

Main Idea: We're going to learn from the four scenes in Genesis 42 how to see God in the drama of life, and not just see Him in it, but experience His sufficient grace as we encounter it.

The Setting:

1. Keep in mind the Big Picture of Genesis 37-50.
 2. Keep in mind the purpose of Genesis 42.
- I. We see the guile (1-5).
 - II. We see the guilt (6-24).
 - A. Joseph has God's plan in mind.
 - B. Joseph has his brothers' good in mind.
 1. You cannot cover up guilt.
 2. Guilt must be addressed and removed.
 - III. We see the grace (25-28).
 - A. Grace makes forgiveness possible.

Forgiveness is a two-part choice...

 1. It's a choice to ask God to help me do what I can't do on my own.
 2. It's a choice to no longer hold the past against the person I'm forgiving.
 - B. Grace makes forgiveness necessary.

Here are two common objections...

 1. "I can't forget what he did to me, so I can't forgive!"
 2. "I was hurt too badly to forgive!"
 - IV. We see the grief (29-38).
- Make It Personal: Do you have any drama in your life?
1. How can God use this situation to fulfill His purposes?
 2. What specifically can I do to glorify God in this situation?
 3. How can I help others to glorify God in this situation?

Scripture Reading: Romans 5:12-21

Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. There's a wonderful truth for those of us who have any drama in our lives. And the drama could be our own making, or others, or a combination of the two, as it usually is. Where there's a bunch of sin, God provides an even greater supply of sufficient grace.

This world is filled with drama. We see it in Washington, and Hollywood, and on the ballcourts, and in churches, and in families.

How should we respond to drama?

We're going to learn from Genesis 42 how to see God in the drama of life, and not just see Him in it, but experience His sufficient grace as we encounter it.

If you want a good summary verse for Genesis 42 it would be this one, Numbers 32:23. "Be sure your sin will find you out."

Let's say it together. "*Be sure your sin will find you out.*" Sin always has consequences. Galatians 6:7 declares, "Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap."

You might object, "But I know people who have violated God's Word, and seem to be getting away with it. They don't even seem to feel guilty about what they're doing. It's like their conscience is seared. What about them?"

Indeed, there are plenty of people like that. The question, however, is are they really getting away with it?

When we open our Bibles to Genesis 42 we see the answer in living color. *Be sure your sin will find you out.*

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This message is adapted from two series at WBC in 1992 and 2002.

But the focus of Genesis 42 isn't on the brothers whose sin caused the drama. It's actually on the God who makes His servant Joseph sufficient to respond to the drama in a God-glorifying way. And beyond that, on God who actually uses the drama to further His redemptive plan for a family, a nation, and the entire world.

The good news is that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He does the same thing for those who trust Him today, enables them to glorify Him as they navigate the drama of life.

Let's keep in mind a couple of things as we come to Genesis 42.

1. *Keep in mind the big picture of Genesis 37-50.*

God devoted only two chapters in the book of Genesis to tell us how the universe got here. Only two. Yet He gave us some 39 chapters to tell us how the nation of Israel came into existence. And of those, 13 chapters are a story about Joseph (Gen 37-50).

Why is that? The story of Joseph is really a story about God. Sometimes the Bible tells us things about God, such as God is holy (1 Peter 1:16), and God is love (1 John 4:8). But sometimes the Bible *shows* us things about God, and that's often the case in Old Testament narratives, like this one.

The story of Joseph shows us that God is sovereign. We see in living color how He controls the events in the lives of His people. We see His wisdom, His patience, His care. We *see* it.

We see the moral of the story in 39:2, 3, 23. God was "*with Joseph.*"

2. *Keep in mind the purpose of Genesis 42.*

Do you remember what God told Abraham would happen to his descendants? Back in Genesis 15:13 He declared, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years."

It's that promise that God is fulfilling in Genesis 42. God used a famine to bring the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to Egypt, where they would spend the next 400 years. Genesis 42 tells us loudly and clearly that God keeps His Word.

But it also shows us that God used the most unlikely characters to fulfill His promises. Here He worked through the actions of a betrayed son and jealous brothers and an inconsistent father and a pagan Egyptian ruler to preserve His people and take them a step closer to providing the world with the Messiah.

