

# (Genesis) 59 - Joseph's Brethren and the Disciplines of Life

by S. Lewis Johnson

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*God's discipline is a means of teaching us spiritual truths, preparing us for faith in Christ, and bringing us to repentance and conversion.*

**Duration:** 51:22

**Scripture:** Psalm 119:67, Isaiah 40:20, Matthew 6:33, John 3:16, Acts 2:38, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 2:8-9

**Topics:** "Disciplines Of Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the story of Joseph and his brothers in the land of Canaan. Joseph, who had been sold into slavery, has risen to power in Egypt and is now testing his brothers to see if they have truly changed. Through various trials and tests, Joseph is trying to bring them to conviction and repentance for their past sins. The preacher emphasizes the importance of the little experiences in our daily lives, such as how we treat our family and friends, as these are the things that truly matter in our faith. The sermon also highlights the prolonged discipline that God puts his people through in order to build a strong foundation of grace and repentance.

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## Transcript

Will you turn with me this morning to Genesis chapter 43. Genesis chapter 43. This is the continuation of the story of Joseph.

Now the famine was severe in the land. So it came about when they had finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, go back, buy us a little food. Judah spoke to him, however, saying, the man solemnly warned us, you shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.

If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. But if you do 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.

Then Israel said, why did you treat me so badly by telling the man whether you still had another brother? But they said the man questioned particularly about us and our relatives saying, is your father still alive? Have you another brother? So we answered his questions. Could we possibly know that he would say, bring your brother down? And Judah said to his father Israel, send the lad with me and we will arise and

go that we may live and not die, we as well as you and our little ones here and our little ones. I myself will be sure to for him.

You may hold me responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame before you forever. For if we had not delayed, surely by now we could have returned twice.

Then their father Israel said to them, you'll notice incidentally that Jacob now is being called Israel. Israel is the name that stresses the fact that he was a fighter for God. But in contrary to the experience of Abraham, whose name was changed from Abraham from Abram to Abraham, and Moses thereafter generally used the term Abraham, Jacob's name was changed, but most of the time it has been still Jacob until this chapter.

Then their father Israel said to them, if it must be so, then do this. Take some of the best products of the land in your bags and carry down to the man as a present, a little balm and a little honey, aromatic gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds, and take double the money in your hand and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was a mistake.

Take your brother also and arise, return to the man. And may God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man that he may release to you your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.

So the men took the present and they took double the money in their hand and Benjamin. Then they arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph. When Joseph saw Benjamin with him, he said to his house steward, bring the men into the house and slay an animal and make ready for the men are to dine with me at noon.

So the man did as Joseph said and brought the men to Joseph's house. Now the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house and they said, it is because of the money that was returned in our sacks the first time that we are being brought in that he may seek occasion against us and fall upon us and take us for slaves with our donkeys. So they came near to Joseph's house steward and spoke to him at the entrance of the house and said, oh my Lord, we indeed came down the first time to buy food.

And it came about when we came to the lodging place that we opened our sacks and behold, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full. So we have brought it back in our hand. We have also brought down other money in our hand to buy food.

And we do not know who put our money in our sacks. And he said, be at ease, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks.

I had your money. Then he brought Simeon out to them. Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house and gave them water and they washed their feet and he gave their donkeys fodder.

So they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon, for they had heard that they were to eat a meal there. When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present, which was in their hand and bowed to the ground before him. Then he asked them about their welfare and said, is your old father well? Of whom you spoke, is he still alive? You know, preachers occasionally take texts out of their context and preach from them.

Sometimes they preach truth. And in spite of the fact that they've not used very good hermeneutics and exegetical skills, nevertheless the Lord blesses because the truth is proclaimed. But it's not a good idea to take a text out of its context as a general rule.

There was a preacher who once filled a pulpit and he preached. And when he finished, he asked the other preacher who was there that morning what he thought of his sermon. He said, my dear brother, if your text had had the smallpox, your sermon never could have caught it.

