

September 20  
Lesson 3 (NIV)

## VICTORIOUS LOVE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 51  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Genesis 42

### GENESIS 42:6–25A

<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."

<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> 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, "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." <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>25a</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.

## KEY VERSE

*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."*—**Genesis 42:22**

# LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

## Unit 1: Struggles with Love

LESSONS 1–4

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

- A. Surprise Encounters
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Doubt (Genesis 42:6–17)
  - A. Brothers' Arrival (vv. 6–8)
  - B. Joseph's Accusation (vv. 9–14)
    - Trust, but Verify*
  - C. Joseph's Alternative (vv. 15–17)
- II. Decision (Genesis 42:18–25a)
  - A. Joseph's Requirement (vv. 18–20)
  - B. Brothers' Remorse (vv. 21–23)
  - C. Joseph's Reaction (vv. 24–25a)
    - Big Boys Don't Cry*

### Conclusion

- A. The Importance of Tears
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## HOW TO SAY IT

Canaan *Kay-nun*.

Pharaoh *Fair-o* or *Fay-roe*.

Reuben *Roo-ben*.

Simeon *Sim-ee-un*.

## Introduction

### A. Surprise Encounters

What's the best surprise you ever experienced? The announcement of a forthcoming grandchild? The renewed health of a loved one? A broken relationship repaired? For some, the answer will be an unexpected family reunion. Those who have been deployed for service overseas seem very happy to surprise their loved ones with an early return after a lengthy absence. Sometimes arrangements are made for the returnee to show up unexpectedly at a ball game or other public event where the person's family is in attendance.

The looks of astonishment and then unbridled joy are very touching. Though families expect that their loved ones will return eventually, their reactions reveal that the emotions of an anticipated reunion are magnified when that reunion happens without warning. Part of the joy in watching such a reunion is in seeing what happens when there hasn't been time to prepare psychologically for the reunion. And so it was with Joseph.

### B. Lesson Context

When the Egyptians began to feel the effects of the predicted famine (see lesson 2), they cried out to Pharaoh for relief. Pharaoh sent them to Joseph (Genesis 41:55), whom he had appointed to prepare Egypt for the years of famine. The famine, however, affected lands other than Egypt as well. As a result, "all the world" came to Egypt to buy food (41:57). Joseph's homeland was among those, and Jacob urged his sons to travel to Egypt and purchase food (42:1–2). Exactly how much of the seven-year famine had occurred before the brothers went to Egypt is not clear. Later, when Joseph revealed his identity (see lesson 4), he told them that only two of seven total years had passed (45:6).

For the first journey to Egypt, Jacob did not permit Benjamin—one of two sons of Jacob's beloved wife Rachel, the other son being Joseph (Genesis 35:24)—to go. Jacob had already lost his favorite son, Joseph; Jacob did not want to risk losing his second favorite, Benjamin (42:3–4). Thus 10 brothers traveled to Egypt without him.

## I. Doubt

### (GENESIS 42:6–17)

#### A. Brothers' Arrival (vv. 6–8)

##### **6a. Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people.**

*Joseph* had been appointed as *governor* and second in command to Pharaoh after his proposal for how to prepare Egypt for the coming years of famine (Genesis 41:33–43; see lesson 2). His tasks of preparation for the famine were complete; now the tasks of distributing aid were his primary responsibility. At this point, the *people* still had enough money to purchase the *grain* that they needed (contrast 47:13–26).

**6b. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.**

Showing respect for a foreign dignitary, the brothers *bowed down* appropriately to Joseph. This almost fulfills Joseph's dream of some two decades earlier recorded in Genesis 37:9. We say *almost* because only 10 of the 11 "stars" (brothers) were doing the bowing at this point.

**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 asked.**

**"From the land of Canaan," they replied, "to buy food."**

**Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him.**

*Joseph recognized his brothers* immediately, even though about 20 years had passed since he last saw them (compare Genesis 37:2 and 41:46; see lesson 2). One can only imagine the look on Joseph's face at this surprise encounter! Perhaps he had thought he would never see them again. But there they were! How should he treat them? What should he say? The recognition is not two-way, however, as indicated by the phrase *they did not recognize him*. Contributing factors are Joseph's Egyptian clothing and a closely trimmed beard in keeping with Egyptian custom (compare 41:14). Above all, none of the brothers expected to encounter Joseph *anywhere*, let alone in the position of governor of Egypt!

Joseph had probably pondered on many a day how he would respond to his brothers if he ever saw them again. As he *spoke harshly*, or with a tone of severity, Joseph may have been buying time to ponder his forthcoming "big reveal" in more depth.