Have you ever struggled to forgive someone who hurt you? What would you do if you stood face to face with the ten men who caused you to waste thirteen years of your life as a slave and as a prisoner?

We're ready to enter the drama of Genesis 42. We'll see four scenes.

I. We see the guile (1-5).

As scene one begins, Joseph is the number two man in Egypt, his father and brothers are back in the homeland of Canaan, and a severe famine is causing havoc throughout the Middle East. Genesis 41:57 records, "And all the countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the world."

The famine reached Joseph's family, too.

Genesis 42:1-2 "When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, 'Why do you just keep looking at each other?' ² 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.'"

I chuckle when I read Jacob's question to his sons, "Why do you keep looking at one another?" The KJV records, "Why do you look upon one another?"

I get the impression that the ten brothers are sort of like bumps on a log. They're not functioning as you would expect to see God's chosen family functioning. Ever since their crime against their brother twenty years ago, they've lived with a mask, a cloak of pretense, playing the paralyzing game of cover up.

Unconfessed sin does that, you know. It paralyzes us and saps the joy right out of life. We end up, not living, but dying one day at a time.

Do you think these ten sons really pulled the wool over their dad's eyes? I'm not so sure.

Notice verses 3-5, "Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. ⁴ But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. ⁵ So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also."

Why didn't Jacob send Benjamin with the other ten? The text says it was because Jacob feared something terrible would happen to his only other son born to his favorite wife, Rachel. I wonder if the text doesn't also imply that after twenty years, Jacob had doubts about the sincerity of his ten sons. Maybe he didn't totally trust them. I don't know if he saw through their guile or not.

But from our perspective looking back, we can see it. The brothers had wasted two decades of their lives pretending and hiding the truth. Their past sin haunted them in the present. "Be sure your sin will find you out."

In the first scene we see the guile of the brothers. The second scene takes us from Canaan to Egypt.

II. We see the guilt (6-24).

I want you to just think of the odds of what happened next in the narrative. Verse 6, "Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground."

Can you imagine that? The brothers have not seen Joseph since the Midianite caravan pulled away, hauling Joseph against his will to Egypt. They had no idea he spent time as a slave in the household of Potiphar, and then as a prisoner, thirteen years in all. They had no way of knowing he had spent the next seven years as Pharaoh's executive assistant during years of abundance. Add to that at least a couple of years during the period of famine, and it's been 20-25 years since these siblings had talked.

And don't forget there are thousands of people traveling to Egypt at this time, from all over the world, searching for food. I read that Egypt's population at the time was two to four million.² And it just so happened that the brothers' caravan ended up at Joseph's doorstep?

What a coincidence! No way.

The next two verses are humorous to me.

Verses 7-8, "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

² <http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/people/>; <http://history.stackexchange.com/questions/2275/what-was-the-estimated-population-living-in-egypt-around-1446-bc>

asked. 'From the land of Canaan,' they replied, 'to buy food.'⁸ Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him."

They didn't recognize him. No wonder. This isn't their kid brother any more. Joseph looked like an Egyptian, not a Hebrew. His wardrobe was Egyptian. His etiquette was Egyptian. Unlike his Hebrew brothers, he now had no facial hair. And his language was Egyptian, which is why he spoke through an interpreter (23).

Now watch what happens in the dialogue, verses 9-14. "Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, 'You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.'¹⁰ 'No, my lord,' they answered. 'Your servants have come to buy food.'¹¹ We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.'¹² 'No!' he said to them. 'You have come to see where our land is unprotected.'¹³ 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.'¹⁴ Joseph said to them, 'It is just as I told you: You are spies!'"

What's going on? Why does Joseph keep insisting his brothers are spies?

You say, "He's going to get even with the scoundrels! That's what I'd do! Like a cat with a mouse, he's playing with them. He's making them squirm!"

Is that what he's doing? No. I think he had two reasons for his response.

A. Joseph has God's plan in mind. I get that from verse 9. Right after Joseph first saw his brothers, the text says, "Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, 'You are spies!'"

