

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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Who are You?

Genesis 42:1-38

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There are three points to today's message:

- Joseph recognized his brothers.
- Joseph tested their character.
- Joseph heard their distress.

In our series on the life of Joseph, we've covered:

- Some of his family lineage.
- The sins that passed from one generation to the next, such as deception, jealousy, and extreme favoritism.
- We know that Joseph's brothers hated him and sold him into slavery.
- We saw how Joseph went to Egypt and was a trusted servant of Potiphar.
- Then we saw how Joseph avoided temptation and was thrown into jail.
- In jail, he met a baker and a cupbearer and interpreted their dreams.
- The baker was put to death by the king, but the cupbearer was let out of jail.
- Joseph hoped the cupbearer would remember him and help him get out of jail but he did not, at least not immediately, but he remembered Joseph when Pharaoh was troubled by a dream and his magicians could not interpret it.
- Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams and Pharaoh made him second in command over all of Egypt.

## **JOSEPH RECOGNIZED HIS BROTHERS**

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 42:1-13

*When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you just keep looking at each other?"<sup>2</sup> He continued, "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die."<sup>3</sup> Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt.<sup>4</sup> But*

*Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. <sup>5</sup> So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for there was famine in the land of Canaan also. <sup>6</sup> Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. <sup>7</sup> As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he asked. "From the land of Canaan," they replied, "to buy food." <sup>8</sup> Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. <sup>9</sup> Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected." <sup>10</sup> "No, my lord," they answered. "Your servants have come to buy food. <sup>11</sup> We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies." <sup>12</sup> "No!" he said to them. "You have come to see where our land is unprotected." <sup>13</sup> But they replied, "Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more."*

**EXPLANATION:** The famine did not just affect Egypt. The surrounding areas were also suffering from lack of water and therefore lack of crops. When Jacob heard that Egypt had grain to sell, he sent ten of his sons to make the journey and purchase the food. This journey would have taken anywhere from 4-7 days one way. About 20 years had passed since Joseph had seen his brothers or his brothers had seen him. Joseph was no longer a scrawny teenager. He was the Pharaoh's right-hand man. He was a grown man, dressed like an Egyptian, speaking like an Egyptian, in a position typically filled by an Egyptian. While his brothers may have aged, their general appearance would have been the same. Joseph had no problem recognizing them, but he asked them to identify themselves anyway.

**ILLUSTRATION:** There was a little boy who liked to watch the cartoon called Bob the Builder. In fact, he liked it so much that people started calling him Bob. He would reply, "I am not Bob. I am Mark." He knew who he was.

**APPLICATION:** Jacob's sons knew who they were. They not only knew their names. They also knew their identities. They knew they were sons of Jacob, and while they did not bring it up in this conversation, I guarantee they also knew the promises that God had passed on to their family through their great-grandfather Abraham and grandfather Isaac.

We live in a world where so many people have become confused over their own identities. It begs us to ask the question. Who do we claim to be? Let's see what happens next.

## **JOSEPH TESTED THEIR CHARACTER**

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 42:14-17

*Joseph said to them, "It is just as I told you: You are spies! <sup>15</sup> And this is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. <sup>16</sup> Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!" <sup>17</sup> And he put them all in custody for three days.*

**EXPLANATION:** Part of Joseph's job included vetting and negotiating with the foreigners who came to Egypt in hopes of purchasing grain. Anyone coming to the country, even under the pretense of purchasing grain, would have been examined carefully. The Egyptians had to be mindful of spies from enemy countries who might try to attack while they were weakened by the famine or who might try to rob them of their grain reserves. So, while it seems that Joseph is being unnecessarily harsh, he may have actually been applying the same interrogation techniques that he normally used with foreigners.

Despite Joseph's pretense, however, he knew his brothers well. He knew the men they claimed to be, but he also knew they had done wicked things. Still, he wanted to give them the benefit of the doubt. In verse 16, Joseph told them he wanted to see if they were telling the truth. Some versions say: "*to see if there is any truth in you.*" If you look at the Hebrew wordage here, you will find that the word translated "truth" also sometimes means "faithfulness" or "reliability". The word translated "in" can also sometimes mean "with" or "for."