Which was his way of saying, of course, that the sermon had no connection with the text. Yesterday I was reading in a book by J. C. Ryle and he was commenting on that same thing. And there was a preacher who gave out a text, he that is so impoverished that he hath no ablation, chooseth unto him a tree that will not rot.

Isaiah chapter 40 verse 20. Here he said, as a man by nature impoverished and undone, he has nothing to offer in order to make satisfaction for his soul. What ought he to do? Well, the text says he ought to choose a tree.

So he ought to choose a tree which cannot rot, even the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and proceeded to preach on the atonement. Well, this particular text here, verse 27, I know you're wondering what's the connection between the context of what I'm saying and this particular passage. Now, this particular passage says, you'll notice in verse 27, your old father of whom you spoke, is he still alive? Well, now the authorized version renders that, is your father, well, the old man of whom you speak, is he yet alive? Well, there was a preacher, that same preacher, and so he took the text once, he decided he wanted to speak on indwelling sin, and so he took this text, the old man of whom you speak, is he yet alive? But as you can see, this doesn't have anything to do with indwelling sin.

Now verse 28, that's what Mr. Rouse said. Now verse 28, and they said, your servant our father is well, he is still alive, and they bowed down in homage. As he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, he said, is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me? And he said, may God be gracious to you, my son.

And Joseph hurried out, for he was deeply stirred over his brother, and he sought a place to weep, and he entered his chamber and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out, and he controlled himself and said, serve the meal. So they served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves.

Because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians. Now they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in astonishment.

Evidently Joseph had seated those brothers in the order of their birth, and they were amazed at the fact that this was done, since they didn't realize he knew anything about them. And he took portions to them from his own table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they feasted and drank freely with him.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Our subject this morning is Joseph's brethren and the disciplines of life. Behind the scenes of the chapter that is before us today is the continuing lesson of the mingling together of the purposes of God and his providential government.

Far in the background is God's purpose of removing Israel from the evils of Canaan to Egypt as a unified people. Evidently the Lord thought that it might be worthwhile for Israel and his sons and their families to be moved to Egypt in order to preserve them from the evils of the Canaanites. And so all of the events that are transpiring before us as we read these chapters are designed ultimately to be part of that program by which Jacob is to be brought down into the land of Egypt.

Now there is a problem, however, with this plan, and that is that the brothers are guilty of a very grievous sin, and being guilty of a very grievous sin there cannot be any unity in that people. And if there is no unity in the family of God as they move down into Egypt, then it would not be long before the disintegrating forces of sin should lead to the assimilation of Israel with the Egyptians. And so God evidently is very concerned about in that problem that exists in Jacob and his sons, and it is that sin that they have committed against Joseph.

Now I say that sin is a disintegrating force, it is a dividing force, it is a separating force, and God does not overlook sin. The prophet Isaiah, speaking for the Lord God, says your iniquities have separated between you and the Lord God. Sin is a separating force, and for that reason it is a disintegrating force.

And because God cannot overlook sin, he must have conviction, repentance, and conversion. And therefore in the prime minister of Egypt's life, Joseph, we have all of these events transpiring together with the lives of Jacob and his sons toward this one goal, that there may be conviction of sin and repentance and true conversion, and the brothers may be welded together into a unified body, doing works meet for repentance. So what we have then in these chapters, which may seem to be nothing more than history, is history from a religious viewpoint, or Hausgeschichte, the history of salvation, as biblical scholars term it.

We have the testing of Jacob and the brethren. We have the revelation soon in chapters 44 and 45 of who Joseph is, and the response that that brings with Jacob and the sons, the development of Jacob and the sons in the spiritual life. And it is brought about by the discipline of the famine which God has brought over the whole of that part of the world.

Jacob's learning. He's learning some of the things that God intends for all of us to learn, and finally in this chapter we read that he submits to the will of God. He says, For me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.

