

ALL TEN BROTHERS BOW TO JOSEPH

Genesis 42:6-24 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

The Lord knows how to reawaken deadened, hardened, seared consciences. He knows what to do and who to use. In the last six months, have we prayed the prayer of David in Psalm 139: 23-24? “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” What do we expect God to do when we ask God to search us, to show us our sins and reveal our hearts, so we can confess, repent of our sins, and claim the cleansing blood of Christ to forgive our sins? How do we expect God to work? I read the words of Pastor Louis Prontnicki of Maple Glen Fellowship Church in Pennsylvania. His words provoked my heart. He said, “What if God were to answer your prayer to search your heart... by using your spouse or your children or a friend? What if instead of the Holy Spirit speaking directly to your conscience, the Lord were to use other people to test you and expose your heart? Would you catch on, that He was using others to answer your prayer? Would you be willing to let the Holy Spirit use other people to show you your sinful heart and your secret idols? Or would you resent them?”

Johnny once was visiting his grandparents along with his sister, Sally. The grandparents, knowing how much of a hunter Johnny was at heart, gave him his first slingshot. He practiced in the woods all the time near their farmhouse. But Johnny was no expert shot. He could never hit his target. As he came back to Grandma's back yard one day, he decided to take one shot for the road. He spied her pet duck that Grandma so enjoyed. On an impulse, once more he took aim and let fly. The stone hit, and the duck fell dead. Johnny panicked. Desperately he hid the dead duck in the wood pile, only to look up and see his sister watching. Sally had seen it all, but she said nothing. After lunch that day, Grandma said, "Sally, let's wash the dishes." But Sally said, "Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn't you, Johnny?" And she whispered to him, "Remember the duck!" So, Johnny did the dishes. Later that afternoon, Grandpa asked if the children wanted to go fishing., Grandma said, "I'm sorry, but I need Sally to help make supper." Sally smiled and said, "That's all taken care of. Johnny wants to do it." Again, she whispered, "Remember the duck." Johnny stayed while Sally went fishing. After several days of Johnny doing both his chores and Sally's chores, he had taken all he could take. He couldn't stand it. He confessed to his Grandma, “I killed the duck with my slingshot. "I know, Johnny," she said, giving him a hug. "I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave of you." After so long, and after God’s awakening of our consciences, the truth will often come out. What

was it going to take to awaken the consciences of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, and Zebulun? That's the message God has placed on my heart today. What are the means God will often use when He uses others, even our own closest family members and friends? Let me share today four means God often uses to grip our hearts and prove His Word is true in Romans 2: 4, "that God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance."

GOD MAY BRING *PRESSURE* INTO OUR LIVES TO MAKE US FACE UP TO OUR DISHONESTY, LIES, CRUEL WORDS AND ACTIONS. (I.)

That pressure may be only a word, just one word. God is into using tiny things—as a needle prick to startle our hardened consciences. Double back with me to Genesis 42: 1-3. We read, "When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look or keep staring at each other? 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." So, ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt." God was using that little word "Egypt" over and over to awaken these 10 hardened shepherds. "The way of the transgressor is hard," Proverbs 13: 15. These ten brothers were now a hardened bunch of shepherds. Reuben slept with his father's wife, Bilhah. Simeon and Levi deceived a town, slaughtering all the men, and taking the women and children captive in retaliation for Shechem violating their sister, Dinah. Judah had two sons so wicked, Er and Onan, that God took their lives. Judah's wife died, and he defiled his daughter-in-law, Tamar, thinking she was a temple prostitute. All ten brothers, except Benjamin, sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt. They crushed their father's heart with their deceitful lie that Joseph was dead. 22 years later, these hardened brothers wall-papered their consciences, believing their own lies. What would God use? Would God be severe? **God started with pressure.** The famine in Egypt was world-wide, over all the earth—Genesis 41: 57. Corn and wheat and all the grains Jacob and his sons grew were dwindling to nothing. Facing starvation. Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, so he sent his ten sons without Benjamin, down there to buy grain. In the process of traveling down to Egypt from Canaan, from Padanaram, their sleeping consciences started to awaken. What jolted them like cold water poured down their backs as their consciences were sleeping? It started out a bit severe. God would use both severity and grace to bring these men to repentance, but it didn't start out easy. Jacob mentioned one word--"Egypt."