Seeing his brothers brought what to mind? The *dreams*. What dreams? The dreams he had as a teenager in chapter 37. He dreamed he and his brothers were binding sheaves, and their sheaves bowed down to his. And he dreamed again and saw the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing down to him.

No doubt he'd thought about those dreams many times. In those dreams God made it clear that the day was coming when his father and eleven brothers would bow before him. And now he sees ten brothers prostrate before him.

Dream fulfilled. Actually not, not in full. Joseph knows that his father and another brother are missing. God's plan is being fulfilled, but there's more to come.

That's what Joseph is after. It's not revenge, but God's plan.

B. Joseph has his brother's good in mind. When Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies, not once but three times, I think he is trying to help them. Help them what? Help them come to grips with something.

Guilt. You can't experience forgiveness until you acknowledge your guilt.

I see Joseph testing the waters. I think he wondered if his brothers had ever regretted what they did to him. I believe he's seeking to kick into gear the seared collective conscience of ten of his siblings, in a way that will result in their good and the fulfillment of God's plan.

You may ask, "How do you know the brothers' conscience was seared?"

I don't know for sure, but I see a clue in the final words of verse 13. "And one is no more." Who are they talking about? Joseph. They had so covered up their guilt that they now believe the lie themselves. One of our brothers is no more. He is dead and gone, nowhere to be found.

They of course don't know how wrong they are.

How do you help someone who is not thinking rightly about past sin? Joseph devised a test which we see in verses 15-20:

“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. ¹⁶ 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!” ¹⁷ And he put them all in custody for three days. ¹⁸ On the third day, Joseph said to them, ‘Do this and you will live, for I fear God: ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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.”

What is Joseph doing? Why did he put his brothers in prison? Why didn't he reveal himself to them immediately? Why send nine back home and keep one in prison? Does this have something to do with revenge?

Honestly, the text doesn't specify motives here, so we can only conjecture. We do know Joseph was a sinner too, as is every descendant of Adam that's walked the planet. That means Joseph had a heart like my heart and yours, one that can function with mixed motives. Joseph needed what we need.

Forgiveness. A changed heart. A Savior.

I do not doubt that Joseph struggled with the inner turmoil that accompanies being sinned against in grievous ways. But because he trusted in the One who forgives and changes hearts, I believe he did what he did here with God's plan and his brothers' good in mind.

Joseph knew that his brothers had a problem, that they were paralyzed by their past sin. He also knew that they could never experience the joy of the Lord, which he was now experiencing, until they came to grips with what they had done. The pretending and the hiding and the cover up would have to stop.

So he ripped the scab off of the old wound.

Did it work? Did it help his brothers deal with their guilt? Yes it did.

Watch what happened next in verse 21, “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 upon us.’”

According to the KJV they said, “We are verily GUILTY concerning our brother.” Those are significant words, “We are *guilty*.” In the Hebrew, “*we*” is emphatic. Those are hard words to say, and in this case, more than twenty years overdue. But finally, the skeleton is out of the closet. They can hide it no longer.

The firstborn spoke up next in verse 22, “Reuben replied, ‘Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.’”

In other words, I told you so, but you wouldn't listen!

Several have told me how much they like the Joseph story, and I certainly agree. It's one of my favorites. One of the reasons Joseph speaks so loudly to us is his authenticity. Yes, he'd been hurt. And now when he hears his brothers' admission of guilt, he does something that draws us in.

What would we have done if those were our brothers? Notice verses 23-24, “They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. ²⁴ He turned away from them and began to weep, but then turned back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.”

He wept. When Joseph heard his brothers talking about their wicked deed against him, when he heard of Reuben's defense, when he detected a hint of brokenness in their tone, *he wept*.

Joseph has been waiting for this day for years, for this response.

Guilt. Ten sinful men were exposed in their guilt. And that's a good thing.

When sin occurs and there's no guilt, then there's no God-honoring response to the sin. Unconfessed sin is like cancer. Until it's removed, it spreads and destroys. It affects your sleep. It destroys your health. It ruins families, and friendships, and churches.

Perhaps you're here today paralyzed by some past sin. Perhaps you cheated a friend out of some money. Maybe you lied to your boss. Possibly you took advantage of someone. And ever since then, you've been trying to cover it up. And you've done a pretty good job of it. Your conscience used to scream at you. Now it barely whispers.