And so he seems to be learning submission to the will of God. But it costs, or it is necessary for God to send affliction. I remember a text that the prophet Hosea writes.

He puts the words of God down on, he speaks as the mouthpiece of God, and these words of God in the light of the apostasy of the nation are these. I will go away and return to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face. And then the prophet adds for the Lord God in their affliction they will earnestly seek me.

And then a text that I've quoted to you before, Psalm 119 and verse 67. Before I was afflicted, the psalmist says, I went astray, but now I keep thy word. So it is necessary for God to send affliction.

Many of the afflictions that we experience as believers are designed to teach us spiritual truths. And then the afflictions that we have when we are not believers are often designed to prepare us for the exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is true in their affliction they will earnestly seek my face.

Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep thy word. The sufferings that we have to undergo are often the means by which God brings us to faith and trust in him, either as a non-believer or as a believer. So we have here then a striking manifestation of God's action and discipline, and we have a striking manifestation of the nature of the human character.

The writer of the Epistle of the Hebrews has a great section on discipline of the servants and saints in Hebrews chapter 12. We find some of that illustrated here in the life of Joseph. And we have the discipline of the non-believers, if we may call the brethren of Joseph non-believers at this time in the experiences that they must undergo.

So there are these lessons. There are other lessons in this chapter too. There is the recovery and victory of faith as Griffith Thomas puts it, and we see that in Jacob.

There is the moral power of the fear of judgment. You notice that over and over again the brethren of Joseph fall into fear as a result of the things that happen to them. Why should we fear? Why should we ever fear? Well, in the first place from the divine standpoint, fear is a blessing of grace.

It's one of the ways in which God gets our attention. And so the conviction that was deep down in their hearts over their sin is brought to the surface, and the response that they have to their disobedience is fear, because they sense somehow that they must appear before a God who will set things straight ultimately. That's why we have the fear of death, all of us naturally.

We are fearful of death because it's appointed unto men once to die after this the judgment. And so men do fear. They don't like to hear about divine things.

They don't rejoice when Sunday comes around to go to hear the Word of God. It's because of our sin nature and our sins that have separated us from the Lord God. Fear then is one of those blessings from God.

In this sense, the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. And did you notice too as you read through these chapters the naturalness and unconsciousness of moral testing? The brothers are largely ignorant of what's happening, but even in the daily experiences of life that seem rather insignificant, great issues are at stake. I'm sure that afterwards as the full import of what was happening to them came home to them, they must have discussed how even such things as a famine, as that incarceration in Egypt, as the fact that they had a young brother who was also the daughter of Rachel.

These are the little things of life, but it is in the little things of life, the hidden things of life that God often tests us. It's not in the big things. We tend to think it's in the big things.

It's not in the big things. It's in the little things. It's in the little ordinary experiences of life, the things that only you and your family know about that are often the means by which God judges our character.

Gideon and the men with him were distinguished by the way they drank water. Just a simple little thing like that marked the 300 out from the rest of the thousands that had originally been with Gideon. And it was 300 who drank the water in a certain way that made the difference.

So those little experiences of our lives that we think are so unimportant, those experiences in our families, how we treat our husband or how we treat our wife or how we treat our children or how we treat our friends or how we treat our neighbors or how we reflect the faith that we profess on Sunday in our daily life. These

are the things that really count, not the big things. And that's an important lesson for us to learn, all of us.

Now remember the history. Jacob and the brothers are in the land of Canaan. Joseph has been sold into slavery.

He there has come into contact with Pharaoh, interpreted his dreams, and he has learned as the Spirit has taught him that there would be a time of prosperity and then a time of famine. Well, the prosperity has come and Joseph has made it possible for Egypt to have food, but other places do not. And so finally Jacob sent to the land of Egypt and came into the presence of Joseph by the providence of God.