When Jacob started talking to his sons, none of them looked him in the eye. The word "Egypt" was all it took. Reuben looked at Simeon who looked at Levi who looked at Judah. The word "Egypt" was more pressure on these ten hardened men than the famine itself. Jacob startled them with strong words. "Go down to "Egypt"

and buy grain.” As their eyes darted and danced from brother to brother, the word “Egypt” exploded with pressure inside their guilty consciences. They could remember the pittance of 20 pieces of silver they sold Joseph with into slavery. They could still hear his pleading for mercy as the Ishmaelite traders carried him away. They could visualize his face filled with horror and terror. They could hear again the clink of silver they received from the traders as they sold their brother into slavery. They could see him begging for his life as he was being dragged off. Donald Grey Barnhouse once said, “The word “Egypt” in their ears must have sounded like the word rope in the house of a man who hanged himself.” Up to this time, all ten brothers kept the lie alive that Joseph was dead. They said it so many times that it just rolled off their lips. Did they think they might pass a gang of slaves, a chain-gang in Egypt, and have to look into the hollow eyes of their sold brother? When God applied the pressure of famine world-wide, these brothers must have hated every long mile of the 250-300 miles south to Egypt. What one word in our lives, brings up God’s pressure, and starts to awaken our seared consciences? What one phrase or incident brings it all back? Secondly,

GOD MAY PERSUADE US TO DO THE VERY THING WE VOWED WE WOULD NEVER DO, ANGRILY SAYING IT WAS NOT OUR PLACE. II.)

Notice Genesis 42: 6. We read, “Now Joseph was governor/prime minister 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.” When God gives a prompting or a word that is truly from Him, a dream He truly gives, it doesn’t matter what we initially think of it. God knows how to change our minds and how to bend our wills. Flashback with me 22 years to when God gave Joseph his dream at age 17. Look at Genesis 37: 5-8. Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. He said to them, “Hear this dream that I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.” His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?” So, they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. Then when they sold him into Egypt, they said, (Now) “we will see, Genesis 37: 20, what will become of his dreams.” In essence, in Joseph’s face, they were saying, “Over our dead bodies will we bow to you.”

This bowing was a repeated event. We read in Genesis 43: 26, “When Joseph came home, they brought into the house of him the present that they had with them, and bowed down to him to the ground.” Then in Genesis 43: 28, we read, “Your servant, our father is well; he is still alive.” And they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves.” You need to know that Jews don’t bow to others. What

was it that made Haman so thoroughly hate Mordecai the Jew? We read in Esther 3: 1-2, “After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him. And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage.” Under **the pressure** of starvation, God was **persuading these ten hardened brothers** to do something that was beneath them, something they vowed they would never do, something they would rather die than do, but God said they would do and they did so repeatedly. Thirdly,

GOD MAY PRESENT AN OLD FORGOTTEN MEMORY TO US, TO PUT US INTO THE SHOES OF THE ONE WE HAVE FAILED TO LISTEN TO.

Notice in our text how God is revisiting an old memory. It reminds me of Jesus, after the resurrection, questioning Peter, “Do you love me?” What’s the old memory? Let’s look at what is happening in Genesis 42: 7-14. “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.” And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. 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.” They said to him, “No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies.” He said to them, “No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see.” And they said, “We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more.” But Joseph said to them, “It is as I said to you. You are spies.” Listen to the pleading of Joseph’s brothers with them. Then notice in Genesis 42: 21, “Then they said to one another, “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us, literally pleaded with us, and we did not listen.” Now the shoe was on the other foot, as the ten brothers were pleading with Joseph that they are not spies, but he would hear none of it. Don’t condemn Joseph for this treatment of his 10 brothers.

