



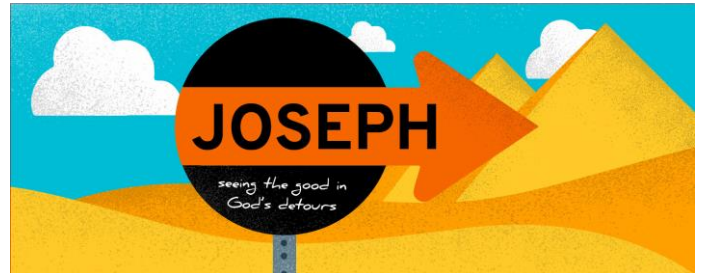
VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Joseph: Seeing the Good in God's Detours

Part 7: Divine Detour: The Way God Changes
Hearts

Tim Badal | November 13, 2016 | Genesis 42



As we continue our series on Joseph I want to focus this week on really seeing the good in God's detours. We've been seeing major detours in Joseph's life. He was given the task of checking on his brothers, but instead of simply checking in and then returning home to report to his father that the flock and his sons were well, everything changed. Joseph's detour rerouted him to Egypt.

We remember the reasons that the brothers hated Joseph. His father loved him more than the other sons and had given Joseph a coat of many colors, which was a visual sign of his favoritism. Also, Joseph had some dreams that he announced to the rest of his family, which made his brothers' blood boil. So when they saw him coming to check on them, they conspired to kill him. But after further consideration, they sold him as a slave to some traders who were headed to Egypt. They never expected to see him again, as Egypt was a long distance from Canaan. They figured they were rid of their brother and led their father to believe a wild animal had killed him. That was detour number one.

Detour number two takes place in Potiphar's house, where he had been elevated from a mere slave to second in command. Everything is going well until Potiphar's wife falsely accuses Joseph of rape. As a result, he is thrown into prison.

After spending over a decade in prison waiting for God to rescue him, Joseph's third detour takes place. Pharaoh has some troubling dreams. Joseph has proven to two of the other prisoners his ability to interpret dreams, and one of the prisoners—Pharaoh's cupbearer—is restored to his place in Pharaoh's court. The cupbearer remembers that Joseph accurately interpreted his dream, so he tells Pharaoh about Joseph.

Pharaoh brings Joseph out of prison, and Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams, telling him of an extreme famine that would be coming after seven years of plentiful crops in Egypt. He recommends that Pharaoh prepare for the famine by storing 20% of the harvest from the good years. And at that point, detour four, Pharaoh elevates Joseph to prime minister over all of Egypt and puts him in charge of the grain collection process.

We can see God's good in the detours in Joseph's life. But let me remind you that God is not simply Joseph's God or even God over the area code where Joseph lives. God is the God of all His creation. While He was doing work in Joseph's life through these detours, Genesis 42 turns the story back to Canaan. Up to this point, the story's spotlight has been on Joseph, but now we look back at his father, Jacob, and his brothers.

We'll see that just as God was working in Joseph's life, He was also working in the lives of his family. For 20 years they've lived without Joseph. I wonder if every time Joseph's birthday came around or the date of his "death" the brothers' consciences didn't get stirred a little bit—these hardened men who had dealt with him treacherously. I wonder if there were ever any conversations about him, or sleepless nights, as a result of the guilt they must have felt. I even wonder if they ever considered revealing their secret to their father.

Today, we're going to see how God awakened their consciences, and how He does the same with us, moving us to repentance. Through the example of Joseph's brothers, we'll see how—little by little, step by step, test after test—God brought them to the place of full confession and repentance.

But first, let's get our bearings by turning back to Genesis 41, beginning with verse 53:

⁵³ The seven years of plenty that occurred in the land of Egypt came to an end, ⁵⁴ and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. There was famine in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. ⁵⁵ When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph. What he says to you, do."

⁵⁶ So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. ⁵⁷ Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth.