Joseph, guided by the Lord God it would seem, retained Simeon, put him in prison, in incarceration, because he wanted to ultimately have Benjamin and finally Jacob. And he sent them back, and as they went back they found their money which they had paid for the grain in their sacks of grain. And they feared because they thought, they must have thought that we stole that money.

And now finally they need food again and Jacob speaks and says that they are to go back down to Egypt. And Judah speaks, because Judah has now evidently become the spokesman. And Judah speaks and he says, well father, remember the man said that we were not to come unless we brought our youngest brother.

And he said there was if we came without the youngest brother we would not even see his face. And so if you send our brother with us we will go, but if you don't send our brother with us, well we're not going. And so the inevitable go back my son for food is debated by Judah who's become the spokesman for the brothers.

Evidently some of the others have been disqualified by the actions or by the fact that they were separated like Simeon. And Judah now emerges as a leader among the brethren. Joseph is, Jacob is still thinking about himself though and so he says, why did you treat me so badly by telling the man whether you still had another brother.

It's very difficult for Jacob to speak from the standpoint of the divine program. He's thinking of himself and so his reaction shows an inordinate self-concern. But it was like a dagger in his heart to think about Benjamin going.

Benjamin the youngest son, the son of Rachel. And furthermore he didn't trust those brothers. But Judah argues and as a result of his very, his very impressive and his very concerned argument that he would be sure to for him finally Jacob yields.

And we read in the 11th verse, then said their father Israel to them, if it must be so then do this. And acting very much as he did when he was about to meet Esau, he asks them to take a gift back, a present. And after he has suggested that, he then in the 14th verse says, and may God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man.

Now that's an interesting statement because he appeals to the God of the Abrahamic covenant, may God Almighty. Evidently Jacob thought that he could bind up their safety with the purpose of God. And so he calls upon the God of the Abrahamic covenant to grant them compassion as they go back down to Egypt.

And notice this was on Jacob's part an expression of faith. Not simply that he used the term God Almighty, but it's clear that he thinks that this God, God Almighty, the God of the Abrahamic covenant is a God who

is effective in Egypt as well as in the land of Canaan. It was the custom in those days as I've mentioned before to you to have tribal deities, local deities.

And so there would be the God of a particular place, like the God of Bethel, or the God of Jerusalem, or the God of Shechem. And these gods were thought to have authority and power in a very limited locale. So the Egyptians had their gods too.

But it's clear that Jacob regards the God of the Abrahamic covenant as a God who has authority and power not only in the land of Canaan, but also in the land of Egypt. And so that's an expression of his understanding of the greatness of the God of Israel. But the last words of verse 14 I think are the most interesting of Jacob's words.

He says, as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved. Now that's not a complaint, but it is a word of grief spoken in the spirit of faith. The old Jacob, the old supplanter, is now on the way to becoming Israel a fighter with God.

Now Luther has a very pithy way of saying things, and he was once speaking about 1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 7, which says, casting all your care upon him because he careth for you. And Luther said, oh that we could learn this sort of casting. But he who does not will remain a man downcast, outcast, cast off, cast behind, cast away.

And Jacob is learning to cast his care upon the Lord. As for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved. There is the note of submission there.

There's something ironic about this though. Here is a man, he is the patriarch, he's had the experiences of Abraham and Isaac, he's known some great experiences with the Lord God, and here he is weeping over the fact that he is going to lose Benjamin, and that he's lost Joseph, and that he's lost Simeon. And he's weeping as it turns out at the very things that are ultimately the means of his great blessing.

Mary Magdalene wept over the empty tomb. Isn't that an amazing thing? Before the empty tomb, she was weeping. Now of all the things before which you should not have wept, it was the empty tomb.

Because the empty tomb is the proclamation of the resurrection and of the living Savior. But in the presence of the empty tomb, which is the token of victory, the token of resurrection, the token that he is alive, she's weeping. But that's characteristic of human beings, is it not? We do not look at things from the divine standpoint.

