



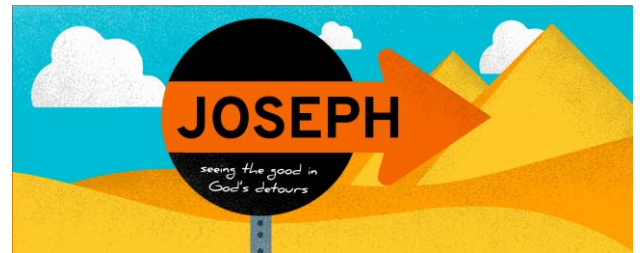
VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Joseph: Seeing the Good in God's Detours

Part 8: Real Repentance

Steve Lombardo | November 20, 2016 | Genesis 44



"Are you truly sorry, or are you just sorry you got caught?" said every parent to every child they've ever had. Repentance is doing a "180." You're going one way, then something happens, or something stirs your mind, or you get in trouble and get caught—but you repent of that and go the other way. That is our definition of repentance.

The question is: are you repentant because you feel bad about the punishment and the consequences of your choices, or are you truly repentant because you realize how wrong your actions are? Are you determined to change them and not do them again?

The year was 1990. Our family lived in a suburb of Minneapolis-St. Paul. The snow had fallen, just like it did there this past week. The moon was out. The nights were bright in Minnesota. I was spending the night at a friend's house. It was a little bit after midnight and we had this idea that we should go and ding-dong-ditch people in the neighborhood. Do you guys know what ding-dong-ditching is? It's when you ring the doorbell and then run away. It's a really fun thing. But no—young people here—I'm not endorsing it.

So we went out and did it, and then came back—and got another idea. Why don't we take some eggs from the refrigerator and throw them at houses? Now this is really a bad activity, but we did, and then went back into the house. Then we thought, "Why don't we go out, since we had such fun the first two times, and ding-dong-ditch again?" So we did.

My buddy, Darin, was going to ding-dong-ditch a house. I remember being across the street, hiding behind a bush, and I watched him sneak up to the house, doing a funny little dance. But just before he hit the doorbell, the door ripped open and I saw two giant hands come out, grab him and pull him inside. I froze. I didn't know what to do so I tore off running back to his house and went inside.

I was thinking, "Darin is dead. What's going to happen?" I crawled in bed and pretty soon the phone rang. It kept ringing and ringing. Then all of a sudden the doorbell rang and I heard people come inside. Then Darin came downstairs into the room where I'm pretending to be asleep. And he said, "Get up. We're going to court." We were in seventh grade!

I got up and saw a policeman there. He was talking to Darin and his parents; then he took me out to his car. I got in the front seat, but he said, "No. In the back seat." So I got in the back seat. We drove to my house—a short drive—and pulled into the driveway. I'll never forget. The light was on and my dad was standing in the entrance, looking out the window. Uh oh!

The policeman and I walked into the house and went upstairs. He sat down to talk with me and my parents. My parents were so disappointed that I did that. I remember grieving. I was scared about the punishment, but that wasn't really what hurt. What hurt was I knew the wrong I had done and that it had grieved everybody around me—including God.

So I went to bed that night and Dad woke me up early the next morning. We went over to the house we had egged and I washed it. I don't know where Darin was; I guess he was sleeping in. Maybe he wasn't repentant. We came back home and I remember thinking about the trouble I was in. I even cried about it—not because of the punishment, but because of my sin.

In our study of Joseph's life we've come to Genesis 44. The brothers who had persecuted Joseph, who had intended to kill him but instead sold him into slavery, have now come back to him to get more food during the famine. Joseph puts his brothers to a test to see if they're really repentant.

Let's review. Joseph's father was Jacob, Jacob's father was Isaac, and Isaac's father was Abraham. He lived around 1900 B.C., before the time of King David and the nation of Israel. He was alive before Moses led the nation of Israel out of Egypt. He lived during the 12th dynasty of Egypt, and Sesostris II was probably the Pharaoh at that time.

Joseph had 11 brothers who did not like him because he was their father's favorite. This was demonstrated by the gift he was given: a coat of many colors. Joseph's life took a different trajectory after his brothers sold him into slavery. He experienced great success, yet he was also incarcerated.

