

LIFE GROUPS

Genesis 42

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

ICE BREAKER QUESTION: How has your character been tested before? Share that experience.

The full story of Joseph is recorded in Genesis 39-50; this study takes a deeper look at Genesis 42. We see how God used the drought to bring Joseph's brothers to Egypt in search of grain. Joseph had been put in a high position as part of God's plan to save Israel and unify Joseph's family. God used Joseph's test of his brothers in order to convict them of their sin against Joseph. However, these events did not bring about immediate resolution between Joseph and his brothers.

Read back through the passage before going through the questions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What is your biggest takeaway? How was your experience with the Life Tool's this past week?**
- 2. Read Genesis 42:1-8. What is significant about these verses and the interaction between the brothers coming before Joseph? How do you think you would respond if you were in Joseph's shoes?**

Prior to Genesis 42, the last interaction Joseph had with his brothers was in Genesis 37 when they plotted to kill him and then sold him as a slave. Even as Joseph had moved on and God provided Joseph with prosperity, he had not been reconciled with his brothers. Understanding that his brothers did not recognize him, Joseph hid his true identity in order to test them.

In verse 6, Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him. Joseph recognized them and remembered his dreams from years earlier (Gen 37). God placed Joseph in a position to prepare for the drought so that he could provide for his family. However, this specific instance was not the ultimate fulfillment of Joseph's dreams because only ten of his brothers had come to Egypt to buy grain.

Recognition. Of course, Joseph recognized them in an instant. They were bearded Semites. And there were ten of them—all brothers! The older ones had grayed but were still recognizable by their profile and gait and, of course, their Hebrew dialect. Did Joseph momentarily freeze? Did he inwardly gasp? We do know that he recognized them and carried out his dealings with them with perfect regal composure.¹

3. Read Genesis 42:9-20. Why do you think Joseph started testing his brothers and what is important to note about the way in which he tested them? What do you think was happening in the hearts of Joseph and his brothers during this time?

In verse 15, Joseph gave his brothers an ultimatum: while the rest were imprisoned, one of them should return to Canaan and bring their youngest brother to Egypt so that Joseph might verify that they were honest men. Yet in verse 19, Joseph told them that only one brother would remain in prison while the rest went to get their youngest brother.

At the same time Joseph needed to know what was in his brothers' hearts. Were they the same callous, murderous lot? Were they as heartless as they had been thirteen years earlier? Did they still hate him? Would they resort to similar expedients among themselves when pressured? Would they sacrifice another to save their skins? Joseph needed to know the truth. And he knew that he might never know if he revealed who he was. Moreover, a pardon would allow the truth to be glossed over. So on the spot Joseph conceived a brilliant strategy—that of fierce, implacable interrogation.²

Joseph's repeated accusations unnerved the ten. They revealed that there were really twelve brothers. They counted not only Benjamin among them but himself! Were their consciences coming to life?³

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 494.

² R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 494.

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 495.

Joseph had been brilliantly messing with their minds and hearts, and he continued to do so when, after three days, he surprised them with two new things. First, he stunned them by referencing God (*Elohim*):⁴

And he announced that he feared God! Such dissonance. God was intruded into their swirling, trembling thoughts by the pagan viceroy. And then, second, Joseph decided that only one brother would have to stay as hostage, while the nine others returned for Benjamin.⁵

Hence Joseph also had Simeon bound in front of them to test them carefully and see if they showed any signs of affection for him.”

With this, Joseph further tested his brothers by placing money in their sacks. Would they be happy to abandon Simeon for money, as they had once done to Joseph? How would they interpret Joseph’s actions? As a gift? Or as an attempt to frame them as thieves?⁶

4. Read Genesis 42:21-28. How did Joseph’s brothers respond to the tests and their hardship? What were they experiencing?

The brothers were filled with fear when they discovered their money in their sacks. Not knowing that Joseph ordered the return of their money, they thought it was an oversight of his staff (Genesis 43:12). Having been accused of being spies, they believed they would also be seen as thieves who did not pay for the grain they were given.

Joseph’s brothers were experiencing the grace of guilt—bloodguilt. They knew that they were guilty and deserving of death. God’s ancient dictum to Noah rang in their consciences:

*Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed,
for God made man in his own image. (9:6)*⁷

This is the first time ever in the narrative that the brothers mention the Lord. But because of their raging guilt, they were quick to see God in this. They were traumatized, shocked, and terrified by a fresh and fearful awareness of the divine. However, this was not mere fear—it was *godly fear*. Joseph’s brothers realized that their sins were against God. Fear is one thing, but godly fear comes from sensing that a holy God is the hand

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 496.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 496.

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 497.

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 496.

behind the circumstances of your life to bring you to where you ought to be. The brothers trembled in their awesome awareness.⁸

a. How do we see the weight and implications of harbored, unconfessed sin in our hearts and lives of the brothers?

The guilt Joseph's brothers felt had an undeniable effect on the way they viewed their betrayal of Joseph and the way they now treated their brother Benjamin. Still, Joseph easily could have responded to their request with anger, bitterness, and revenge. Instead, he responds with the kind of undeserved compassion, grace, and forgiveness that we later see in the way Jesus ultimately forgives our sin, covers our debt, and welcomes us to His Kingdom. All He requires from us is that we confess our sin as we approach Him in surrender and belief.

The brothers believed that they were being judged by God for how they dealt with Joseph. They admitted that they heard his pleas for help, but ignored him. When Joseph heard this, he was moved to tears. God had convicted them of the sin previously committed against Joseph. Though convicted, they had not yet proven their character, and Joseph had Simeon put in chains in front of them. However, he also filled their sacks with grain, their money, and provisions for their journey home.

