

## Genesis, pt3: Joseph's Character, part 3: Discernment for Truth Genesis 42-43

**MPS** God makes wise and full of grace those who discern truth for gospel reconciliation to honor His name.

**OBJ** Every person can labor to discern truth for healthy, God-honoring relationships by guarding against Four Dangers.

**INTRO** I begin today by asking a very challenging question. **Are you ready?** (That's not the question.) Here it is: **Is there any relationship or situation in your life that has been left unreconciled?** The next two messages deal with forgiveness and reconciliation. Each of us will find ourselves somewhere in the midst of a similar situation. **Why?** Because the central work of sin is brokenness of relationship, first with God, and then with others, and the central message of the gospel is forgiveness and reconciliation. There is much for us to learn and apply in these chapters. My aim is in overview to provide some guiding principles that you can apply to your life, and hopefully, use for further study.

### **READ Genesis 42:1-11**

*When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" <sup>2</sup>And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." <sup>3</sup>So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. <sup>4</sup>But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. <sup>5</sup>Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.*

*<sup>6</sup>Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. <sup>7</sup>Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." <sup>8</sup>And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. <sup>9</sup>And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land." <sup>10</sup>They said to him, "No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. <sup>11</sup>We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies." **Genesis 42:1-11***

**Consider the looming head-on collision we are moving toward.** Jacob, concerned for his family's well-being, is forced by the famine to send his sons to Egypt to buy food. He is about to learn that his son, whom he thought was devoured by a wild beast, is alive. But even more, he will learn that his other sons are the ones who sold him into slavery and fabricated a lie to deceive their father. Those sons, who are about to be exposed in their lie and deception before their father, are about to stand before their younger brother in need of help. Finally, Joseph is about to be confronted by his brothers that sold him into slavery. There is no doubt, this new position had likely helped him forget many of the wrongs of the past. That is, until one day his brothers appear in front of him. In an instant, now almost fourteen years of suffering and injustices done against him come crashing back like a tidal wave of emotion. Any relief or reward is now threatened by their surprise appearance. Joseph was justified in Egypt, but the prior injustices done against him by his family were all past that he had been forced to deal with alone without any opportunity for reconciliation, until now.

**How does one proceed when confronted by such unresolved past and painful relationships? Do you ignore it and try to keep going?** "Ignore" is never an solution because it never works, but only buries hurt to continue its destruction. Maybe you gloat, showing how great you've done to those who harmed you. This is a terrible idea too, because it only returns evil for evil, and we are instructed not to do this, but to bless. <sup>1Peter3:9</sup> **Any response of self-pity or pride is harmful for all parties. The gospel compels us to greater love that begins by looking to Jesus, who became love for us, then laboring for reconciliation.**

**The Gospel is the power of God for salvation.** <sup>Rom1:16</sup> By the gospel, people are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, and empowered with the message and ministry of reconciliation. God's love set on us in Jesus compels us to be people of reconciliation. <sup>2Cor5:11-21</sup> This is no small matter but demands the deepest trust in the hardest aspects and relationships of life. But IF God has reconciled us to Himself, and He has, there is no wrong we suffer that the gospel cannot reconcile. **Christ-followers are compelled by God's love in Jesus Christ to labor for reconciliation.**



**TRANS** Reconciliation with God in salvation is our ultimate standard and model. But not all reconciliation in this world looks the same. Knowing what we are called to do by the gospel the question then becomes, “**how does a Christ-follower labor for reconciliation that honors God in all relationships?**” Lies enslave, deceive and destroy. Only truth can deliver, heal and restore from the destruction of lies. The first step toward reconciliation is discerning truth. We begin by remembering...

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**OBJ** Discerning truth means guarding against **Four Dangers** that always undermine God-honoring relationships.

**Jacob sends Joseph’s ten brothers to Egypt to buy grain.** Notice, the family still lives under the deception of the brother’s past sin. Jacob still lives in fear of what might happen to Benjamin because of what he thinks happened to Joseph.<sup>42:4</sup> When they appear before Joseph, they bow. Joseph recognized his brothers and remembered his dream, but they did not recognize him. He accuses them of being spies. Weird way to reconcile with the brothers, right, with an accusation? They deny it and tell him why they have come. Joseph has them thrown in prison.

