

Three Steps Forward

- Genesis 43
- Solomon wrote, “Before destruction a man’s heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.” (Prov. 18:12) The wonderful truth is this: that verse can refer to the same person by the grace of God. Paul was on the road to destruction as a haughty Christian-hater and persecutor until he met Christ on the road to Damascus. He was humbled then and in many ways after that and is now honored as one of our greatest brothers in Christ. Humility comes before honor. We will see a glimpse of that kind of transformation today in Joseph’s brothers. As much as the ten brothers have shown themselves to be haughty and selfish, we begin to see a renewing of their minds in this story. Joseph, you remember, began his secret test of the brothers in chapter 42 when he sent them back with their money restored in their bags. And...when he sent them back without Simeon, whom he kept in custody with the strict understanding that they would not see Simeon again unless and until they returned to Egypt with their youngest brother. Benjamin.
- Let’s look at this passage today under three main points, which are the character qualities we see beginning to develop in the ten brothers: Responsibility, Humility, and Gratitude.
- **Responsibility (verses 1-15)**
- When the scene opens, the family has run out of grain. The father says to his sons, “Go again, buy a little food.” No mention of bringing Simeon back home. Israel didn’t even say, “Oh yeah, and what’s that kid’s name who is still down there in Egypt? Starts with an S...” No! He just sees the cupboards are bare again and he has 9 sons sitting around doing nothing. This is where Judah steps up and eventually succeeds where Reuben had failed. He says, “We’ve been warned!” Remember, he says to his father, the man told us that we would not see his face again until we brought our youngest brother to Egypt. The man said that, and he’s the man in charge of the grain! If we want grain, we have to take Benjamin to Egypt. We will not go back there without Benjamin.” Israel complains that they should not have even told the man they had another brother, and the argument continues.
- Judah then steps up as a man of character. He looks more like the man from whose tribe the Christ will one day come when he says he will take care of Benjamin. *Send him with me*, he says, and that way we all will live and not die, and I pledge, I promise, that his safety will be on my head. If he is harmed in any way, I will bear the blame forever. If you are a teenager, answer me this. What’s something teenagers have to learn to take in order to be mature? It’s a big word that starts with an R. Right! Responsibility. Before you can take responsibility for others, you have to learn to take responsibility for yourself. What can get in the way of that? Laziness. Pride. Jealousy. Parents. Huh? Yes, even parents can get in the way. Parents, what do you continue to do for your teenagers, and even your children, that by now they should be doing for themselves? Responsibility is a powerful thing. When accepted, it often leads to diligence, time management, wisdom, and maturity.
- Israel agrees to let Benjamin, his now favorite son, go to Egypt with the others. But he does two things that are both wise and important. First, he tells them to take back a gift of some of the fruits of the land and double the money for grain. The money that was returned the first time in their sacks, and the money for more grain. Second, he prays a blessing over them. “May God Almighty (El Shaddai!) grant you mercy before this man.” He entrusted them to God’s care. And I love the second part of his prayer. “May he send back your other brother (*what was his name again?*), and Benjamin.” Oh, Israel! When he resigns himself to the possibility that he may never see Benjamin again he says with a heavy sigh, “If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.” Bless his heart, Israel is still thinking more about himself and his own troubles than he should be. That leads us to...
- **Humility (verses 16-32)**
- When the brothers are lined up in Egypt, waiting to see Joseph, he sees them first and notices that they have Benjamin with them. Joseph seizes the opportunity to meet his youngest brother and to

examine the others again so he orders up a nice lunch for all of them. The brothers automatically assume the worst when they are led to Joseph's house, and fear they will be assaulted, pressed into servitude and, maybe worst of all, have their donkeys stolen? Not sure why donkeys are part of the equation, except maybe that's their ride and it would be a really long walk back to dad's house. But it is an interesting parallel, their fear of Joseph's possible actions against them compared to what they actually did to him: They assaulted him, sold him into servitude, and he had no way to get back home.

