

Beneath Joseph's Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat: Let The Healing Begin (Genesis 42)

I couldn't help but think of Joseph's story while recently reading a book on the parable of The Prodigal Son¹. The author argues that we are mistaken if we turn the reunion of the lost son and his father into the climax of Jesus' story. Instead, our focus should be on the older brother's unwillingness to forgive and accept his younger brother and join his father's celebration. This parable concludes leaving the question of whether or not this family will ever be fully reconciled still dangling before us. In a similar way it's tempting to turn Genesis 41 into the climax of the Joseph story. After his dreams at the beginning of the story, Joseph endures 13 years of hardships and injustice. But five chapters later Joseph is finally released from prison with the hope that he will be able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Having succeeded, Joseph is told by Pharaoh, *"I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt."* *Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and people shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt (Genesis 41:41 - 43).* This could be the fairytale ending we've been waiting for as Joseph is once again lifted up and given the garments of privileged status (like the one given to him earlier by his father). But this story isn't over yet. Like the parable of The Prodigal Son, the driving questions behind part-two of this family drama are, 'What will happen when the younger brother finally meets his older brothers again?' and 'Will Joseph's dreams about his family finally be fulfilled?' And so Genesis 42 opens with Jacob imploring his sons to go to Egypt and buy some food so his family will not starve.

1. What does the tone of Jacob's words to his sons suggest about his relationship with them? (Genesis 42:1 - 2)
2. Compare Jacob's tone toward his older sons with his feelings for his youngest son Benjamin (born to him by his favourite wife Rachel, the mother of Joseph). (42:3 - 5 and 42:38)
3. Why is 42:6 such a significant verse in this story?
4. Given Joseph's obvious feelings for his older brothers, why does he keep his identity hidden from them and treat them harshly (42:7 - 28)
5. What do you think made Joseph's brothers finally feel convicted about what they had done to him? (42:18 - 23)
6. Why do you think Joseph secretly returned his brothers' money to them? (Genesis 42:25 - 28).
7. Why is reuniting this fractured family important to God?
8. How does this story apply to your family (and church family)?

¹ *'The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith'* Timothy Keller. 2008. Penguin Group. New York.