Oh, the drama is there, but you've convinced yourself it's somebody else's fault. Things would be better if only that other person would...

Dear friend...

1. *You cannot cover up guilt*. Time won't heal a violated conscience. Years may pass, but the guilt remains. The solution?

2. *Guilt must addressed and removed*. How does that happen?

Proverbs 28:13, "He that covers his sins shall not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy."

Psalms 32:3-5, "When I kept silence, my bones became old...I acknowledged my sin unto You...I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord..."

1 John 1:8-10, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves...but if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

O friend, why try to hide your sin when you can have it removed? Why bury your guilt when you can experience God's amazing forgiveness?! God loves you! God offers you pardon for your sin. God sent His own Son who went to the cross to remove your guilt, and mine.

How could guilt ever be removed? On what basis? That's scene three. The guile, the guilt, the *grace*. The first two scenes focused on the brothers. In scene three the spotlight shines on Joseph.

III. We see the grace (25-28).

What is grace? Grace is giving someone what they do not deserve. Unmerited favor and help. Watch what Joseph did out of grace.

Verse 25, "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."

Did you catch that? What did Joseph do? He returned good for evil. Had he forgotten what his brothers had done to him? No. He made a choice. He chose to exhibit grace. In fact, this was but the first of many gracious actions Joseph exhibited towards the men who hurt him so badly.

How could he be gracious towards them? They owed him, didn't they? Joseph chose to treat them as though they did not. He chose not to hold their sin against them. In his heart he forgave them.

If we're honest, Joseph makes us feel a little uncomfortable. Why? Because he responded to sin in the way God wants us to respond, but perhaps have not. When someone wrongs us, we tend to hold grudges, give the silent treatment, or settle the score. We tell ourselves, "After what he or she did to me, I've got a right to feel this way."

But Joseph surrendered his rights. He forgave. How did he do that? *Grace.*

A. Grace makes forgiveness possible. When we forgive, we're not doing the natural thing. We're doing the supernatural thing. We're doing what God does.

Forgiveness is a two-part choice...

1. *It's a choice to ask God to help me do what I can't do on my own.*
2. *It's a choice to no longer hold the past against the person I'm*

forgiving. Just like God did with us.

Grace makes forgiveness possible. But more than that...

B. Grace makes forgiveness necessary.

Necessary, as in this is what must happen. Grace will not settle for two common objections...

1. *"I can't forget what he did to me, so I can't forgive!"* Grace says, no. I don't need to forget the deed in order to forgive the person. Rather I need to choose *not* to remember the deed against the person and as a basis for how I will treat the person. Just like God did with me.

Nor will grace settle for this objection...

2. *"I was hurt too badly to forgive!"* Indeed, you may have been hurt in grievous ways, so grievous you can't seem to get it out of your mind.

But grace has a solution. Don't just try to get it out of your mind. *Replace it.* Replace that terrible deed with a far worse deed, and let your mind dwell on it.

What deed?

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34)."

Replace what happened to you with what happened to Jesus. No one has ever been hurt as badly as Jesus. Though innocent, He was betrayed by His own, framed and subjected to an unjust trial, scourged, nailed to a wooden cross where he fought for ever breath until He gave up His spirit.

And that's not even the worst. While on that cross He willingly took upon Himself the horrendous sins of every guilty human being that would ever repent and believe on Him. He endured the wrath of God that sinners deserve, the just punishment that sin demands, and He did all this so the guilty could receive God's full pardon.

Grace says, focus on *that* deed rather than my own. And then I'll be able to do with others what He did with me. "Forgiving each another, just as in Christ God forgave you (Ephesians 4:32)."

Is there anyone in your life you have refused to forgive? I think of the teen who says, "I hate my parents. I'll never forget what they did to me."

There's the spouse, "She gave me a raw deal. She broke my dreams. What do you expect me to do?"

Start right here. Follow Joseph's example. Joseph is a model of grace. He didn't gloat over his brothers. He chose to forgive them, and then help them come to grips with their sin. He knew until they admitted their wrong, they could not experience freedom.

Then, in a very practical way, he did something very kind to them. He let them keep their money. Not because they deserved it, but because that's what grace does.