## **B. Joseph's Accusation (vv. 9–14)**

### **9a. Then he remembered his dreams about them**

Seeing his brothers bow to him brought back to Joseph's memory *his dreams* of authority in his family (Genesis 37:5–10; see lesson 1). He surely must also have remembered how much his brothers despised him on account of those dreams (37:8, 11). Ironically, their actions to prevent any ascent to power on Joseph's part had done the opposite in contributing directly to his current status. Human nature suggests that there may have been some sense of satisfaction on Joseph's part when he *remembered* his dreams while his brothers bowed before him.

**9b. and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected."**

Why the memory of his dreams caused Joseph to accuse his brothers of something he knew was false is unclear, but there are some theories. One suggestion is that even though we wouldn't call this revenge, Joseph can't resist making his brothers squirm for a while. Another theory is that Joseph uses the line of interrogation we see here to test his brothers' character. Have they improved any in the two decades since selling him into slavery?

The accusation *you are spies* has a ring of believability. Coming to spy under the guise of buying food is quite plausible: buying food would take resources from the nation while also providing a cover story as the brothers scout out where Egypt is *unprotected*—places vulnerable to attack by an enemy. Though a payback or revenge motive seems reasonable from a purely human standpoint, Joseph's true motivation seems to have been more noble than that. The longer he could hide his identity behind a mask of harshness, the more likely it was to elicit truthful statements from his brothers.

Joseph surely noticed that Benjamin, his younger brother and the other son of their mother, Rachel, was absent from the group of brothers. He must have wondered if Benjamin was dead. And what about their father, Jacob? It is also possible that Joseph desired to find out more about

his brothers. Did they still despise him after all these years? Had they repented of their treatment of him?

**10. “No, my lord,” they answered. “Your servants have come to buy food.**

Modern interrogation practice is to interview suspects separately to see if their stories match. But Joseph knows most of the important parts of the story already! His accusation seems to have been intended to put his brothers on the defensive. If so, the desired effect is achieved.

**11. “We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.”**

Joseph may well have found dark humor in the claim of his brothers to be *honest men*, even though he doesn't yet know that they lied to his father regarding Joseph's fate (Genesis 37:31–34).

**12. “No!” he said to them. “You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”**

Joseph continued in accusation mode. People under stress may make unguarded comments. We may speculate that Joseph hoped that his brothers would do just that, revealing in the process important family information.

**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.”**

In their hasty denials, the brothers reveal several pieces of information that Joseph could immediately verify as true. Therefore he had no reason to doubt the parts he could not verify: both his *father*, Jacob, and his *youngest* brother, Benjamin, were still alive.

**14. Joseph said to them, “It is just as I told you: You are spies!**

Still *Joseph* challenged the men's truthfulness with a terrifying accusation of spying. How could they prove their innocence if this powerful man was convinced of their guilt?

### C. Joseph's Alternative (vv. 15–17)

**15–16. “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. 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!”**

Joseph gave the men what seemed to them to be a chance to prove that they were who they claimed. But Joseph already knew they were *telling the truth*. His agenda was therefore different from what it seemed to be to the brothers, an agenda that becomes clearer as the story unfolds.

Perhaps to emphasize how serious he was, Joseph swore twice, saying *as surely as Pharaoh lives*. The ruse of pretending to be thoroughly Egyptian continued.

**17. And he put them all in custody for three days.**

Why this three-day “time out”? It may have been a tactic to emphasize Joseph's power to impose his will. Alternatively, it could have been that Joseph needed more time to consider how best to convince his brothers it was necessary to bring Benjamin to him.

## II. Decision

(GENESIS 42:18–25a)

### A. Joseph's Requirement (vv. 18–20)

**18. On the third day, Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God:**

On *the third day*, apparently after more thought, *Joseph* was ready to dictate a different set of conditions. Before revealing his new plan, however, Joseph gave the rationale for his decision: his *fear of God*.

From our viewpoint, Joseph clearly referred to his fear of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 32:9; 50:24; see also Exodus 3:6). Such a statement might have tipped his brothers off that something was different about this Egyptian governor. However, his brothers should be excused for not understanding what Joseph was asserting. For one thing, the name used to refer to God is a plural word that often refers to the true God (over 1,000 times in the Old Testament) but can also refer generically to supernatural beings who may be mistaken for gods (example: Psalm 82:1).

Though God could be differentiated from false gods easily by identifying him as the Creator and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he has not yet revealed his name (Exodus 3:14–15). So context could cause the brothers to think that Joseph feared *some* god, but which *one* remained a mystery.

To further muddle the situation, Joseph looked Egyptian, had an Egyptian name (Zaphenath-Paneah; Genesis 41:45), and was married to the daughter of the priest of Ra (41:50; see lesson 2). Joseph's brothers probably assumed Zaphenath-Paneah worshipped Ra and other Egyptian gods.