Soon, standing behind her, someone will say, Mary, Rabboni. She will reply. And how much is contained in those few words? And how often is that not true, my dear Christian friends? You and I have experiences, and we think, why has the Lord allowed this to happen? It's amazing to me, really, it's amazing how often we say things like this in the midst of the experiences that we have.

Why has this happened to me? But our whys are answered by the Word of God. They ultimately are designed to be part of the plan and program of God. He works all things together according to the counsel of his own will.

If we ask why, we must look for answers in the Word of God. He also works in such a way that all things work together for the ultimate good of those who are called according to his purpose, to those who love him. And so, in the case of Jacob, he is weeping over the fact that he's losing Benjamin, and all the

time, there's Joseph.

He's not dead, he's alive. He's the prime minister in Egypt. He furthermore has access to all of the things that Jacob and the sons need.

And furthermore, he is the key figure in bringing them into Egypt to preserve them from the evil of the land in which they are at the present time. Everything is working for Jacob's good, and he's speaking about being bereaved. So characteristic of us.

We look at the empty tomb and we weep, but in faith we see it really is the sign of victory. And I'd like to suggest to you, my Christian friends, that no matter what happens to you, and the ultimate things do happen to us, we do lose our loved ones. They do suddenly die.

They do suddenly pass from our presence into the presence of the Lord. We don't really have to ask, why has this happened to me? In the tone of a complaint, we may want to be exercised by it and ask, now what has God to teach me from this? But ultimately we know if we have truly been brought by the Holy Spirit to a trust in him, this is part of his plan and program for me. And now by the grace of God, I'd like to adjust to it and respond to it in faith.

While the brothers make their trip down to Egypt, it's remarkable the things that Joseph does. I do not know that there's anything in these chapters that lets me know that Joseph actually knew what was happening, but his actions are so guided by the Holy Spirit that it almost seems as if he knows precisely what is taking place. His actions are actions that are dictated by inspiration, by the work of God.

He's not acting, he's not trifling with human feelings, he's not following the dictates of his own personal desires, but you sense as you see what he does when he accuses them of being spies and puts them in prison and then puts only one in prison and sends them back. And then in a moment in the next chapter when he will have put in the sack of Benjamin that cup in order that he may have Benjamin back there, that he may get Jacob down into Egypt. It's almost as if he knows precisely what's happening.

He knows that God wants to bring conviction and repentance and conversion to these brothers and union to the whole of the family. All of his actions seem to be guided by the Holy Spirit, and yet it is not said that that is what is transpiring. It's almost as if it's supernatural.

Well, when they got there, they met Joseph in the grain market. He was there. No doubt he had left instructions, if those Jews ever come back here, you let me know, because I want to be down there in that marketplace when they're there.

And so he was there, and he saw them. And he said to his steward, now bring them home to my house. And when they heard that they were to go to his house, they immediately feared.

We read in verse 18, now the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house. The steward, and they immediately begin to explain how it happened that they had money in their sacks, and the steward makes it all sound as if it's supernatural. He said, don't worry about that.

I had your money. But he doesn't tell them how the money got in the sacks. It's almost as if he says, it's a supernatural thing how it happened.

He left it that way. And incidentally, the steward has evidently been taught about the God of the Hebrews, because he says, your God and the God of your father, probably taught by Joseph. And whether he had a true faith in him or not, it does not say, but he at least recognized him.

But the fear of the brothers is a reflection of the fear that I was talking about a moment ago. It's that which began in the Garden of Eden when man sinned, and when the Lord God came down in the garden at the end of the day in order to fellowship with Adam and Eve, they hid themselves. That fear that comes when the word of the cross is preached in a congregation, and there's someone sitting in the congregation who has never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a fear deep down in the heart. And incidentally, if you're here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the scriptures are unfolded, and the scriptures are properly proclaimed as those that tell us that we are sinners and headed for a Christless eternity because we are guilty and under divine condemnation, there is a fear that grips the human heart. We don't like to deal with the fact that our lives are not under the sovereign authority of the word of God.