We've been talking about how detours can bring frustration and consternation to our lives. But in and of themselves, these detours can also be incredibly helpful, perhaps showing us a new way of traveling from point A to point B. The dictionary definition reminds us that detours never take us on the shortest usual route, and in fact can bring difficulties. But in reality, detours can change our lives.

I have experienced detours that have taken me through an about-face, heading me in a totally different direction. I remember that with the death of my brother. I remember that when Amanda had her cancer diagnosis. These experiences caused me to look at life completely differently from how I had viewed it the day before. Detours can help us make needed changes in our lives.

Consider the great theological lesson we were taught by Lightning McQueen. Remember him from the movie "Cars"? Lightning McQueen was a self-centered, arrogant race car who had everything going for him. After winning many trophies, he was convinced he needed no one else but himself. As a result, he walked over people, not caring about their feelings. Then one day he was headed down the interstate toward yet another race when he encountered a detour and found himself on Route 66 in a city called Radiator Springs. Over time this detour would teach him that his life needed to change. He was convicted of his arrogance and self-centeredness, and with the help of his new friends, he learned he wasn't as great as he had thought. Some of his past sins came back to mind and he saw how his life had been impacted by them.

All of us have experienced detours that cause us to re-evaluate who we are and where we're going. Scripture teaches us that we like sheep have all gone astray (Isaiah 53:6). But it also tells us that God in His goodness and mercy shows us our sin, and when He moves us to a place of repentance, trusting Christ as our Savior, salvation becomes the best detour we can experience. Genesis 42 is a picture of that process, showing how God melts hearts and brings people to repentance.

1. The Divine Detour uses life's troubles to remind us of sin.

We should notice that troubles in life can be used as God's divine detour to convict us of our sin. Let's pick up the story there in verse one:

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.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the spotlight is now on Canaan, miles away from Egypt. We see now that even though Joseph had been gone for as many as 20 years, Jacob's fears were still very much alive. He is now afraid that if he were to send Benjamin with the other brothers to Egypt for grain, something bad might happen to him as well. His loss of Joseph is still a raw wound in his life.

But God is moving in the lives of Joseph's brothers. He is not content to leave them in their sin, but He wants to stir in their conscience the realization that what they did to Joseph needs to be confessed—having sorrow for their sin—and repented of—a determination never to do those things again. How does He bring this process about? As we'll see, the way God prompted the brothers to conviction of their sins is the same way He brings us to conviction.

This involves the problems we face.

What was the problem in Joseph's brothers' lives? It was the same problem a lot of people in that day were facing: famine. Now, we knew it was coming because we've read about Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams. We knew there would be seven strong years agriculturally, followed by seven years of famine. We also knew that Joseph filled the storehouses with grain during the seven good years in preparation for the famine. But that plan of preparation wasn't known about in Canaan. Jacob and Joseph's brothers realized they needed to do something or they would die of starvation. They could not get beyond this problem on their own. We may not really understand what they faced, but let's try to put ourselves in their shoes.

In an ancient agrarian society, a famine meant a slow and painful death. The pantry supplies would dwindle and there would be no idea if rain would come tomorrow or not. Even if rain did come, it would take another entire growing season before any food would become available. They were sitting there dying a slow, grueling death, and they had no solution. They couldn't go to Jewel or Aldi and pick up food.

We don't know what a famine is today, because our food comes from all over the world. I always look at the bananas I buy, because the stickers show where they come from: Ecuador or Bolivia mostly. I often wonder how they get them to us quickly enough before they get overripe, since they only last a day or two on my counter. But they do it somehow.

But in Jacob's day, there was a very small radius of land from which they could obtain their food. So they had a serious problem, and as He does so often, God used this problem to bring Joseph's sons to their knees. Usually when things are going well, we don't change anything. Prosperity and success are never good "pokere" of our consciences. They don't move us to change. When things are terrible is when we start making changes.

This involves our paralysis to fix them.

