

Hearts Will Be Revealed

Genesis 42

Intro: Reconciliation Requires Repentance

Not all broken relationships this side of heaven can be reconciled. It's the sad reality of this life. Why is the case? One reason is: reconciliation requires repentance. If sin has broken a relationship, then true reconciliation occurs only after confession and forgiveness.

Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about. You want a broken relationship restored—with your child, parent, friend, a church member—but healing is hindered by unrepentance. It's a sad and difficult reality.

What do you do when a relationship has been broken by another person's sin? This is the situation Joseph finds himself in Genesis 42. Let's draw out three principles...

Principle #1: Pay Attention to Providence

Look what the Lord is doing around you. **[vv1-2]** About two years into the famine that Pharaoh dreamed about, and Joseph told him

would come, word spread 300 miles northeast to Canaan that Egypt had food.

Jacob thinks his people are on the brink of extinction if they don't do anything, which is why he says to his sons, "Why are you looking at each other? Stop twiddling your thumbs and go buy food in Egypt so we don't die!" Which would mean, God's covenant people will die AND God's covenant promises will die.

This is a big deal. So his sons go. **[v3]** Notice Moses call them *Joseph's brothers*, not *Jacob's sons*. He's giving us a hint of what's about to happen. Who do you think they're gonna run into in Egypt?

They travel for a couple weeks, but only 10 of them go. Jacob has 12 sons. **[v4]** Benjamin, the youngest son, has the same mother as Joseph (Rachel), Jacob's favored wife, which is why Jacob favored Joseph, and now Benjamin. He doesn't want harm to come to him, but doesn't have that same concern for his other sons because he *commands* them to go! **[v5]**

The “others” are surrounding nations. The famine was so severe, and word had spread that Egypt had food, so nations, including the “sons of Israel,” go there for survival.

Don’t miss God’s sovereignty in this. In ch37, Joseph dreamed at age 17 that his brothers would bow down to him. They became so jealous of him that they tried to prevent the that dream by selling him as a slave to Egypt, not knowing that *their* attempt to stop the dream was God’s means of fulfilling it!

But fulfillment wouldn’t come for 22 years. Joseph—a slave, then a prisoner—became second in charge through a seemingly coincidental/random set of circumstances.

Thus, all the surrounding nations flock to Joseph for food, including Joseph’s brothers who sold him into slavery 22 years prior. God is providential working out is plan not only to save his people from starvation, but to reconcile his people to each other. The family of Jacob is fractured, and God intends to heal them through a famine.

Pay attention to providence. The Lord is always working, and sometimes he peels back the curtain of providence for his people, as he is about to do for Joseph...BUT Joseph does not know the state of his brothers' hearts. He can't see into them, so he must sense whether they've truly changed. This takes us to...

Principle #2: Sense Sorrow Over Sin

Pay attention to providence: God might have you cross paths with ones who sinned against you, but you must be discerning because reconciliation requires repentance. Are the brothers repentant? Let's see. **[v6a-b]**

You can hear the way Moses words that sentence to highlight God's providence. He just said Joseph's brothers are on their way to Egypt to buy food, and now he says, "Joseph is the one from whom people buy food."

Now, it's unlikely Joseph would've manned every storehouse of food. In fact, the plan he gave to Pharaoh included overseers of each storehouse. And thousands of people flocked to Egypt every day. So the likelihood Joseph's

brothers would come directly to him was low. But guess what happens? **[v6c]**

That remind you of anything? A dream 22 years prior? They are fulfilling God's plan, and they don't even know it! But Joseph does. **[vv7-9a]**

Just imagine the rush of emotions Joseph feels in this moment. He knows who they are; he remembers the dreams; he remembers the unspeakable suffering they put him through. But they don't know who he is. Why? It's been 22 years. Joseph was 17; now he's 39.

That's a big difference! *If you go into my office and see pictures of me from over 20 years ago, you'd see the difference! People look at those pics and say, "I don't even recognize you!" I had more hair, bleached tips, and was about 50lbs lighter! 22 years is plenty of time to become unrecognizable.*

But on top of that, Joseph looks and sounds like an Egyptian. He's clean shaven: face and head. He's dressed in Egyptian royal garb. He's speaking Egyptian through a translator.

Not only that, the last person they expected to see in this position of power was Joseph! He was sold as a slave, and they probably thought he was dead by this point. So it's obvious why they don't recognize him.

BUT he recognizes them. So why doesn't he just tell them who he is? "It's me! You're little brother! It's been all these years and we're reunited!" He doesn't do that. Look what he does. **[vv9b-11]**

Is that true? Sure, they're not spies, but are they *honest* men? They sold Joseph and then covered his garment in goat's blood to make their dad think he was mauled by an animal. Which is exactly what he thought...for 20+ years! "Really? You're *honest* men?"