**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.**

Only *one* brother rather than nine would be required to stay in Egypt as a ransom; the others would *take grain* (and Joseph's orders) *back* to Canaan.

**20a. “But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.”**

Joseph did not tell them when to come back, only that they *must bring* the *youngest brother* with them. Judging from Joseph's words, the punishment for espionage was death.

**20b. This they proceeded to do.**

The following verse continues as though this sentence never happened. This represents a significant jump in the narrative (see Genesis 43:1–16).

## **B. Brothers' Remorse (vv. 21–23)**

**21a. 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;**

Though the biblical account does not mention Joseph's *distress* at the time (Genesis 37:26–28), we are unsurprised to learn that Joseph's suffering was evident to his brothers. So intense was their hatred and contempt that Joseph's cries for mercy went willfully unheard.

Yet, those cries echoed back to them in this moment, confirming their *guilt* and heralding that punishment was finally at hand for their crime (or so they believed). It is striking that these 10 men were blaming themselves for the death of the man who was standing before them!

**21b. “that's why this distress has come on us.”**

The brothers believed that when one encountered *distress* or troubles, it was a punishment for some previous wrongdoing. That thinking is reflected throughout the Bible (examples: Job 11:13–18; John 9:1–2). We may still feel that our struggles are God's judgment on us for our past sins. But, like the brothers, we see only part of each story and should be wary of interpreting too confidently God's intentions in any situation.

Ironically, this trouble *has* visited them because of Joseph—not as punishment but because God has worked through their sin to save them (Genesis 45:5, 7–8; see lesson 4). Though the

brothers believe God is punishing them, in fact he is about to deliver their whole family from famine.

**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.”**

*Reuben* is Jacob’s firstborn (Genesis 49:3). Before this moment, Joseph knew nothing of what Reuben had said in his defense (37:21–23). Reuben’s statement about *an accounting for Joseph’s blood* confirmed that he believed Joseph had died and that he considered all of the brothers present to be guilty of that death.

**23. They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.**

Because of Joseph’s cunning use of *an interpreter*, the brothers have been speaking frankly before him without realizing he could understand their “private” conversation. For long years, he must have wondered whether they felt any guilt or remorse for their actions against him. Though he had clearly found great purpose in his Egyptian life, part of Joseph wanted to know if his brothers had ever overcome their hatred of him.

### C. Joseph’s Reaction (vv. 24–25)

**24a. He turned away from them and began to weep.**

Joseph was not prepared for what he heard. The brothers’ words of remorse, coupled with Reuben’s personal expression of regret, proved more than Joseph could handle.

**24b. but then came back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.**

After composing himself, Joseph probably voiced again the terms necessary for safe return to Egypt (Genesis 42:19–20). Joseph imprisoned *Simeon* as a surety until the brothers returned with the youngest one.

Joseph probably had meant to detain the oldest son, Reuben, due to his status as firstborn son, but changed his mind after hearing Reuben’s confession. *Simeon* is the second oldest of Jacob’s sons (Genesis 29:32–33).

**25a. 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.**

Before sending his brothers back to Canaan, *Joseph* took certain calculated steps. Because it was within his authority to set prices for *grain*, Joseph decided to send the food back with his brothers at no charge. But he refunded their *silver* without telling them.

This strategy served Joseph in at least two ways. First, he blessed his brothers by not accepting their payment, thus allowing that money to be used for other purposes as necessary.

Second, by not telling them what he would do, Joseph’s actions made them fear God (Genesis 42:28). Would the governor see them as thieves as well as spies? Was this finally God’s plan to punish them for Joseph’s death? How much worse could things get?

## Conclusion

### A. The Importance of Tears

Joseph had settled into life in Egypt, secure in his powerful position. He had married and started a family. He had taken over the responsibility of providing grain for those who had traveled from near and far to Egypt because of the severe famine that had ravaged many countries. It was business as usual for Joseph until he looked up and saw a group of 10 men dressed like he used to be when he lived in Canaan. And then he realized—these were his brothers! They too had come to Egypt to buy grain.

That Joseph's motives for acting as he did toward his brothers were not rooted in selfishness or vindictiveness is seen most of all in his tears. He could not control his emotions when he learned that Reuben had actually intended to spare his life. Though the brothers did not know it, the governor of Egypt was already planning how to see his father again and keep his whole family safe.

While Joseph was hiding his true identity from his brothers, his declaration that "I fear God" was the truth. The brothers did not realize what a comfort that declaration should have been to them. Joseph's tears revealed his heart for all time.

### B. Prayer

Our Father, thank you that you use even our most desperate circumstances to serve your loving purposes. Let our fear of you guide us as Joseph's fear guided him. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Fear of God must guide our decisions.<sup>1</sup>