Lord. Ask Him to bring it about if it is His will and be willing to do your part – whatever the Lord calls you to do. It will require you to forgive, it will require you to let go of old hurts and grudges and allow the Lord to bring healing. Who do you need to be reconciled with? Remember that reconciliation takes two parties and both have to be willing. If the other party isn’t willing, you need to leave it with the Lord but you need to be sure that your heart is clean by forgiving them and not holding onto any grudges.

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Genesis 45:9 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.

Don’t you LOVE this – tell my father that the Lord has made me lord of all Egypt . Joseph wanted his father to know he was alive but also to know how well he had done in his life. He also tells them – hurry and do it – do not delay. Remember the last time they returned to their father there was a delay before they returned to Egypt and I am sure Joseph wanted to make sure there was no delay this time. He was so desperate to see his father.

Genesis 45:10-11 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.’

Joseph, because of what the Lord had providentially done for him would be able to provide for his father and his brothers because there were still 5 more years of famine to come. How awesome for Joseph to be able to provide for his family out of the abundance the Lord had given him. How has the Lord allowed you to provide for others – whether it was financially or otherwise? Have you given Him the glory for it? Have you made sure those who benefited from your abundance knew where it came from?

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Genesis 45:15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

Don’t you want to know what they talked about – don’t you wish you could be a fly on the wall and eavesdrop on that conversation? What do you think they talked about?

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Genesis 45:24 Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, “Do not quarrel on the way.”

You’ve got to love this – do not quarrel – Joseph knew this was their tendency – he also knew that he had just given more to Benjamin just like he did at the meal and didn’t want the brothers fighting about it. Joseph knew his brothers and was able to give a warning on the front end – do you have people in your life who know you so well that when they hear about a situation you are facing they are able to give you warnings that you might need to hear on the front end? May we be willing to hear them and may we be willing to speak words of warnings to others when the Lord puts it on our hearts.

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We will end today with the glorious reunion of Jacob with his 11 sons and the news of Joseph!

Genesis 45:25-28 So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. **26**And they told him, “Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.” And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. **27**But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. **28**And Israel said, “It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”