That word *honest* is used 7x in this chapter. It's repeated to make us question, "Are they truly honest? Or are they no different than who they were 20yrs ago?" That's what Joseph is trying to discern. That's why he calls them spies—he's trying to draw out their honesty.

He could've just killed them or thrown them into prison right away. He had the authority to do so! OR he also could've revealed who he is right away. Why didn't he? Think of what that would do? They'd just been afraid of him, and he wouldn't be able to test the sincerity of their hearts. Have they changed???

So he puts them through some tests to discern their hearts. **[vv12-13]** Why they sharing all that? It's like they're trying to give whatever details they can to prove they're not spies, and they share exactly what Joseph wants to know. He wants to know about his dad, and he wants to know about his little brother, Benjamin.

So they just spew these details to prove they're ordinary dudes, and the last detail they spew is, "one of our brothers is no more." They're talking about the guy standing right in front of them, and they don't even know it.

What's interesting is that they choose to bring up that detail. If there was no remorse over what they did to Joseph, then they could've said nothing about the brother who is no more.

Maybe we're getting a glimpse into their hearts? But it's not enough for Joseph to truly know. **[vv14-17]**

This feels odd IF we think he's doing this out of revenge. If he wanted revenge, he would just kill them! Or put them in prison for life, not three days, which is far less than the 13 years he was in prison! He is giving them a taste of what he went through. But WHY? **[vv18-20]**

He changes his plan that now looks eerily similar to what happened to him. He, one of the brothers, put in the pit, away from the rest. *But they* ruthlessly left him to die. The question is: Are they gonna do that again? That's the test. By leaving one, the rest of the brothers' hearts will be revealed. If they don't come back for the one, then they're no different.

Have they changed? Are they *honest*? We get another hint as they start talking to each other, thinking Joseph can't understand them. **[v21]** The guilt over what they did to Joseph all those years before still haunts them.

Note this: Time cannot atone for sin. As hard as you may try to suppress your guilt over the horrible things you've done, giving it time will never bring true healing. You must know your sin must be paid for! The brothers know their sin hasn't been paid for yet, and they think they're about to pay for it now! "Why else would this prince of Egypt treat us like this?"

Everyone knows, there must be a reckoning for sin. And everyone knows, deep down, at some point, in some way, their sin must be paid for. How will your sin be paid for? What are you doing with the guilt that still haunts you? What are you doing with shame that overwhelms you for what you did years ago, or last week?

Oh friend, look to the one who paid the debt for sinners like you. Jesus Christ came to pay the penalty for the sin that time could not atone for...that your good works could not atone for...that not even your deep-seated sorrow can atone for. Look to Christ Jesus who paid it all! **[Gospel appeal]**

These brothers desperately need to look to the Messiah who would come to do that for them, because as far as they're concerned, Joseph is gone. There's no chance to reconcile and seek his forgiveness. There's only the memory of what they did to him.

They say in v21, "We saw the distress of his soul when he begged us and we wouldn't listen." Joseph's desperate cry for mercy has been ringing in their ears for 20 years.

Do you see why Joseph tests their honesty? His last memory was his plea through tears to let him go. In their hard-hearted anger and greed, they refused and sold him for silver.

But, if you remember, Reuben wasn't totally on board with this. And he's quick to remind his brothers of that fact. **[v22]** Reuben, the firstborn, is kind of a loser. He's pulls the ultimate "I told you so!", trying to get himself off the hook, but he was complicit in deceiving his father, so he's not off the hook.

So they're having this whole exchange in Hebrew before this Egyptian prince whom they think doesn't understand them, but he gets the whole thing. **[vv23-24a]**

Imagine the complexity of emotions! He's reliving the experience of what they did to him, thinking about all the suffering he's been through because of them, considering what he's missed out on for 20 yrs...hasn't seen his dad or his other brother, away from his home.

But then he hears his once cruel, heartless brothers express remorse. And he loses it. This is not a man who is vindictively toying with his brothers to get revenge. This seems to be the disposition of one who wants reconciliation, but doesn't know if it's possible, because he isn't sure if they're truly repentant. **[vv24b-c]**

What is he doing? He binds Simeon, the 2nd oldest, *in front of them*...why? It's a test...to see how they respond to one of their brothers being bound. Is their response any different than when they did the same thing to Joseph?

Then he does another odd thing. **[v25]** The word *money* is the word *silver*; the same word used in ch37 to describe what the brothers received when they sold Joseph into slavery—20 pieces of *silver*. What's Joseph is doing? He's testing them. If they find that money, and still don't return for Simeon, then they haven't changed. They're the same greedy, heartless men they were 20 years ago.