**Danger #1. Pride over present position that prevents confronting the past.** 42:1-17

This first danger that threatens to undermine reconciliation addresses Joseph’s temptation. For fourteen years Joseph suffered great affliction because of his brothers, but he had attained a position of great privilege. Now he was proved right in his dream. And most of all, he had the power to revenge the wrong done to him. **Joseph is confronted by his past hurt and must decide how to proceed. What is he to do with his position in relation to his brothers?**

We can become so thankful to get past our past that we guard against any threat to avoid what we left behind. We may not gain a privileged position, be proved right or get power as Joseph did, but pride can create them in us to guard any threat or pain. Any amount of pride in advancement can cause one to think it’s not worth the risk to bother with reconciliation. But the ‘weight’ of hurt in us acts like a ‘millstone around our neck in the sea of life’, so that an unreconciled memory of the past can sink us, whether we are ever confronted by the situation or not. Faith in Jesus reminds us that our reconciliation to God means He wants to work reconciliation with other people. It may not be perfect in this life, as salvation is to God, but it can remove the stain of guilt, shame, hurt and bitterness that continues to hinder or harm us in this life. We will only later learn why Joseph did this, to get the truth from his brothers. But here we see the danger to let pride or pity cause us to guard our pain, instead of trusting God to discern truth and seek reconciliation.

Two phrases indicate that Joseph avoids this first danger to discern truth, he “*recognized his brothers*”, and “*remembered his dreams*”. That lingering memory of hurt and pain is likely the Holy Spirit inviting you to discern truth and pursue God’s healing. **Godly wisdom reminds us; God reconciled us to Him by truth and grace so we can discern truth to give grace for reconciliation with others.**

**TRANS** Joseph does not use his accusation to protect his position, but rather to discern their true intent.

**Danger #2. Taunt to Inflict (blame, suffering, harm, revenge) versus Test to Discern** 42:18f

**Joseph tests his brothers.** He decides to hold one of the brothers in custody while the others return to bring their younger brother to him. Knowing their father will not agree to this, it creates quite a tense discussion. The test exposes the lie and fear that’s ruled their family for the last thirteen years, that they have all lived with unresolved guilt from their sin.

In discussion they admit their guilt and wrong over what they did to Joseph. (.21) [One note: pay attention to the brothers named in the reconciliation process. This is important to understand the process.] Reuben speaks first, reminding that he warned against what they had done to Joseph, calling this a reckoning for his blood. Who, as far as they know, is dead. What they did not know is that Joseph understood them. And their words broke his heart. He binds Simeon before their eyes, displaying the seriousness of his words and actions. Joseph did not intend to harm, but to discern their intent and whether he could trust them. Another way we deduce this is by his blessing them with grain and their money being returned



to their sacks. But upon their discovery, even this blessing became a weight of guilt to them, not knowing why it had been done. [Guilt from sin resists even blessing, so that everything only heaps on more weight of condemnation and shame.](#)

**We should not overlook the value of Joseph's test for discernment.** He could have easily used this to taunt his brothers and heap on more guilt and shame. But by his reaction we know this is not his intent. He is testing them to discern the status of his family and their intent. They have proven by past actions that they are not worthy of trust. And as of yet have done nothing to prove otherwise. Joseph is in a position to take advantage of his brothers, but instead he gives them opportunity to prove the truth and build trust. His motives are revealed as pure, but he cannot shortcut reconciliation without proving his brother's intentions. In that moment when it is realized you have what some might consider "the upper hand", even when you are right, it is important that it not be used for personal gain but only to pursue reconciliation by discerning truth. [Testing to discern true intentions is important for trust, the only way reconciliation can be built on truth.](#)

**TRANS** Joseph's test was one of words. His test identifies, and averts, our third danger.

### **Danger #3. Trust based on shallow words versus truth.**

The brothers came to Egypt to buy food. The security of their lives were at risk from starvation. The words they offered formed the foundation for any trust Joseph could place in them. Therefore, he had to establish whether their words were true and honest or only shallow feelings based on fear. Fear makes a terrible relational foundation, always shifting by the situation and never settling or able to bring stability. Just because they said what they said did not mean that it reflected their true intent. After all, they had lived in a lie for many years now. And until he could verify, their words were not sufficient for trust. [Joseph's test to discern aimed at the truth of the brother's words, which is the only solid foundation for relationship.](#)

There is a [relationship principle](#) that we must all learn and apply: [the depth or extent of trust in a relationship should always be proportionate to the depth of knowledge \(truth verified\) that relationship is built upon.](#) The strength of any relationship is equal to the intimacy, deep knowledge rooted between persons, of that relationship. Trust extended based on shallow words makes one "naïve" and vulnerable to deception and damage. Trust built on truth builds strong relationships. Yes, there is always potential to be deceived in any relationship, as some are, which highlights the value of this principle. [Truth verified, and the person accountable, remains the only healthy way to build or reconcile a relationship.](#)