When he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, he was given great authority over Egypt, including being put in charge of the distribution of food during the years of famine. At this point in the story, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to get food for their families. They did not recognize Joseph, but he recognized them.

1. The story: Joseph tests his brothers

So Joseph decided to put them to the test, to see if they were still the same guys who wanted him killed over 20 years before—or had they grown up? Had they forgotten about him and their sin toward him? Would they act the same way toward another brother, as we'll see in today's story?

So let us begin reading Genesis 44:

¹ Then he commanded the steward of his house, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack, ² and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph told him.

Last week we learned that the brothers did get grain in Egypt, but Joseph put their money back in their sacks. He had also asked them to leave one of the brothers in Egypt, and had also requested that they bring their youngest brother, Benjamin, when they returned to Egypt. So Simeon was kept as collateral to insure that they would return.

The rest of the brothers went back home, but eventually they ran out of food. So they told their father, Jacob, that they had to bring Benjamin back with them. Jacob didn't like that idea, but he allowed Benjamin—who was Joseph's full brother—to go along with them. And again Joseph put their money back in their bags, but this time he put his silver cup into Benjamin's sack.

³ As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. ⁴ They had gone only a short distance from the city. Now Joseph said to his steward, "Up, follow after the men, and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good?' ⁵ Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he practices divination? You have done evil in doing this."

⁶ When he overtook them, he spoke to them these words. ⁷ 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." ¹⁰ He said, "Let it be as you say: he who is found with it shall be my servant, and the rest of you shall be innocent."

¹¹ Then each man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. ¹² And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. ¹³ Then they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

¹⁴ When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground. ¹⁵ Joseph said to them, "What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination?" 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."

2. The signs of real repentance

As we're talking about repentance, I will be challenging you to examine yourself to see if you've repented of your sins before God. But here we see signs of real repentance in Joseph's brothers.

The brothers tear their clothes and return to the city – 44:13

First, verse 13 tells us the brothers *"tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city"* where Joseph was. Tearing one's clothes was a sign of heartfelt grief and remorse. While appearances of remorse are not positive proof of genuine repentance, still grief and a true hatred of sin ought to include this type of reaction to sin. Do you hate your sin? Are there times when you even weep over your sin?

The brothers returned to the city, even though Joseph's steward told them that only the man who had stolen the cup needed to go back. When they were first overtaken and accused of taking the cup, they said, "How can you accuse us? How can you speak such things?" They promised, *"Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we also will be my lord's servants."* In other words, "Whoever has it—he's dead, and then we're all going to serve Joseph."

The steward changed the terms: *"Let it be as you say: he who is found with it shall be my servant, and the rest of you shall be innocent."* The brothers could have taken the easy way out. They could have said, "Fine. Then take Benjamin. He's the servant, and we're gone." That's essentially what they did with Joseph when they got rid of him. Now they could have gotten rid of the other favorite son of Jacob.

This was the first phase of the test of Joseph's brothers. Had they acted only in self-interest, they would have renounced Benjamin as a thief and then departed for home. But these are not the same men who had done this to Joseph 22 years earlier. They were really repenting and bearing the fruit of real repentance.

The brothers throw themselves to the ground – 44:14

"When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground." They prostrate themselves before him. They are no longer seeking justice as they had done before when they thought themselves to be innocent—but now they can only throw themselves on Joseph's mercy. They've been broken and humbled. They now know they are sinful and guilty.

Real repentance demonstrates a deep humility and a surrender of one's own pride and rationalizations. They could have rationalized it: "How did that cup get in there? Let's figure out how that happened. We know we're not guilty. Benjamin couldn't have taken it." But no. They throw themselves on the mercy of Joseph.

Listen now to Judah, who is speaking on behalf of the brothers:

¹⁷ But [Joseph] 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." 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.”

The brothers, through Judah, confess their sin to Joseph – 44:16

Judah, representing all the brothers, acknowledges their sin before Joseph and before God. He says, “*God has found out the guilt of your servants.*” It’s not just the guilt of the cup. They realize they are guilty men. They realize they can’t do to Benjamin what they had done to Joseph. Their secret sin has come back to haunt them. This is the uncovering of their sin.

