

# GENESIS—WEEK 33

## THE STAGE IS SET



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is Joseph Distributing Corn in Egypt by Bartholomeus Breenbergh (1598–1657) On display at Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham (UK)*

Joseph finally gets his chance to shine, and he seizes the opportunity without flinching. Still, God makes him wait.

Then, at last, things start to work out.

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Thank you.

Genesis 42:12–43:25 — *The Stage is Set*  
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1 Genesis 42:12–25 (ESV)

*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. 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 he put them all together in custody for three days.*

*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. And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them.*

Why is Joseph weeping? What happened that’s so significant that he can’t control his emotions?

His plan is working beyond his wildest dreams. He wants his brothers to “get it”—to experience life-changing repentance. But how? He’s putting a lot of pressure on them, but he hasn’t done anything to relate their current situation to the past.

Joseph seems to be playing this by ear, without a specific plan to turn this into repentance. He even changes his mind at one point and lets most of them go explaining, “*For I fear God.*”

Then he overhears them discussing how this is all because of the evil they did against “*our brother*” many years ago. How could they possibly have connected the dots already?

It’s God! He’s blessing this! It’s all just too wonderful, and Joseph’s eyes fill with tears.

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Praise God for the amazing way that He works—including those things that don’t seem to make sense.

Sometimes we get to see God’s plans working out. Sometimes we don’t. And sometimes we have to wait—like Joseph did.

This can be a brutal lesson in patience. Without knowing how things are going to work out, we’re called on to keep the faith and wait to see how God’s plan will unfold. It’s tough.

But this helps sear the lessons into our memories in the end. God’s higher purposes can get heavy.

2 Genesis 42:26–34 (ESV)

*Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed. And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack. He said to his brothers, “My money has been put back; here it is in the mouth of my sack!” At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, “What is this that God has done to us?”*

*When they came to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, “The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us and took us to be spies of the land. But we said to him, ‘We are honest men; we have never been spies. We are twelve brothers, sons of our father. One is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.’ Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, ‘By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. Bring your youngest brother to me. Then I shall know that you are not spies but honest men, and I will deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land.’”*

They’re lying! Joseph made no such promise. He actually said, “*Bring your youngest brother to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die.*” — Gen 42:20 (ESV)

Shading the truth like this is way too natural for these guys; that’s part of what Joseph is trying to cure them of. They don’t want Jacob to hear Joseph’s death threat, so they just make something up.

Of course, they were also lying when they said, “*We are honest men.*” No one should believe anything they say. This is about to come back to bite them.

It’s all part of this grand wake-up call they’re in the middle of.

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Jacob’s sons are traveling down the road to repentance. So are we, and we delude ourselves if we think we can skip the toll booths on this road. The first of Martin Luther’s 95 theses made this clear.

<https://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>

1. *When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said "Repent", He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.*

This permanently repentant heart Luther refers to will never stop changing us. That’s the lifelong process of sanctification.

Real Christian fellowship (koinonia) is the secret sauce. Our friends should nudge us along in sanctification. If you don’t have a friend in whom you can (and do) confide completely, you’re in danger. Curiously, the safest people to confide in are the quickest to call you out when you’ve gone astray.

Those who Satan wishes to destroy must first be separated from meaningful fellowship.

A real friend is one of God’s greatest gifts.

3 Genesis 42:35–38 (ESV)

*As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid. And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me." Then Reuben said to his father, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you." But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol."*

Reuben makes a ridiculous proposal. He basically says to Jacob, "If I lose Benjamin, feel free to kill a couple of your grandsons to make up for it." On what planet does that make sense?

Not surprisingly, Jacob rejects Reuben's plan, but what inspired Reuben to say something that nutty in the first place? Ruben could have made an honest case, like:

"The Egyptian lord's request to see Benjamin makes sense. We said that we had another brother and he said, 'Prove it.' His fear of military attack is reasonable, too; Egypt has food and no one else does. And when he let us out of jail, the Egyptian said that he fears Elohim—really!"

But Reuben doesn't say any of these things. He's too busy managing all the lies to keep track of the truth. He has to be careful to not mention that they think God is punishing them, since he can't tell Jacob why. He also can't blurt out the truth about them all being jailed or about the Egyptian's death threats. Everything he says has to be checked against a "don't blurt out the truth" list.