Joseph gave his brothers the benefit of the doubt, but not without holding them accountable to the only one he could trust, his father's words. This allowed them the opportunity to prove their words true, to right their lies from the past, and restore truth in the relationship to trust them. [Restored trust would become the bond for reconciliation between them.](#)

### **APPL Be careful that you do not build relationship by trust in shallow words; but discern truth for trust.**

Reconciliation to God in the gospel is by the One who IS Truth, Jesus Christ. God does not require "blind faith" but reveals truth for us to believe as the basis for our reconciliation to Him. <sup>John1:14;14:6</sup> **IF God reconciles by truth, how can we dare believe that we can accomplish the same on less than, shallow words that have to real meaning?** We begin by discerning truth because there is NO reconciliation without truth; truth of WHO God is (Holy & righteous), of who we are (sinful), of what God has done (loving redemption), and how we are to respond (believe, repent, confess and obey). [Joseph models for us that truth in relationships that produces reconciliation begins NOT by our determination, but by our discerning truth.](#)

We must guard against using shallow words to avoid hardship, inconvenience or difficulty that we don't want to deal with, only to act as if everything is okay, when it is not! This is what this danger is all about. When you refuse the necessity to discern truth, you precipitate harm by placing trust in words that cannot hold it. When you refuse the opportunity to verify truth you harm others by denying the opportunity for true reconciliation, thereby communicating either that God is not able, they are not worthy, or you are not willing. We cannot make everything okay in our own way. You cannot make others speak or act truthfully. You should never forsake anyone the opportunity for reconciliation because of hurt or wounds, but neither should you ever settle for shallow words that forsake truth. [Reconciliation to God comes only through truth. The Christ-follower's responsibility is to do all we can to discern for ourselves and offer the same to others.](#)



**TRANS** This leads us to Genesis 43. Joseph could have absolved their fear, but he did not have all the truth required to redeem the whole situation. This is where we must be careful not to “short-circuit the process. When grace is working, we must give it time to take its full effect.” James 1:4

#### **Danger #4. Forgiveness short-circuited by un-atoned forgetfulness.**

Food starts to run thin again and Jacob wants them to return to Egypt. But the brothers know that they cannot return without Benjamin. Here Judah gets involved and takes personal responsibility for Benjamin. This is another indication of grace working in the family. Jacob is still stubborn and ruled by fear. All are afraid, but they’re also getting hungry. What we see here is so common; people have to come to the end of themselves before they fully trust in God. **Any temporary solution offered will only shortcut the full atonement being worked out with false hope.**

The pressure of Joseph’s test holds a refining effect that forces the family to deal with their lies and deceit, though they do not yet know that is what’s taking place. Jacob relents and allows Benjamin to go with them. He packs on gifts and doubles their money. When they arrive back before Joseph, his test is paying off. He sees his younger brother, prepares a feast, brings Simeon out, tells them it was God who returned their money, and washes them for the feast. Joseph asks about Jacob. They tell him that he is still alive. This is important because Joseph’s second dream has not yet been fulfilled. Then we again see, the blessing Joseph bestows causes the brothers to be amazed. Guilt and fear still prevent their enjoyment of any blessing. When he serves the brothers, Benjamin receives a portion five times as great as the others, no doubt a reward that is greater because he bears no guilt. **Grace is working and blessing bestowed as truth is revealed.**

**There is so much to be learned in the working out of God’s grace at work in us.** Joseph’s test is the process for him to discern trustworthiness, and his brothers to come clean of their own guilt by getting honest in confession. And this is what occurs. This time of testing, the pressure and discomfort of it, is a time for truth to rise to the top from where it got buried so many years ago, without the charged emotions “falsely narrating” in the moment it occurred. **The process of discernment is beneficial for all because God, who is Truth, is always present when truth is discerned, and only truth brings the work of God to bear on the relationship.**

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**CLOSE** Discerning truth is never about whether you should or can forgive. God makes all forgiveness between people and in situations possible by the completed work on the cross. Joseph had already forgiven his brothers before they ever appeared in front of him. More on all this next week. **Discerning truth is about applying forgiveness to pursue reconciliation between people.** What we need to pause on today is this; **Have you fallen prey to any of these dangers in your life?**