Their problem is so huge that they are paralyzed, without any solution they themselves could produce, so they have to think about new solutions. Jacob, the aged patriarch of the family, looks at his ten young, able-bodied sons and says, "Why are you looking at one another? We know there is food in Egypt. Let's take some of our goods and buy some food. Why are you just sitting there?" But the famine had paralyzed them into thinking their lives were over. They don't know what to do.

There are times in our lives as well when our problems are so big that we too are paralyzed and don't know what to do. If I might be honest with you, when Amanda received her cancer diagnosis, I was paralyzed with fear. We were both only 40 years old. We didn't know how bad it was or the prognosis, but I can remember the thought going over and over in my mind: what if they say it's terminal? What if it's in her bones? Her diagnosis was for a rare sort of breast cancer that almost always progresses into bone cancer.

So I did what you might do: I went to Web MD. That's helpful, right? But that only increased my fear. "What am I going to do, and God, why would You want me to be a widower? What am I going to do with my kids? What am I going to tell my sick wife? What if...what if...what if....?" We need to remember that God has said He doesn't give us a spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7)—but I wasn't living there. And Joseph's brothers weren't living there either. Their problem was too big for them to handle.

This involves pointing out our faults.

I wonder if Jacob's instruction to his sons went like this: "I want you to go to Egypt." "What's that, Dad?" "I want you to go to Egypt." "Egypt?" I wonder if that word echoed in their hearts. Egypt? Joseph might be in Egypt. That's the last place we knew Joseph was headed. Back when they sold their brother to the traders, the text makes it clear he was headed to Egypt.

Commentators believe the reason they're reluctant to go to Egypt is that they're afraid they might see Joseph. What would it be like to see him as a fraction of his former self after 20 years of slavery? They had no idea that he would have been elevated in Potiphar's house, or that he could interpret dreams and be promoted in Pharaoh's government. They might have thought they could run into him on a side street, broken down and emaciated. They envisioned meeting his eyes and it frightened them.

Have you ever wronged someone, then later realize you have to meet them again—maybe at church or in a family gathering? Think of the sick feeling you have. "What am I going to do when my eyes connect with theirs? What will I say to them when I have to say hello?" This was in the minds of the brothers when the subject of Egypt came up. Their thoughts went back 20 years to their great sin. The word Egypt was the alarm that broke these brothers out of their slumber.

Now, they're not fully awake, like that first moment when you hear your phone or alarm clock go off, and you want to ignore it. You reach, half-awake, to turn it off. That's what the mention of Egypt did for these brothers. God had a way of waking up their hearts.

I remember reading *The Tell-Tale Heart*, by Edgar Allan Poe. The killer goes to bed and hears the heartbeat of his victim, and it drives him crazy. We're told by the author that it's not the heartbeat of the victim; it's his own beating heart and guilty conscience that's keeping him up at night. I wonder if the brothers' conscience and concern about Egypt and possibly seeing Joseph kept them up at night as well.

But they obeyed Jacob and headed out to Egypt. They didn't have much of an option really—it was Egypt or death. In verses 6–17, we see that God can sometimes teach us about our sins by putting us in the path of others.

⁶ Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground.

Remember, Joseph had dreamed about this—the stalks of grain bowing down to his stalk. God is being faithful to bring his dream to fruition.

⁷ Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. “Where do you come from?” he said. They said, “From the land of Canaan, to buy food.” ⁸ And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him.

How in the world could they have not recognized their brother? It's a question we need to answer. But remember a couple things. Seventeen-year-olds will look different when they're 35. Listen, I was a good-looking 17-year-old, but it's not the case these days. Second, his time in Egypt had made him look different as well. I can't tell you how many people have viewed our wedding picture with disbelief. Jet-black hair flowing beautifully...

Based on what we can learn from history, most men in Egypt were bald. After all, bald is beautiful, right? They also probably wore heavy make-up to accent their eyes and wore things that would identify their position of authority. In Canaan, as we will learn later, men were hairy and bearded. That would later set them apart from the Egyptians. The final reason they did not recognize Joseph was that they expected to find him in some gutter somewhere—not standing before them in a throne room. These are all reasons they did not know who he was.