Joseph was not trying to determine if the brothers were who they said they were. He was trying to determine if their hearts had changed since his last encounter with them. He wanted to know if they had become faithful, reliable men. He wanted to know not only if they were telling the truth but also if the Truth (capital T) was with them or for them.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A number of years ago, David Copperfield performed a magic act on live TV. Through the power of illusion, he made the Statue of America seem to disappear. I say “seem” because we all know that it did not really disappear, but somehow David Copperfield was able to manipulate his audience’s brains into thinking that it was no longer there. It was an illusion—a false sense of reality.

**APPLICATION:** Like magicians, we too create illusions in our own lives. We identify ourselves as certain things and then convince people that we are who we say we are. Sometimes though, someone really close to us knows the truth.

- I know a guy who kisses up and kicks down. In other words, his superiors think he’s great, but those below him know what a tyrant he is.
- People have told me how their parents came across to others as wonderful, but in reality, they abused their children.
- How do I know if you are truly who you say you are?
- How do you know if I am who I say I am?
- In a world full of illusions, how do we know what is real? The same way Joseph would know who his brothers turned out to be. Time and attention. He needed to see how they would respond. He needed to throw out some bait and see what he dragged in.

Review: Joseph recognized his brothers and he tested their character.

## **JOSEPH HEARD THEIR DISTRESS**

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 42:18-26

*On the third day, Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: <sup>19</sup> If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. <sup>20</sup> But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.” This they proceeded to do. <sup>21</sup> They said to one another, “Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come on us.” <sup>22</sup> Reuben replied, “Did not I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you would not listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.” <sup>23</sup> They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. <sup>24</sup> He turned away from them and began to weep, but then came back and spoke to*

*them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes. <sup>25</sup> Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man's silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. After this was done for them, <sup>26</sup> they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left.*

**EXPLANATION:** After three days, Joseph had determined a plan of action. It's interesting to note that right off the bat, he identified himself as a God-follower. As such, he showed concern for the men's families who were in dire need of the grain. It had been over a week since the men's departure, and it would be another week until their return. Joseph did not want to jeopardize the health and safety of his father, his brother, Benjamin, or any of his other relatives at home. After Joseph gave his proposition, the brothers circled up and discussed the matter unaware that Joseph understood every word of their conversation.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A woman named Beth made a mistake, a really bad one (not anyone named Beth that you know). She blamed herself for what she had done. Others told her it wasn't her fault, but she secretly continued to blame herself. She put on a brave face and people said she was strong. But she said mean things to herself and was deep in self-loathing. She said things to herself that she would have never said to anyone else. Her negative self-talk prevented her healing, and it was only by the grace of God that Beth recovered from her despair. Yet, most people would have never known.

**EXPLANATION:** For Beth, and for Joseph's brothers, and even you and me, there are three facets of identity—who you say you are, who others perceive you to be, and who you are when you are alone. Joseph's brothers identified themselves as the sons of Jacob, the sons of God's promises. While they may not have recognized it at the time, they were in fact, the namesakes of what would become known as the 12 tribes of Israel. They presented themselves as a united whole, a loving family. They had, after all, come all the way to Egypt to buy food for those they loved. But who were they when they were alone?

Like Beth, when they thought no one else could hear, they admitted their guilt. They relived the devastating act, and they expressed their distress at having to live with themselves and what they had done. Hearing their guilt and grief broke Joseph's heart.

**CONCLUSION:** Joseph recognized his brothers, and he heard their distress, but he had trouble believing they were the men they claimed to be—honest, loving family men—because he had seen a different side to them. So, he had to test them to determine if what they said would ring true. What about you?

To be a man or woman of character and integrity, the three facets of your identity should all be the same. Who you say you are should be who people think you are and who you really are, even when no one else is around. The people in your life should not feel as if they have been tricked into believing something that is not true when it comes to your identity. If you are a Christ-follower, then God has given us clear instructions in his word about the kind of life we should be living. He knows us better than we know ourselves. Are we living up to his name?

**INVITATION:** If you do not know Christ, then you do not really know who you are meant to be. You may think you know your identity, but the Bible says that you are made to be holy, and to be holy, you need a relationship with Christ. Come to the altar and let me talk to you about who God made you to be.

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