This is the judgment from God, Who had sovereignly orchestrated all of the events leading up to this point—and Judah knows he is guilty before God and he confesses it. He doesn’t blame Joseph. He doesn’t blame Benjamin. He doesn’t blame the famine. Rather, he takes upon himself the guilt that God has uncovered, and he faces it head on.

Do you blame shift? Is it ever your fault?

Judah is humble, transparent and responsible for Benjamin’s welfare – 44:18–32

The last sign of genuine repentance is Judah’s humility and transparency, along with his willingness to take full responsibility for Benjamin’s well-being. He admits that they had done wrong and that God had seen their sin. They accept their guilt. They also know their father will die if Benjamin does not return to him. So Judah begs Joseph, “Take me and let the rest go.”

His speech, as well as his sacrificial offer, shows a spirit of self-giving, gentleness and confession. This is strong evidence that God’s grace has been working in his heart. He is a very different man from what he used to be. His father’s life is important. His relationship with his father and with his brothers is important.

In Judah we see a picture of One Who is to come—the Messiah, Jesus. Isn’t it interesting that we’ve seen how Joseph’s life reflects Jesus. Jesus is the greater Joseph. But in this chapter, Jesus is also the greater Judah. In fact, Jesus is born out of the tribe of Judah. He is called “The Lion of the tribe of Judah.” And here Judah is the one who is sacrificially offering himself as a substitute for his brother.

Turn to Revelation 5. We don’t usually go from Genesis 44 to Revelation, but I want us to see where this phrase is used. In Revelation 5 we’re given an awesome glimpse into the throne room of heaven. The Apostle John is taken to see these things that are yet to come.

Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

God Almighty is on the throne, holding a scroll sealed with seven seals. In it was written the will of God, the purposes and plans of God. It contained the salvation of God—and nobody could open it. No one could make it happen. No one could bring about forgiveness. No one could bring about justice or conquer evil. The scroll remained closed—and John wept, because all hope was gone.

And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain. And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

The Lion of the tribe of Judah! John looks and it’s a Lamb. Jesus is our sacrifice—Jesus, coming right from the throne, the Lion of Judah, the Lamb of God. He takes your sin and my sin on the cross because He loves us, if we will repent, if we will turn from our way to His way—the way of the cross where He shed His blood for your sin and for mine. Judah is a picture of Jesus.

So back to our story. This was more than enough for Joseph. He now sees real repentance in his brothers, especially in Judah. Not only can he forgive them, but he can now be reconciled to them, as we'll see in the next few weeks. But in our chapter he doesn't yet reveal who he is.

Consider how Joseph recreates the conditions that had happened in his own life in such a way that the brothers had every opportunity to do the exact thing to Benjamin that they had done to him. But instead of that, they repent. Judah's emotional appeal does not change Joseph's heart, but it reveals that Judah's heart has been changed. This means Joseph can now reveal his identity, because of their genuine repentance. They bear the fruit of repentance.

It's one thing to say, "I repent," or even to feel remorseful. It's another thing to bear the fruit of true repentance. Regretting your sins and the consequences of those sins in your life is not enough. That sorrow for sin must turn to a hatred of sin and a desire to turn from it, and a dependence upon God for the forgiveness of your sin and for the freedom you will then receive from sin's power.

3. Sin, salvation and self-examination

So when you repent—is it real? Have you repented of your sin and of your self-rule? Have you given yourself over to the Ruler of all that is? Have you submitted to the Lord? Our third point this morning looks at sin, salvation and self-examination.

Repentance is a necessary element in the salvation of a person. It is not a work whereby we earn our salvation from God; rather, it is descriptive of what happens to a person when they come to saving faith. C.S. Lewis said, "Repentance is not something God demands of you before He will take you back. It is simply what going back to Him is like."

But here's the problem, and it's a huge problem. I've been praying this week for you as you hear this. Two billion people on our planet claim to be Christians. Right around 50% of Americans claim to be born-again followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. But now listen to Jesus' words in Matthew 7:13-14: *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."*

So who's correct? Are the numbers correct—or is Jesus correct? That would mean, then, that in our church there are people who think they're on their way to heaven when they're actually on the broad road that leads to destruction. There are people in this church who have prayed a prayer and think they're all good with God, but who have never repented of their sin. Village Bible Church? We've got a great church. Are the numbers lying, or is Jesus lying?