And so we return, we reject, we flee, we try to keep away from the hearing of the word of God. We don't even want to be in the presence of those who are believers if we can possibly help it. So they were fearful.

And over and over again, that fear appears. It's the fear of the lost man. It's the fear of you, if you're lost in this congregation.

And it's the fear of you, you Christian, if it so happens that there is some sin in your life that is harming the communion that you ought to be having with the Lord God. Well they finally come into Joseph's presence at his house, and twice it is stated they bowed to the ground. Notice the 26th verse.

They bowed to the ground before him, and the verse 28, they said, your servant our father is well, he's still alive, and they bowed down in homage. That's the unconscious fulfillment of the dreams that Joseph had so long ago when he was just a lad. Back in chapter 37 we read, for behold, as Joseph was telling his dream, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up, and also stood erect, and behold, your sheaves gathered round and bowed down to my sheaf.

Then his brother said to him, are you actually going to reign over us, or are you really going to rule over us? So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words, and so he told them another dream. And this time even Jacob objected to the dream. What's this dream that you've had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground? Twice over, and already before they've bowed themselves down to Joseph.

Now in the conversation, this little interview that follows, there are several very touching things. We read in verse 29, as he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, and notice Moses adds the words, his mother's son. What a touching thing that is, because Joseph and Benjamin were blood brothers.

The others were the sons of Jacob, but the sons of other mothers. Joseph was the son of Jacob and Rachel, and Benjamin was the son of Jacob and Rachel. As he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, he said, is this your youngest brother of whom you speak to me? And then turning to Benjamin, and evidently at this point there was a lump that was beginning to rise in his throat, because immediately he has to hurry out in order to keep from weeping in the presence of his brothers.

All he can get out is, may God be gracious to you, my son. And then the 30th verse says, and Joseph hurried out, for he was deeply stirred over his brother. I'd like for you to notice that word, deeply stirred.

That's a very stirring word, incidentally. That's the Hebrew word kamer. It's used in the Nephal stem in three places, the very same form.

And this very same form, nichmeru, is used in three significant places. One of the places is 1 Kings chapter 3 and verse 26. There Solomon is making that decision involving the son of the two women who had come to him.

They had evidently been sleeping together and they had each an infant. And during the night one of them rolled over and rolled over one of the children and it smothered to death. And so they were having a debate over the possession of the remaining son.

And finally they were brought before Solomon, the king, for his judgment. He listened to them and finally he said, divide the son then and give half to one and half to the other. And you'll remember the scripture says something like this, and the woman whose child the living, and the woman whose child was the living one, spoke to the king.

And she said to the king, oh my lord, give her the living child and by no means kill him. But the other said, he shall neither be mine nor yours, divide him. Then the king answered and said, give the first woman the living child and by no means kill him.

She is his mother. And they marveled at the wisdom of Solomon. But I omitted one little phrase or clause.

The text says, then the woman whose child was the living one spoke to the king for she was deeply stirred. I know there are lots of people that think the authorized version is out of date. In some ways it is.

But in some ways the renderings of the authorized version are still very touching, at least to me. I'm sorry, but I do not think deeply stirred says as much as the authorized version rendering says. The authorized version puts it very literally.

And it strictly says, her bowels yearned upon her son. There is hardly anything more expressive, it seems to me, of the ultimate devotion than a clause like that. Her bowels yearned upon that son.

It's the very same word that is found of Joseph's yearning over his brother Benjamin. And when we read here that he was deeply stirred, it's again his bowels grew warm and tender. For the word kamer means to grow warm and tender.

The most expressive, the most significant use of that verb, however, is in the eleventh chapter of the prophecy of Hosea. In a sense, this is the climax of that great book. It certainly, to my mind, is the greatest chapter in the book of Hosea.

