

THROUGH IT ALL: UNHEALTHY RESPONSES (42:36-43:15)

Murphy's Law says, "If anything can go wrong, it will." And that's often true. For example:

- If you wash your car on Saturday morning, it will rain that afternoon.
- Whichever line you get in, the other line always moves faster.
- When things are going well, something *will* go wrong.
- Just when you think it couldn't get any worse, it often does!

The bottom line is, life often doesn't work out the way we want. Unexpected trials, challenges, and changes are going to happen. And over time – without even realizing it – we develop some unhealthy responses when things don't go according to our plan and our timing.

That's what we'll look at tonight – unhealthy responses to life's trials and challenges and how we can make some course-correction in those areas.

But, as we pick up tonight, Joseph's brothers have made it back home after getting food from Egypt. And they tell their dad how the Prime Minister accused them of being spies, and how he will keep Simeon in prison until they bring their youngest brother Benjamin as proof that they were telling the truth. So, unless they bring Benjamin back to meet him, they won't be able to buy any more food and Simeon will remain in prison.

Now we come to Jacob's response to all these trials, challenges, and changes. And, as we focus on his response, we're going to see some of our own unhealthy tendencies when life doesn't go according to our plan and our timing...

1. We tend to respond in a negative way, rather than positive.

When a challenging situation hits you out of left field, does your mind typically jump to the worst-case scenario? Jacob did...

Genesis 42:36–38 *“And Jacob their father said to them, “You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me.”³⁷ Then Reuben said to his father, “Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put [Benjamin] in my hands, and I will bring him back to you.”³⁸ But he said, “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol.”*

As you can see, Jacob is a man who has trouble walking by faith even though he’s known the Lord for over a hundred years at this point. He wrestles constantly with a negative viewpoint.

But notice the missed opportunity: You see, Jacob is the Patriarch and leader of this huge family – 11 sons, all their wives, children, grand-children, and great-grandchildren. So, when his boys come back with this news, Jacob has the perfect opportunity to point his entire family toward God and His sovereignty plan. He could have said, “Okay family, this whole thing has blind-sided us and it looks pretty bleak, but we have to remember that God loves us and watches over us, so none of this is happening outside His plan. We can trust Him and that’s what we’re going to do.”

But Jacob doesn’t respond with that kind of faith; he responds with negativity – even though he had lots to be thankful for. After all...

- His sons were still alive (including Simeon).
- They had all the food they needed *at no charge*.
- All they had to do was take Benjamin back as proof that they were telling the truth, and the Prime Minister gave his word that Simeon would go free.

Yet, Jacob saw none of this as God’s goodness and provision. Instead, his mind jumped to the worst-case scenario. And his sons had learned the same tendency. Remember, they immediately expected the worst when they realized their money was returned in their bag.

NOW LET ME BE CLEAR: sometimes we *should* be fearful... when we’ve done something wrong.

Illustration: True story that happened several years ago at a KFC. A man and woman stopped to pick up dinner, and they took it to the park for a picnic. But when they opened the bag, they found more than chicken – there were bundles of money in the bag!

You see, the manager had been working in the back and he put all the day's proceeds into one bag, ready to go to the bank. But the woman working the counter grabbed the bag, thinking it was a ready-to-go order.

So, when the couple saw the money, drove back to the KFC and returned it. The manager was SO relieved because – best-case scenario – the lost money would have been replaced out of his salary. Worst-case scenario, he would've been fired.

And the manager was so impressed by the guy's honesty, he said, "Let me take a picture with ya'll and I'm going to post it on our corporate KFC page so the whole world can see that there are still honest people out there!"

But the guy quietly pulled the manager aside and said, "Please don't do that. I'm married and the woman I'm with is not my wife."

You see, sometimes you *should* be afraid when the money shows back up in your bag – when you've done something wrong! But for Jacob, this wasn't one of those times. Their money had been placed back in their bag, but they had done nothing wrong. It was the goodness and provision of God *through* Joseph.

But Jacob had taught his sons to respond in a negative way when they faced a trial or challenge. And then Jacob shows us a second unhealthy tendency...

2. We tend to view things in a horizontal way, rather than vertical.

Instead of immediately looking UP (vertically) to God, Jacob *overreacted* with a purely horizontal viewpoint. In **verse 36**, he immediately says, "Joseph is dead. Simeon is dead. Everything is against me!" When Jacob is blind-sided with a trial, his first response

is NOT to look up to see what God might be doing. Instead, he immediately looks in the mirror and feels sorry for himself – *“Everything is against me!”*

At this point, in **verse 37**, Reuben steps in and says, “Hey dad, I’ll make a deal with you. Let me take Benjamin back with us and if I don’t bring him back safe, you can kill both of *my* sons.” It’s a “worst-case” offer because that’s how his dad thinks.

But notice what Jacob says in **verse 38**... He said, “My son will *not* go with you, for his brother Joseph is dead, and Benjamin is the only son I have left.”

Is this not bizarre? He has 10 other sons, but he acts like they don’t even exist! He doesn’t say, “No, you can’t take *your* brother.” He says, No, you can’t take *my* son.” Can you imagine how that made the brothers feel? Jacob is once again sowing seeds of favoritism.