⁹ And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, “You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land.” ¹⁰ They said to him, “No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food.” ¹¹ We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies.”

Joseph might have been thinking, “Honest men? Baloney! I'd love to hear what you told my dad when you got home after you threw me in that pit and then sold me into slavery.”

¹² He said to them, “No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see.” ¹³ And they said, “We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father [truth], and one is no more [lie].”

They just told this Egyptian leader that their other brother was dead. Well, Joseph is 100% sure that's not true.

¹⁴ But Joseph said to them, “It is as I said to you. You are spies. ¹⁵ By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶ Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.”

¹⁷ And he put them all together in custody for three days.

One of two things was possible. It could be that Joseph is a vengeful, bitter man, thinking, “I'm going to get a pound of flesh out of my brothers,” although the text says nothing about this and in fact, he later treats them very generously. Or else he wants to give his brothers a sample of some of the pain they had inflicted on him.

When my son Noah was five or six years old, whenever we went into a store he would wander. I would tell him, “Stay with me,” but he would still wander. I knew I needed to teach my son a lesson, because he would not listen to me. One day we were in a store, and as usual he disregarded me and wandered off. So I decided to let him go, but I followed him without his knowing it. As he made it to the other side of the store, I could tell he was full of bliss. “This is great. I'm my own man, doing my own shopping—loving this!” I left him alone for 15 or 20 minutes. But eventually something went off in his young mind. As he looked around, his freedom turned to fear. He started walking faster. No, Mom and Dad weren't there. He started to run here and there, looking up and down the aisles.

Meanwhile, I was wondering what the security cameras were revealing about me, ducking out of the way where he couldn't see me. Then something happened. Noah stopped in the middle of the aisle. His head dropped and he started to cry. "I'm lost. I don't know where Mom and Dad are. This isn't fun anymore. Someone help me." My first impulse was to let him off the hook. But I left him crying there for about a minute. "I'm scared. I'm lost."

Then I came out and said, "Son, where have you been?" "I wanted to go see the toys. I know Mom and you didn't want me to, but I wanted to do it." "Where did you go?" I said, "You left us. But I want you to know, I was watching you the entire time." "No, you weren't. You didn't know where I went." So I told him all the places he had been and explained why I had done this. You know something? Noah never wandered off again. He had briefly tasted what it could have been like.

This involves being put in others' footsteps.

Joseph is going to give his brothers a little sample of what he had experienced. In his commentary on Joseph's life, F.B. Meyer says we should notice that Joseph calls them spies when they come into Egypt. Years earlier, back in Canaan, the brothers had become angry because Joseph would give their father bad reports about them. As he was coming to Dothan, they called him a spy and were determined to stop him. That's the first similarity.

Second, they treated him harshly and now he treats them harshly as well.

Third, now he puts them into a pit, even as they had once done to him. Meyer goes so far as to say he believes the three days the brothers were in custody reflect the time he thinks Joseph was in that pit. There was certainly a parallel between the brothers' treatment of Joseph and now his treatment of them, and it served to stimulate their guilty consciences. After 20 years of suppressing their guilt, as Scripture describes it, their consciences were seared.

When we experience some of the same treatment that we once did to others, it will stir up feelings we have avoided. As I watch my boys engage with their school classmates, I have been brought to great conviction regarding how I used to treat my own boyhood friends and enemies. When my youngest, Luke, has been heartbroken by his older brothers' harsh treatment, I am reminded of how my own brother Joel felt when Chris and I were harsh with him.

You see, when we ourselves receive harsh treatment, we remember how we hurt others. And no doubt their minds are going back, asking themselves, "How could we have been so hard on our brother?" And might I add, they are experiencing only a small part of what Joseph endured—and it's breaking their hearts. God puts us in the footsteps of others to bring us to conviction ourselves.