It's the book, it's the chapter in which the love of God is set forth and the prophet speaking for the Lord God tells Israel how when Israel was a youth he loved him, how he sent prophets to them, how he taught Ephraim to walk, how he healed them, how he led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love. He describes all of the experiences that express love and affection. He was like a husband to Israel.

He was like a herdsman to Israel. And in addition, prophets were sent to them to seek to get them to turn from their apostasy. And finally, God calls out in a kind of puzzlement, how can I give you up, O Ephraim,

for righteousness and justice? It would seem demands that Israel be destroyed.

How can I give you up, Ephraim, the Lord God says? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admar, one of the cities destroyed when Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed? How can I treat you like Zebulim? And then God describes the feelings that he has for Israel. He says, my heart is turned within me, all my compassions are kindled, all my repentings are kindled together, and that's the word, deeply stirred, the very same word, the very same form in the Hebrew text that is used of Joseph's love for Benjamin. And so the word expresses the warmth, the tenderness, the deep emotion of the covenant keeping God for the nation Israel, the deep emotion of a mother for her own son, the deep emotion of a blood brother for a blood brother, and you can add also, my Christian friends, the deep emotion and the deep love of a husband for a wife.

That's the kind of affection that Joseph has for Benjamin. It's no wonder that he hastened out of the room, found his own room, and there wept. And after a time, he washed his face, got control of himself, and came out and said, serve the meal.

Well, the last few verses of the chapter describe the feast for Benjamin. You certainly learn something about the true greatness of Joseph. The tenderness, the pathos, the simplicity, the truthfulness, all of these things make for the greatness of a man, and Joseph is a great man.

You may find many things wrong with Joseph, but there is one thing that marks him out as great, and that's this sense of tenderness and responsiveness to Benjamin and to his brothers. Well, they sit at one table, and Joseph and the Egyptians at the other, because it wasn't a social segregation, it was a cultic segregation. To eat with the Hebrews was unclean, but they're astonished that Joseph is able to seat them in the order of their age, and that must have also created the uneasy sense of approaching judgment to them.

And all of this is designed, I say, by the Lord God to bring them to conviction and to repentance because of the sin that still is upon their conscience. When Joseph gives Benjamin five times as much of the food as he gives to the brothers, it also was not simply an expression of his love for Benjamin, but it also was designed to test them for jealousy. Do they feel toward Benjamin as they felt toward the other blood brother, Joseph? And he learns through this that there has been a change of character on the part of the brethren, for they sit around and they feast and drank freely and enjoyed the time together.

Well, I think, and I want to say just a few words in conclusion, we're impressed by the prolonged discipline that God put those men through. One might ask, why does he put those brothers through such a prolonged discipline? Well, you see, it was important for the future of Israel that these eleven brothers come to a true understanding of what it is to be saved, what it is to know repentance, what it is to have an experience of the grace of God. If you're going to build a building, you need a good foundation.

If you go down to the center of Dallas when a skyscraper is built, they don't just have a big, wide foundation, but they have one deep, many stories down, because if that building is to stand, it must have a deep foundation. And in spiritual things, that is true too. If God is going to use an individual in the service that he wishes, there must be a deep work of grace.

And that is what is transpiring. There are basically three reasons for the chastisements of God. One is retributive.

David experienced that. After his sin with Bathsheba, God said, the sword shall never depart from thine house. Then there is preventive chastisement, and Paul speaks about the thorn in the flesh, and he said God gave him the thorn in the flesh that he might not boast himself too much.

That is, to curb his pride. That's one of the reasons that we suffer the discipline of God too. But probably most often we suffer the discipline of God for purposes of education.

Job experienced that. He said he had heard of the God by the hearing of the ear, but now his eye seeth God. Wherefore, he repented in dust and ashes.