Let me give you three evidences of real repentance so you will examine yourself to see if you're on the way that leads to everlasting life. The Scriptures give us great security as believers. It's such a good thing that we can have assurance that our lives are in God's hands, Who loves us and gave Himself for us. There's a security that comes with that.

But the Scriptures are also filled with lots of warnings, aren't they? I don't want to not heed the warnings. I would rather warn, warn, warn you—so you're sure where you stand before God. Here are three signs of repentance.

An intellectual understanding that sin is wrong

First, you acknowledge that your sin is a transgression against God. You have an intellectual understanding that sin is wrong and is an offense to God. You know that sin is missing the mark. The mark is perfection. The mark is Jesus. But we each turn to our own way. So we know we are sinners, that *"none is righteous, no, not one....for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:10, 23). There is an intellectual understanding that sin is wrong.

In his first letter to the Corinthian church, back in the first century, the Apostle Paul tells them about all the things they've gotten wrong. There is a lot that is messed up in their church: divisions, sexual immorality, idolatry. He just gives it to them. They have an intellectual understanding that their sin is wrong.

Is there sexual immorality in the church today? Is there idolatry in the church today? Are there divisions in the church today? The first evidence of real repentance is that we acknowledge these things as sin and that we have an intellectual understanding of our sin.

A heartfelt sorrow for your sin

You must have a heartfelt sorrow for and hatred of your sin in light of the cross, leading you to renounce it. In Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth, he talks about his first letter. He says in 2 Corinthians 7:8-10:

For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

He first wrote to them, blasting them for the sin that was taking place—and they became saddened by it. They experienced godly sorrow which led to repentance. So Paul was thankful that God brought them through that.

Repentance is not just regret that leads to death. Our prisons are filled with people who are very remorseful. They're sorry they got caught. They regret that they now have to rot in jail. But unless God turns that sorrow into godly sorrow that leads to repentance, it's all for naught.

Do you have a heartfelt sorrow over your sin, acknowledging that sin is an affront to God Almighty? So many times in the church today we want to quickly tell people how good they are and how much God loves them. God does love them. He loves us—but not because of our righteousness or goodness. No, you're far worse than you think you are. Your sin is an affront to God Almighty, Who is perfect in His holiness, in His justice and in His righteousness. You can never measure up to Him.

Turning from your sin and following Christ

You have heartfelt sorrow, then you make a decision of the will to forsake your sin, trusting and obeying Christ instead. Paul was happy with the Corinthians because their sorrow that was so great led to their repentance.

Remember that repentance means turning a "180" and going the other way. That's what happens in salvation. You intellectually acknowledge your sin. You know it's sin. Then you have heartfelt sorrow for it because it's an affront to God. In that moment, because of God's grace and only by His work, you turn and say, "I'm going to go God's way." It doesn't mean you won't ever sin again. It doesn't mean you won't ever struggle again. You might struggle with the same sin for years. But the trajectory of your life now is changed. You're heading onward and upward as a new creation in Christ Jesus as you turn to Him in faith.

As a believer, Jesus is not just your "get out of hell free" pass. He's much more than that. You don't follow Jesus to be like your parents or to appease your wife. You don't ask Jesus into your heart to get blessed and receive His blessings. No, you realize that your sin is an affront to God, and you're going to turn and go His way, because His way is the only way. Jesus said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6).

He's not there blocking the way—He's there inviting you to come to Him. Have you repented and placed your faith and trust in Christ? Maybe you have repented in the past; you're a believer, a follower of Christ. But today you realize you need to come back to Him. You started to go your own way, but need to return to Him today.

Maybe you've never come to faith through repentance. This can be your day. You can make all of heaven rejoice as you turn to Christ by faith.

There are three evidences of real repentance: intellectual understanding, heartfelt sorrow, and turning from your sin to follow Christ. What a great and glorious thing it would be if you would genuinely repent today!

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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