2. The Divine Detour uses time to soften our hearts.

Consider what Joseph doesn't do. He doesn't say right away, "Hey, guys, it's me. I'm Joseph. And you guys have been very bad." Just as Joseph takes his time, God also uses time to soften our hearts. In 2 Peter 3:9, Peter tells the New Testament church, "*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*"

God allows time so that we might come to our senses regarding our sin and see our need to repent. And the gears of God's mill grind slowly. For some of us, it's taken years to see our need for salvation. For some of us, it has taken years to see the wrong we've done in others' lives. For Joseph's brothers, those gears of God's grinding mill have taken 20 years to awaken their conscience. For 20 years they've watched their father weep over the loss of their brother. Twenty birthdays were missed to commemorate Joseph's life. And I wonder, when they would talk about Joseph around the table, if the eyes of the brothers darted to one another to see if someone might break. Would someone's guilt finally be too much to bear? I wonder how many threats amongst the brothers took place: "Don't you dare ever tell our dad. Don't break. Keep the secret."

Twenty years. But what would that 20 years produce? We know what three days did. God's time allows us to do three things.

Time allows us to think.

Verse 17 in our text tells us what's going on: "*He put them all together in custody for three days.*" Three days in prison gives a person time to think. I remember one time as a teenager when I got in trouble with the law. I called my dad and said, "Dad, I've been arrested." My dad responded, "Who's this?" I said, "Dad, it's your son." He said, "How many phone calls did they let you have?" I said, "One." He responded, "You wasted it on the wrong guy," then hung up.

I sat in a cell for 18 hours. It gave me time to think. My mom finally threatened to divorce my dad if he didn't come and pick me up, God bless her. So he came. But I had lots of time to think.

And in that cell those brothers had time to think. "We've been accused of a crime we didn't commit." Hint, hint. "We were treated harshly, even though we were innocent." Hint, hint. "Now we've been thrown into a pit, screaming for our lives." I wonder if, when they were grabbed, they didn't utter the same words Joseph did. "Wait! What are you guys doing? We're innocent. We've done nothing wrong. Don't throw us into prison. Let us go home." Those words must have echoed in their ears from Joseph's own mouth 20 years earlier, and they began to think.

As I was growing up, when I would do wrong my parents sent me to my room to think about what I had done. God does that as well, doesn't He? He puts problems and trials in our lives, and we start thinking, "Why is this happening? Why has this bad circumstance come into my life? Is it because of something I've done? Have I offended God? Have I angered God?" It makes us think.

Time allows us to talk.

Thinking always leads to talking. In verses 21–24, the brother's thinking moves to conversation.

²¹ Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us." ²² And Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood."

"Why are we here?" Answer: "We're here because God is paying us back for the sin against Joseph. We're guilty of his blood." They begin to confess sins from 20 years ago. You think it was in their hearts and minds? You bet. That guilty conscience had been sitting there. They've tried to suppress it, but now the prodding of Joseph brought their guilt up, like a spiritual heartburn. There was no way to suppress it now. So they start talking. "Surely this is why we're dealing with this. We've never dealt with our sin, and now it's coming back to haunt us."

That's what God does in our lives. His convicting Spirit causes us to think, "Why am I going away from God and His Word?" And then we start talking. "Surely these issues in my life are the result of my sin."

Time allows us to tremble.

Let's look at verses 26–28: "*Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed.*" He releases them. "*And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place...*" So they're somewhere between Egypt and Canaan. One of them goes to feed his donkey, and the money he had taken to pay Joseph for the food is found in the grain. "*He said to his brothers, 'My money has been put back; here it is in the mouth of my sack!' At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, 'What is this that God has done to us?'"*

For the first time, they speak of God. "God is at work. God is doing all of this. God has brought forth this famine. God has brought us before the prime minister of Egypt. God has caused this prime minister to treat us in a harsh way, thinking we are things that we aren't. God has used the prime minister to take us into custody. And now God has caused one of our brothers to be left in Egypt." Remember, we read earlier that they bind Simeon in front of the other brothers (42:18–25).