The psalmist speaking about the way in which God seems to treat the wicked. They are prosperous, they have a good life. And on the other hand, the saints are suffering, and unable to understand, went into the sanctuary of God and asked the Lord about it.

He said this was a great problem to him until he went in the sanctuary, and then he learned what God was really doing in the lives of individuals. And he learned, and after he learned, he speaks those wonderful words about the future that God has for those who have truly trusted him. Luther said, my temptations have been my masters in divinity.

There is a story about Paul Sangster, the son of a famous preacher, W.E. Sangster, which he tells about his father. His father went to visit a little girl in a hospital who was going blind, and evidently the doctors could do nothing for her. Mr. Sangster, Jessie said, that was her name, God's going to take my sight away.

For a little while, Sangster didn't answer, and then he said, don't let him, Jessie, give it to him. What do you mean, she said. Well, try to pray this prayer, he answered.

Father, if for any reason I must lose my sight, help me to give it to you. That's true submission to the will of God. One thing that we fail to remember is this.

God is very fair and loving and merciful in the chastisements that he sends to us. Now, our fathers are not always fair, but our heavenly father is always fair with us. I had many fights with my sisters in my childhood.

In fact, that's generally the way I remember my relationship to my two sisters. It was a battle. I was the oldest, and they were the next two, and they were always conspiring against me, so I thought.

My father, however, was usually very fair. I always got the blame. And sometimes I felt that he should have been a little stricter with my sisters, particularly, because I nourished a little resentment.

He loved, incidentally, to say if when he found out that I had done something displeasing, he loved to say, well, you just will have to miss your supper tonight. And they would often laugh when he would say that as I had to leave the room. Incidentally, that's the reason I was so slender when I left home.

I missed so many of those meals. But he was generally fair, and the Lord God is always merciful and good in the midst of our chastisements. They may seem very difficult, but we can trust him to be fair in them.

It's very easy to misinterpret the Lord's dealings with us, is it not? Even a Jacob, even a patriarch, misinterpreted what is happening. He thought that he was being punished, but God was disciplining him, educating him, bringing him to full maturity, and not only him, but his sons and also the nation Israel. He was learning in experience that God works all things together for good to those who love him, to those

who are the called according to his purpose.

That's something we can rely upon in all of the experiences of life. It illustrates the fact that one thing is truly necessary for fruitfulness in the Christian life, and that is genuine repentance and faith. Consciousness of sin is not enough.

Repentance involves not only consciousness of sin, but works meet for repentance. In the book of Acts we read, he, Christ, is the one whom God has exalted to his right hand as a prince and a savior to grant repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. If you are here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, many of the experiences through which you are being put, if you're one of God's elect, is to bring you to the place where you will acknowledge finally that you are lost and undone and only Christ can save you.

And he will, through the working of the Holy Spirit, give you repentance and faith. And the evidence, the definite, final evidence of your conversion is that you do works meet for repentance. And if you're here as a believer, and there is some sin that is hindering communion with the Lord God, the experiences of life are often disciplinary for you, designed to educate you and to bring you into communion with him.

And he will not rest, for he is a heavenly father who loves his children. He will not rest until even in affliction, he will bring you to obedience to his word. Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep thy word.

May God, if necessary, afflict us, that we keep his word. If you're here without Christ, come to him. Believe in the one who offered the atoning sacrifice and receive as a free gift everlasting life.

Let's stand for the benediction. Father, we are grateful to thee for the lessons that we learn from the word of God. Thou art truly a merciful father.

Thou art God almighty. Thou art the covenant-keeping God. And Lord, if there are some here who are still fighting, resisting, oh, by the grace found in Jesus Christ, bring them to the surrender that means faith in life.

For those of us, Lord, who know thee and who are so often rebellious, deliver us, oh God, from our rebellion. Give us responsiveness to the word of God and responsiveness to the experiences through which we pass. Enable us to be an influence for good and not a reproach to thy name.

May grace, mercy, and peace go with us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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