God was leading Joseph to use both severity and grace as God’s means to test his brothers’ hearts, to see if they were going to change and repent, from 22 years ago, when they wanted to kill him, but finally compromised with Judah, to sell him into slavery. God gave Joseph a leading on how to treat his brothers, a complex plan, to put his brothers to the test, a plan that would include harsh treatment as well as great mercies and great grace. God was starting to test them first through harsh times which would soon combine with grace. F. B. Meyer in his commentary on

Joseph, I believe rightly proposed that Joseph repeated with his brothers the exact scene that happened to him at the mouth of the pit 22 years earlier. He said, “When he went to his brothers to check on their welfare, they may have accused him of coming to spy on their corrupt behavior. Now he accused them of being spies. No doubt he had protested that he wasn’t spying, or come to give his father a bad report just as the 10 brothers now protested. They answered him roughly without any basis for their accusations, just as Joseph now answered them. Then they threw him into a pit, just as Joseph now threw them into the dungeon—perhaps the same dungeon Joseph was in for 13 years. Notice Genesis 42:14-17 and listen to Joseph’s test. “By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.” And Joseph put them all together in custody/prison/the pit for three days.” Notice again the parallel between their treatment of Joseph and the treatment they were now receiving. God knows how **to present an old memory to us to bring us to conviction, confession, repentance as He wants to forgive us.** Fourthly,

GOD MAY PENETRATE OUR HARDENED CONSCIENCES BY DEPRIVING US, GIVING US PAIN AND TESTING US. (IV.)

Notice Genesis 42: 18-24. “On the third day Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me. So, your words will be verified, and you shall not die.” And they did so. Then they said to one another, “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.” And Reuben answered them, “Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.” They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.” What can we expect from God when our conscience has been dulled, deadened, or seared, and we have chosen to forget or even try to bury our unwillingness to listen to the leading or direction of the Lord? God has common means of penetrating the hardest hearts. Today, that hardened heart may be yours or mine. God may be trying to shake us, to wake us, to bring our calloused conscience back to life again, to bring us to conviction, confession, repentance, and forgiveness. What will He use to penetrate our consciences? What methods does God employ to awaken us?

He often uses (1) **deprivation or barrenness or famine**, just as God used with Joseph's brothers. God makes us needy as Jacob said, in Genesis 42: 2, "Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." That's needy—that's barrenness of poverty and famine. God makes us needy, sending leanness to our souls, as the Psalmist said in Psalm 106: 15, "God gave them what they asked, but sent leanness to their souls, or literally, a wasting disease among them." God allows the props we lean on to get knocked out, just as with the prodigal son. (2) **God can use pain**. Joseph recognized his brothers, but treated them roughly and spoke roughly to them—v. 7. Joseph accused them of being spies, even though they pleaded saying they were not. Yes, it was pain, but pain with a purpose. Verses 21-22 show the purpose of the pain—the hardened brothers are starting to crack and confess. Reuben is blaming them rather than sharing the blame, but they were all being drawn to see God's hand in all this. Joseph was being used as a prophet of God, being led in every step. I am reminded of the psalmist in Psalm 119: 67. "Before I was afflicted (in pain) I went astray, but now I keep Your word. (3) **God can use testing**. Those three days of all the 10 brothers was a prison test. Moses told God's people in Deuteronomy 8: 2, "And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord, your God has led you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not." Joseph's actions toward his 10 brothers parallel how God brings us to repentance. God's grace started to shine through. In changing his mind of incarcerating 9 brothers while one returned, God led Joseph to imprison one—Simeon while 9 returned. What is this all about but God's grace. Notice again v. 18—"On the third day, Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God." Joseph demanded they come back with Benjamin, but what is this statement all about?

Did the 10 brothers get Joseph's statement, "for I fear God?" This was a common Hebrew phrase no normal Egyptian would use. Would they ponder? This statement was a Hebrew expression reserved for use only by those who had a genuine faith in the one true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was the equivalent of us saying, "for I am born again." These words were filled with grace to inspire his brothers to find hope and encouragement. Why keep Simeon? Remember, he was the second oldest while Reuben was away, and Joseph was sold into Egypt upon Judah's suggestion. Simeon never cared. The eldest Hebrew son should have protested, and he did not. As Simeon was bound before their eyes, something was going on. What a powerful stimulant to their sleeping consciences! Nine of them were being released from prison—and this is when they spoke in Hebrew and began their confessions. God was at work—and there is more, so much more to come. Joseph had to turn away from the brothers to weep. What a beginning God granted. God was on the move. Has He been moving in your heart this morning?