- But this is where we see the humility that has been growing in them. They go together to speak to the steward of Joseph's house, call him lord, and explain how they found the money when they got back home and they brought it back plus money for more food and they had no idea how it even got there! What was humble about this? They took the first step at making things right. They told the truth! They did not even try to make up a story that sounded better than what really happened. Honesty carries its own rewards. I remember taking my kids to Carowinds years ago, and one of them found a \$100 bill there. He was so excited and asked if he could keep it. I told him that first we needed to go talk to someone in the office. I asked the lady there what one should do who found money laying on the ground in the park. Do you know what she said? "Well, if you found any \$100 bills, there's a family here from Florida, on vacation. And for whatever reason, the dad was carrying nine \$100 bills in his pocket, and they all fell out during a ride!" You know what we did? We ran back to that ride and started looking for the others! No, we gave the lady the bill and told her where we found it. As we walked away, I said to my son, "I know it's disappointing that you didn't get to keep that money. But we did the right thing. And that's worth more than money." He nodded, and I think he understood. Proverbs 22:1 says, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold."
- That's basically what the steward said to the brothers when they told him about the money. "Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you." In other words, you have found favor with God, and that is something worth much more than money, or food, or anything else. How true that was, and how little did the brothers understand it. It was still hidden from them how much they were being blessed by God in Egypt. They thought they were just coming for food, but God was growing their character!
- We see their humility again on display as they bow to Joseph and offer him their gifts from Canaan. Joseph asked if their father was still alive and they said yes and bowed to Joseph again! When Joseph saw Benjamin, he asked them if this was their youngest brother, and said to him, "God be gracious to you, my son!" He couldn't contain his emotions at that point and had to find a place to weep.
- When the meal was served, the seating arrangements were almost comical. Joseph is sitting by himself because, well, because he is the Vice Regent of Egypt, the Governor over all the land. He probably wanted to sit with his brothers, but why couldn't he do that? Because they were Hebrews, and Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews because it was an abomination, and they had no idea he was also a Hebrew and a former slave. But why couldn't Egyptians eat with Hebrews? Because they believed eating with Hebrews would defile their food. Isn't it ironic that not many years later, it would be the Hebrews, the Jews, who refused to eat with Gentiles? Not because the food would become unclean but because the Gentiles were unclean and eating with them would make a Jew unclean. Jesus came along and changed that, didn't he? Good for us! The meal is set, and that leads us to...
- **Gratitude (verses 33-34)**
- Why did the brothers look at one another in amazement? Can any 9-12 year-old tell us what amazed the brothers about the way they were seated at the table? Yes, according to their birth order! So Reuben was first and Benjamin was last. And they were amazed because how could the Governor or any of his people know that? What else might have amazed them? Yes, Benjamin had five times as much food on his plate as his brothers. Instead of a Bo Box, Benjamin got a super tailgate box!! "Twelve pieces of perfectly seasoned chicken, three picnic fixin's, six made-from-scratch biscuits and

a half-gallon of Legendary Iced Tea.” How would he eat all that? And why would he be given five times as much as his older brothers? Remember, there has been a famine in the world for two years, and these brothers haven’t eaten well in a long time. Why is Benjamin given 5 times as much as they?

- I believe this is at the same time a test and a demonstration. First it was a test to see if the older brothers would be jealous of little Benjamin who is obviously favored here. Favoritism has reared its head once again. They had been subjected to it once before, and it ended badly. Remember, they sold the favored brother into slavery and then lied to their father that he had been killed by a wild beast. All because of envy and jealousy. Would that envy rear its head again? Joseph wanted to see. Second, I believe this was also a demonstration of Joseph’s love for his younger brother. The only brother he had from Rachel, and the only brother who did not participate in selling him as a slave!
- In the face of extreme favoritism this time, the older brothers seem to pass the test. We are told that “they drank and were merry with him.” Instead of grumbling about what they did not have, they were grateful for what they had been given. Instead of hating Benjamin for having more than they, they ate and drank and were content. Gratitude is a powerful thing.
- Two golfers stepped up to the first tee on the St. Andrews course in Westchester County, New York, one of the oldest courses in America. The older man was kind and played a thoughtful, deliberate game. The younger man was full of pride and impatience. On the first hole he lost his tee shot in the tall grass, shot another one, and finished the hole with an eight. On the second tee he began to lecture his caddie: "Keep your eye peeled. I'm not here to do your job for you!" After that, every bad shot was the caddie's fault. At the end of the first nine holes, the young man was so enraged that he fired the caddie and carried his own bag. "That caddie doesn't like me," he said to his companion, "and I don't like him. He ruined my game. Thank God he's gone!"
- After several holes had been played without a word, the older player broke the silence: "Several years ago a little kid from Yonkers came up here and was taken on as a caddie. He was a wonderfully sweet-natured boy; quick-witted, willing, and had a nose for golf. Everybody liked him. His name was William; he had a club foot. But that didn't affect his quality as a caddie. It was a pleasure to go out with him. A certain famous doctor, a member of the club, became interested in William and took him South on a long trip. When William returned, he went back to caddying. The doctor, however, had to give up golf shortly after that because of his health. He died a few months later. One morning I was playing golf and William carried my bag. Spring was running riot all over Westchester County and the fields and hedges were alive with blossoms. William gathered flowers until he had quite a bouquet. 'Who's the girl, William?' I asked. 'I don't have girlfriend, sir,' he said sheepishly. 'They're for my friend, the doctor--twice a week I take flowers to his grave.' "You see," the man went on, "the doctor took him down South that winter and operated on his foot. He made the boy whole again. And William never forgot the doctor's act of kindness." *"Now that's a caddie worth having,"* the younger man said. *"What ever happened to William?"* The older man said, "He carried your bag today for the first nine holes."
- William sounds like a young man who was living out the truth of 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Want to know the will of God for your life? That’s a great place to start.
- We see a growing sense of responsibility, humility, and gratitude in Joseph’s older brothers, and they have passed the tests Joseph set up for them. So far. More to come!
- Prayer
- Greeting!