You know something, when we treat people out of grace, it blows them away. It's so unnatural, they don't know how to respond.

Look what happened to the brothers. Watch what they did when they found their money. Verses 26-28, "After this was done for them, ²⁶ they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left. ²⁷ At the place where they stopped for the night one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack. ²⁸ 'My silver has been returned,' he said to his brothers. 'Here it is in my sack.' Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, 'What is this that God has done to us?'"

So follow this. On the way home one of the men opened his sack and found his money, and they all trembled. Then when they got home they made another discovery. Verse 35, "As they were emptying their sacks, there in each man's sack was his pouch of silver! When they and their father saw the money pouches, they were frightened."

Everybody got their money back, which means a bunch of free food too! That's grace. And that brings us to scene four, with the spotlight shining again on the brothers.

The guile, the guilt, the grace, and the grief.

IV. We see the grief (29-38).

It was a long trip home for the brothers. Once before, they had returned home without a brother. This time they dreaded reporting to Jacob that Simeon was in prison, and the only way to get him out was to bring Benjamin.

Look at verses 29-34, "When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them. They said, ³⁰ 'The man who is lord over the land spoke harshly to us and treated us as though we were spying on the land. ³¹ But we said to him, 'We are **honest** men; we are not spies. ³² We were twelve brothers, sons of one father. One is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in Canaan.' ³³ Then the man who is lord over the land said to us, 'This is how I will know whether you are **honest** men: Leave one of your brothers here with me, and take food for your starving households and go. ³⁴ But bring your youngest brother to me so I will know that you are not spies but **honest** men. Then I will give your brother back to you, and you can trade in the land.'"

Notice the repetition of *honest men*. Interesting how we can convince ourselves of things that just are not true.

Verse 36, "Their father Jacob said to them, 'You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!'"

Then the situation turned to chaos. Notice Reuben's offer in verse 37, "Slay my two sons." That's how the KJV renders the first words. The NIV says, "You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him back."

Talk about an irrational solution. But no one seems to be thinking straight at this point. Certainly, Jacob's grief clouded his senses in verse 38, "But Jacob said, 'My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow.'"

We've seen four scenes today. Guile led to guilt. Guilt eventually resulted in great grief. But in the midst of it all, there is grace. Because of grace there's hope for us, no matter who we are or what we've done.

So you think your life has drama? This one is far from over, but we'll have to wait until next time to see what happens.

Make It Personal: Do you have any drama in your life?

I believe Genesis 42 teaches us how to see God in the drama of life, and not just see Him in it, but experience His sufficient grace as we encounter it. To do so, we need to ask ourselves three questions.

1. *How can God use this situation to fulfill His purposes?* He could have prevented the drama, but since He didn't, how does He want to use it to advance His saving purposes?

E.g.—

2. *What specifically can I do to glorify God in this situation?* When there's drama, I mustn't focus on what others are doing or not doing. I need to make sure there's no log in my eye (Matt 7:1-5).

Specifically, I need to ask myself, *have I sinned and contributed to the drama?* And if I have, I then have guilt before God which leads to grief in my life and others'. Thankfully, God provided a remedy for sin and guilt. The cross of His Son. Have I dealt with my sin by confessing it to the Lord and those I've sinned against?

That's something specific I can and must do to glorify God in this drama. As well as this. *Forgive.* When we're in drama, we're often sinned against. Which means we must choose to do with others as the Lord has done with us.

Are you refusing to forgive anyone? No doubt the person has caused you pain, but the refusal to do what Joseph did—to forgive and treat the person kindly—will reap an even greater whirlwind of problems. Choose today to forgive, by the power of God's grace.

3. *How can I help others to glorify God in this situation?* Just think. If Joseph hadn't manifested grace that resulted in his brothers' reconciliation, then they likely would not have survived the famine and ended up living in Egypt. And if the brothers didn't come to Egypt, then all twelve sons of Jacob would not have become the nation of Israel, as God promised. And without this God-chosen nation, there would be no God-chosen Messiah for the world, which means no hope beyond this life for you and me.

May the Lord give us eyes to see Him and pursue His glory in the drama of life.