5. Read Genesis 42:29-38. What's the difference between what Jacob and the brothers were experiencing in this passage? Which character(s) do you tend to relate to more when faced with similar situations?

When his sons recounted their journey and Joseph's test, Jacob allowed fear to control his actions. Having grieved his loss of Joseph, he feared that he would also lose Benjamin. As a result, he refused to send Benjamin to Egypt, and in turn decided that Benjamin's life was more significant to him than Simeon's life.

Rather than seeking wisdom from God, Jacob relied on his own instinct and wisdom in making this decision. He allowed his fear to dictate what he believed was the only way to protect Benjamin. Further study of Genesis (chapter 43) reveals that by staying in Canaan, the family would run out of grain and their only option was to return to Egypt for more. Driven by fear, Jacob sought to protect his family, but he actually avoided the blessing of God. This blessing was delayed, but God would be faithful to give it in Genesis 45.

Jacob's mention of his gray hairs indicates the toll that his grief and sorrow had taken upon him in his loss of Joseph. The loss of Benjamin would cause him to die of sorrow.

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 498.

Jacob made it clear that his sadness was the work of his sons whom he believed were responsible for Joseph and Simeon being “no more” (v. 36). As the oldest, Reuben felt his father’s pain and made an absurd promise. But nothing could lessen the pain exacted by his sons’ sins. Thus the godly fear of Joseph’s brothers was now matched by their godly sorrow—and that was a grace.⁹

6. How has God used circumstances in your life to create guilt and Godly fear? What has or is still currently, stopping you from facing your sin?

True guilt is a grace because it brings the guilty to seek forgiveness and to repent. It is especially a grace in a day when Freudian analysis has dismissed conscience and guilt as mere safety devices, collectively created to protect civilized order—an illusion of narrow minds.

Joseph’s brothers were wracked with guilt that, in the context of the Bible, put them in the way of grace. This was good guilt, healthy guilt, graced guilt. Without guilt there could be no forgiveness and no resolution. And without guilt they could never assume their covenant mantles. Perhaps your growing knowledge of God’s Word and your own heart is helping you understand and acknowledge your guilt. If so, embrace it because such an embrace can be a prelude to grace.¹⁰

Godly fear is a grace because the fearer knows where he or she must turn to have the fear assuaged. Fear alone (like guilt alone) is of little use. In fact, it can be debilitating. But godly fear is a fear that God blesses, for he comes to those who fear him.¹¹

’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear.

JOHN NEWTON, 1779¹²

7. Read 2 Corinthians 7:10-11. What does this passage teach us about Godly sorrow and salvation? How do we see these truths of this passage in the Joseph story?

⁹ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 498–499.

¹⁰ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 496–497.

¹¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 498.

¹² R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 498.

Paul would later advise the Corinthians, “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done” (2 Corinthians 7:10, 11, NIV). And that is what godly sorrow would effect in Joseph’s brothers. Godly sorrow is a grace because it leads to repentance.¹³

8. How has God used sorrow in your life to bring you to repentance and experience His grace? Is there anything stopping you from owning Godly sorrow in your life?

But this initial experience with their unrecognized brother was a redemptive grace to their souls.

- *Guilt*. Their admission of guilt, the acceptance of responsibility for their sins, this real guilt, this godly guilt, put them in the way of forgiveness.
- *Fear*. Next their godly fear, the realization that God was afflicting them, focused their souls on the only source of forgiveness and help.
- *Sorrow*. And their godly grief and sorrow then paved the way for repentance.¹⁴

And now godly guilt and godly fear and godly sorrow were going to effect a trio of graces on these impossible men.

Friends and sinners, do you desire God’s grace? If so, accept the guilt for your own sin. Do not blame anyone else. Such guilt is good. It invites God’s grace. Along with this, cultivate a godly fear that reverently trembles before him. Such fear will invoke a graced wisdom in your life. And then own a godly sorrow that will lead you to repentance.¹⁵

a. When someone openly admits a fault, confessing they have done wrong, how much more likely are they to receive forgiveness and understanding?

Although God calls us to forgive all who wrong us, we often find it is easier to forgive those who openly admit their mistakes with remorse and show signs of change. However, with or without receiving this confession, we should still be eager to forgive, just as Christ has forgiven us—leaving a legacy of love, compassion, and grace as we do.

¹³ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 499.

¹⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 499.

¹⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 499.

PRAYER

Thank God for His compassion, forgiveness, and grace, which we see through the legacies of godly people like Joseph. Pray He softens our hearts and grants us the ability to see with His eyes, extending that same kindness—even when it is difficult. Pray also for the assurance that no matter our circumstances or how we believe we have been wronged, God continues to reign sovereign and will remain faithful—never ceasing to work for the good of us who love Him. Pray that others are drawn to Christ’s salvation and gospel through the way we display that light in our own words, actions, thoughts, relationships, and life—our very legacy itself.

As a group, pray the following prayer: God, help us recognize our fears and fight against the temptation to allow them to control us. In situations where we have power over others, please allow us to lead humbly and in a way that honors You. Convict our hearts of unconfessed sin, and help us seek the forgiveness of those we have wronged. Amen.



FURTHER STUDY

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/lord-over-his-brothers>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/guilt-and-grace/>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/real-guilt-is-rare>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/two-kinds-of-regret-one-kind-of-hope>