Life Lesson: It would be easy for us to sit here and say, “This dude is crazy. I would have trusted God in that situation.”

But would you really? Think back to your most recent major test or trial. Did you rest calmly in God’s sovereign care, or did you hit the panic button – jumping to the worst-case scenario?

For the record, my initial response is usually negative as well. But then my theology starts to kick in and I have to remind myself of God’s faithful track-record.

Now we move into chapter 43. At this point, weeks have passed (if not months) and Jacob is still trying to avoid sending Benjamin...

Genesis 43:1–5 *“Now the famine was severe in the land.”² And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, “Go again, buy us a little food.”³ But Judah said to him, “The man solemnly warned us, saying, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother [Benjamin] is with you.’⁴*

If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. ⁵ But if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.'"

Notice: Jacob never mentions Simeon – his son who is in prison! He really had resigned to the fact that Simeon was dead. He really did believe the worst had happened.

And when Judah tried to talk some sense into his dad, Jacob gets even *more* negative...

Genesis 43:6 "Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?"

He says, "Judah, why didn't you just lie when the Prime Minister asked if you had another brother? Why did you tell him the truth?"

Proverbs 12:22 "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight."

You see, Jacob was teaching his boys that it's ok to lie when your back is against the wall. BUT, he didn't realize that something had changed in the hearts of his 10 sons. As we saw last week, God had begun to soften their heard hearts, and repentance was taking root in their lives.

So, several of them joined in with Judah as they tried to convince their dad...

Genesis 43:7 "They replied, "The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother?' What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down'?"

They said, "Dad, we were simply telling the truth. How were we supposed to know that the Prime Minister of Egypt would want to meet Benjamin?" Then Judah made an offer to his dad...

Genesis 43:8–10 “And Judah said to Israel his father, “Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, ~~both we and you and also our little ones.~~⁹ I will be a pledge of his safety. ~~From my hand you shall require him.~~ If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.¹⁰ If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice.”

Judah said, “Dad, you *can’t* keep delaying and denying the reality of our situation. If we don’t go, we’re all going to starve to death. And by the way, if you would’ve let us go when we first asked, we could have gone and come back twice by now!”

So, Jacob reluctantly says yes. And his next response shows us a third unhealthy tendency when we face an unexpected trial or challenge...

3. We tend to trust our own schemes, rather than God’s plan.

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

Again, God never enters the equation for Jacob. He doesn’t pray. In fact, he never even mentions God. Instead, he turns immediately to his own schemes (his name means “deceiver” or schemer). He could immediately see several ways to *bribe* the Prime Minister, but he struggled to see God’s hand in the situation.

Life Lesson: When a trial hits you out of left field, does your mind turn to God, or do you immediately start plotting and planning your own solution? Do you stop and pray? Do you go to trusted mentors and ask for advice? Does your theology – your knowledge of truth –

kick in and remind you that God is in control, He can be trusted, and He must have a plan for this situation?

Finally, with all of his schemes exhausted, Jacob reluctantly trusts God with his son Benjamin...

Genesis 43:13–15 “Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man. ¹⁴ May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.” ¹⁵ So the men took this present, and they took double the money with them, and Benjamin. They arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.”

Jacob finally remembers God, and he even acknowledges that Simeon may still be alive. But then – out of habit – he jumps right back to the worst-case scenario. He says, “Go ahead and take Benjamin. If I never see him again then so be it.”

Wrap Up:

As we wrap up for tonight, let’s talk about some ways that we can break these bad habits:

- Responding in a *negative* way, instead of positive.
- Viewing things in a *horizontal* way, instead of vertical.
- Trusting our own *schemes*, rather than God’s plan.

So, let me give you three ways to make some course-correction:

- 1) **Recognize and admit any negative mentality.** So much of the cure is in the confession when we admit, “I have fallen into the habit of negative thinking. I *say* I trust God, but I really expect the worst-case scenario. I often feel like everything is *against* me, rather than truly believing that God is *for* me.”

- 2) **Force a vertical focus until it becomes your norm.** A negative habit will not lay down and die easily. It takes conscious effort to break a longstanding pattern. So, force a vertical focus:
- **Pray:** "God, what are You trying to show me in this?" I'm not sure what to do so please show me how You want me to respond."
 - **Remind yourself of the truth:** "Father, this didn't surprise You. You are in complete control, and You can be trusted. I know that You must have a plan for this situation, so help me to trust You."
 - **Seek advice from trusted mentors:** Ask the Lord to give you direction through His Word and through wise mentors.

You see, we develop a *bad* habit over time, and you can also develop a *good* habit over time. But you'll have to force a vertical focus until it becomes your normal habit.

- 3) **Rather than immediately turning to your own schemes, trust God's plan and timing.** Don't try to force your own solution. If God hasn't sent the right *answer*, the right *fix*, or the right *person* yet; wait on His timing. Don't get so frustrated when He doesn't work as quickly as you'd like. If you knew everything God knows, you would choose His exact plan and timing for your life!

Small Groups