This is similar to why many banjo players don't sing; they're too busy playing super-fast to do anything else. Reuben's brain is maxed out just trying to manage all the lies. Add to that the stress of discovering the money in the sacks (and wondering what in tarnation that means) and he has total brain freeze.

So, Reuben comes up with a line that passes all his don't-blurt-out-the-truth tests but doesn't pass a sanity check. He blurts that out, and Jacob wonders if his oldest son has lost it.

In a way, he has.

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Speaking of people who are maxed out, always pray for your church leaders. They carry an amazing and unpredictable load. Would you want to face all the things that get dumped on them without warning?

On top of all that, Christian leaders often lack the support that everyone else has. Who can they confide in? Everyone expects them to be a rock. They're not. They hurt just like everyone else.

Ever had a beer with your pastor, or even an elder? This doesn't literally need to involve alcohol, but you get my point. They need normal koinonia just as much as everyone else.

Given all the personal baggage folks offload onto their shepherds, they need it more.

4 Genesis 43:1–14 (ESV)

*Now the famine was severe in the land. And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, “Go again, buy us a little food.” But Judah said to him, “The man solemnly warned us, saying, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.’ If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. But if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, ‘You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.’” Israel said, “Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?” They replied, “The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, ‘Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother?’ What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, ‘Bring your brother down?’” And Judah said to Israel his father, “Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice.”*

*Then their father Israel said to them, “If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man. May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.”*

Jacob has to let them go. His hand is forced and he recognizes that. He knows that God is God and he just has to be willing to trust Him to take care of his sons—even though he’d rather not.

This is a perfect example of head faith that hasn’t been fully converted into heart faith. Jacob knows in his mind that God is in control, but his feelings haven’t caught up yet. He’s not comfortable with trusting God. You might say that Jacob is sure that he can trust God, but he’s not sure-sure.

Many Christians get stuck at this stage. You can only learn so much by reading and studying; some things just have to be experienced.

It’s like learning to trust a parachute. The only way to break out of head-only-faith is to jump out of an airplane. You don’t really know that the parachute works until you’ve felt it pop open.

Israel had to jump.

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There’s a danger in this lesson; we’re not called to be reckless. If you think God is calling you to do something you’re afraid of, don’t assume your fear is wrong. Run your plans by someone you respect.

This is the other side of accountability. Christian fellowship isn’t just about being called out any more than it’s just about having fun. Sometimes common sense advice is what’s needed.

5 Genesis 43:15–25 (ESV)

*So the men took this present, and they took double the money with them, and Benjamin. They arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.*

*When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, “Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon.” The man did as Joseph told him and brought the men to Joseph's house. And the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house, and they said, “It is because of the money, which was replaced in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may assault us and fall upon us to make us servants and seize our donkeys.” So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house and spoke with him at the door of the house, and said, “Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food. And when we came to the lodging place we opened our sacks, and there was each man's money in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it again with us, and we have brought other money down with us to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks.” He replied, “Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money.” Then he brought Simeon out to them. And when the man had brought the men into Joseph's house and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had given their donkeys fodder, they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon, for they heard that they should eat bread there.*

This is the psychological phenomenon of projection. People tend to assume that everyone else thinks the way they do. For example, if someone says that everyone cheats on their taxes, it's a safe bet that he does. He's projecting his personality onto others.

Joseph's brothers are assuming that everything Joseph does has an ulterior motive—because that's how they think. So they ask the steward about the money they found in the sacks, and he says that he received the original payment—it must be God that put money in their sacks.

But he says this in a curious way, even using “Elohim” for God. *Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks.* They don't need to be afraid of the Egyptian lord, but there's another reason to not be nervous—Elohim.

The steward must be in on the whole scheme. Otherwise, he would have no idea why the money was in the sacks and would be puzzled by it.

Instead, he confidently announces that it's Elohim.

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Projection makes many things harder. For example, people are often suspicious of evangelism. They assume we have some kind of selfish “angle.” That's why charity and evangelism go together so well.

Charity is a way for us to get to know people and for them to get to know us.

That leads to trust, which opens the door to the gospel.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Name something that you're still waiting to understand.
2. Who is shepherding you?
3. What's your relationship with your church leaders?
4. What's the riskiest thing you've ever done?
5. Have you ever seen someone be suspicious of something nice someone did for them?