Why is he trying so hard to discern the state of their hearts? It's simple: true reconciliation can't happen without true repentance. There's a principle here for us. Jesus says in Matt. 10:16, "Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." In other words, don't be naïve with people! You gotta be wise! But you also gotta uphold your integrity—be innocent.

Joseph is certainly acting wise like a serpent, but is he innocent like a dove? Maybe. He's not seeking revenge like he so easily could have. But he's also not being forthright. Perhaps it's a wise testing of his brother?

Proverbs 14:15 says, “The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps.” Don’t be gullible! Think about how to relate to other people. *Proverbs 20:5*, “The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.” Joseph is reaching into the deep waters of his brothers’ hearts, drawing out what’s there.

We gotta use wisdom when we’re dealing with people whom we’re not sure have humble, repentant hearts.

Let’s be honest: sometimes we Christians can be a little dumb. We can be a little naïve, a little too quick to neglect red flags and reinterpret patterns of unrepentant behavior in the name of love. Be loving! But don’t throw wisdom out the window!

Here are a few questions you can ask to discern a repentant heart:

1. Is their confession of sin clear, or are they just making continued excuses?
2. Is their sorrow Godward in its focus, or are they just upset they got found out?

3. Have they demonstrated a pattern of behavior change, or do they just go right back to doing the same old stuff?
4. Are they humble in accountability, or do they buck against it because its inconvenient?
5. Have they sought to make restitution if possible, or are they just hoping everyone forgets what they did?

Now, we gotta be careful: don't use this principle as an excuse to justify cynicism towards people. We're still called to believe the best and give the benefit of the doubt. But sometimes people remove all reason to doubt. It's clear! So don't be naïve.

And hear this, you might be the one who needs to repent. You might be the "brothers" in this story. You might need to demonstrate a genuine broken heart over your sin. So don't get mad at those around you for treating you with a bit of suspicion and lack of trust when you haven't shown yourself to be trustworthy.

You ask yourself these same questions:

1. Has my confession of sin been clear, or am I just making excuses?
2. Is my sorrow Godward focused, or am I just mad I got caught?
3. Have I demonstrated a pattern of behavior change, or do I just go back to doing the same old stuff?
4. Am I humble in accountability, or do I, in my pride, keep bucking against it?
5. Have I made restitution, or am I just hoping everyone forgets what I did?

The truth is: The best indicator of a changed heart is *time*. This takes us to...

Principle #3: Trust that Time Will Tell

Though time cannot atone for sin, time will often *reveal* whether a person knows their sin has been atoned for. Time reveals a person's heart. Look what happens when the brothers find the silver. **[vv26-28]**

That's the first time they've mentioned God. They are finally viewing life through the lens of their relationship with God. Their hearts are being revealed.

One brother finds silver in his sack, and at that, all their hearts fail because they know they could be accused of theft! *But only if* they intend to go back to Egypt. They could pocket it, and no one will know! Kind of like what they did when they sold Joseph. **[vv29-34]**

Notice, they keep using that word *honest*, making us wonder, “Are they??” They didn’t mention the silver in the sack, so what happens next causes Jacob to question their honesty. **[v35]** Joseph gave ALL their money back, and now Jacob sees it, which causes him NOT to be open AT ALL to the possibility of sending Benjamin to Egypt. **[v36]**

Of course, he believes Joseph is dead, but he also says, Simeon is no more. Which means, he’s not willing to send Benjamin to Egypt so Simeon could get out of prison!...showing his favoritism. “Simeon is as good as dead, because I’m NOT sending my son Benjamin!”

So Reuben, the idiot eldest brother, tries to reason with him. Look at his reasoning. **[v37]** That’s not very persuasive! “You can trust me

with Benjamin. I'll prove it: I'll let you kill my sons if I can't keep him safe." What?? "Okay, if Benjamin dies, then I'll kill my two grandkids. And the fact that you're willing to let me kill sons doesn't make me trust you with my son!"

So Jacob digs in his heels. **[v38]** Favoritism oozes from his lips. "Benjamin is your only son left? You've got nine others in front of you and one in Egypt!" Jacob's favoritism will NOT let Benjamin go. Which leaves us to wonder, "Will there be an opportunity for reconciliation?"

Conclusion

Sometimes no such opportunity occurs. But here, God providentially worked, *not only* to create the opportunity, but to reveal the state of the brother's hearts so that Joseph will see, reconciliation is indeed possible.

Pray for that. You have a relationship broken by sin? Pray...not only for the opportunity to reconcile, but pray for the wisdom to discern whether it's possible.

In a real sense, there's always a possibility/
hope because God is a God of reconciliation.
That's what he does! He sent his Son Jesus to
die on a cross NOT ONLY to reconcile you to
himself, but to reconcile you to others. That's
what the gospel can do! **[Gospel]**

Look for that opportunity. Pray for that
opportunity. Be ready for that opportunity. And
see what God might do.