This is powerful. For the second time in their lives, they're going to go home to their father one brother short. They're going to have to tell Jacob, "Simeon's still in Egypt." Are they going to lie about it—or will they tell the truth? We learn that they tell the truth. But they finally realize through all of these patterns, God is at work. I want you to realize God is like a hound dog on them right now. He's sniffing them out. Everywhere they try to run from Him, He is there. And they finally realize, "God is doing something. He's changing us. We should have been put to death. But now we've got this money in our pockets—what are we to do?" At this point, the brothers should not be filled with fear and dread. Instead, they know exactly what they should do.

Listen, you will never be brought to repentance unless you see the hand of God moving in your life. Some of us have experienced that. If you're a child of God, at some point you have said, "God is at work."

3. The Divine Detour uses gracious treatment to show us the way to repentance.

When I reach this part of the story, I'm struck by the realization that Joseph could have done whatever he wanted to his brothers. Why didn't he just kill them?

Humanly speaking, we might expect him to speak to them in Hebrew, "I'm Joseph, your brother. You wronged the wrong dude. Kill them." If he wanted some sport, he might have said, "I'm your brother Joseph, and now it's time to pay the piper. Take them off into slavery. And then when you're done using them as slaves, put them in prison for a while. Make them feel what I felt."

But Joseph doesn't do that, does he? Joseph lets them taste a little bit of what he experienced. I don't want to tell too much of what happens, but later in the story they're going to come back with Benjamin, and they're going to see that Simeon was treated well and was fed well.

Remember, these brothers were hardened criminals. Earlier they had killed all the men in an entire city, taking their wives and children as trophies of war. These were men who were willing to kill their own flesh and blood. But after spending three days in an Egyptian prison, they were confessing everything. Three days. Not years. Three days. Nobody can stand under the microscope of God and live to tell of it. Three days, and they were confessing.

God's grace means we don't get what we deserve.

What does Joseph do? He gives them a little taste of his suffering, he sends them on their way, and then he gives them more than they deserve. First, he gives them food. He packs their grain sacks with all the food they need, and he gives it to them free of charge. As they'll learn when they get home, all the money they had brought with them to buy the food was put back in their sacks. They deserve death, but instead he gives them the food they need for life

That paints a picture of what my God does for me. I'm a sinner, hostile toward God, rebellious and insolent, a hater of God. In my decisions to sin I'm shaking my fist at God. God could say, "Enough is enough, Badal. You're a dead man," and He could consign me to the everlasting torment of hell.

But is that what He does? No, my friends. "For God so loved the world that He gave..." (John 3:16). And what did He give? Not just food. Not just my money back. He gave His one and only Son. I deserve hell, but God gives me heaven. And let me tell you something: I'm not the only one in this place that He has done this for. You and I deserve hell, but God is giving us heaven. He gives us what we do not deserve.

Every morning when we awake and experience the sunshine, we should remember that it is God Who gives the sun and rain to the righteous and the unrighteous. He gives joy and love and peace and tranquility to both the righteous and the unrighteous. He gives us all these years to live and enjoy His creation, to enjoy relationships with one another. He gives sinners what we do not deserve—life instead of death.

God's grace sets us on a course toward confession.

In verse 28, the brothers realize that God is at work. They know He is moving to bring them to a certain point: confession. "God is doing this. God knows our sin. So we need to tell our sin." They confess it in verse 21: *"In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us."*

Some of you are fighting against the Spirit of God, and you're wondering why God is against you. You're wondering why everything is a closed door instead of an open path. It's because God has put Himself between you and your future. He's saying, "You need to confess your sin, so I can prove that I am faithful and just to forgive you" (1 John 1:9).

How does God bring us to a place of confession? I want to remind you: God does not do it by condemning us. *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him"* (John 3:17). There's an old hymn that speaks this truth to us. When John Newton, the sinner of sinners, penned the words of "Amazing Grace," he said, "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear..." Does that make sense? Do we ever question the words we sing—or do we just sing them? "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear..."

God's grace teaches me to fear? You bet. Because as sinners, our consciences tell us we're guilty. When God lavishes His love and grace on us, we have to ask, "How can a holy God Who can't look at sin show such grace and mercy? I can't live with it. It's killing me. How can God be so gracious when I'm so sinful?" But then I remember Romans 2:4: *"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?"* God has given us His

Son, Jesus Christ, and we have the burning awareness in our conscience that God chose to bankrupt heaven for sinners like you and me.

God's grace leads us to life.

This forces us to ask ourselves, "How then can I live a life that is an affront to a holy God?" Our conscience is awakened. "How can God be so gracious? How can God be so kind?" Think of the kindness of Joseph. His brothers are leaving, and they must have been incredibly shaken by their experience in Egypt. Yet he has been so gracious to them.

I could have missed this if it were not for God revealing these things in my study. Notice verse 18. It's an important verse. *"On the third day Joseph said to them, 'Do this and you will live.'" They don't have to be fearful for their lives. He goes on in verse 20, "So your words will be verified, and you shall not die." Joseph has given them their roadmap. "If you obey me, you will live and not die. Do what I say, and all will go well with you." He even says, "For I fear God."*

This is another reminder to them that God is at work. God wants them to confess their past sins, and then in the present they must choose to obey the will of God. If they do these things, they will live. I was awestruck when I realized that's exactly what God commands us to do as well. Confess your past sins. And in the present, commit yourself—out of a spirit of repentance—that you will do the will and work of your God in heaven Who has saved you.

Joseph, a picture of Christ, points to us and says, "If you want to live—if you want abundance in life—follow Me, not yourself. If you do these things, you will live and not die." The Bible tells us, in Jesus' own words, "Do you want to live and not die? Do you want to experience heaven and not hell? Do you want abundance and not despair? Then do the will of My Father Who is in heaven. Do it and you will live."

You see, Genesis 42 is a wonderful story of how reconciliation is beginning in the life of Joseph's brothers, because God is moving in their hearts to take them to the right place. We don't know just yet if they're going to say yes or no to it. We don't want to get too far into the story now—you've got to come back next week. But it's a reminder that we've got a decision to make.

God in His infinite love and mercy has allowed you and me to go our own way, to experience all the fun that comes with our human freedom (like my son Noah in that store). But we find ourselves lost. At some point in our lives we find ourselves broken and messed up, with our world turned upside down. We don't know what to do. And in that moment of despair, God could have given us everything we deserved—but He didn't. He gave His Son Jesus, Who came and took care of our penalty, giving us what we needed so we would be able to confess our sins. He then tells us, "Because you have confessed and repented of your past sins, you will no longer go that way, but instead you will do what I call you to do. Now walk in this way, not turning to the left or the right. And when you do, you will experience My love and grace, and you will experience good and not harm."

The question is not: Will Joseph's brothers obey? The real question is: Will you obey? God is working in your heart, and if you've never confessed your sin to Him, He's asking today, "Will you confess your sin? Will you make the decision to follow Me instead of going your own way?" If you have never trusted Christ as your Savior, the Bible says today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). Will you make that decision? Will you determine to confess and obey? Or will you continue to live in such a way that God's vise will grow tighter and tighter, squeezing you more and more?

God's grace is offered today. Will you believe? If you don't fully understand what that means or if you want more clarity, we want to talk with you more. You can stop and talk with me. I had someone in first service come up and say, "This is all new to me. Help me understand this." While that person still isn't quite ready, the vise is getting tighter and tighter. And she said, "I'll be back." I said, "Make that decision before it's too late. There may not be a tomorrow."

So come and talk with me, or with someone at the Welcome Center. Talk to the person who's sitting next to you. Don't make the decision to walk away from this to think about it later, because God is speaking to you today. I pray that people will come to the place where Christ can save their lives, so they can experience the freedom from guilt, and from the sorrow and pain they've brought upon others because of their sin.