

Multi-Colored Grace, Part 7: Are You Changed By It? (Genesis 42)

Edmund Dantès as a teenager had been described as ‘kind, innocent, honest, loving ... naturally intelligent ... living his life instinctively by a traditional code of ethics that impel[ed] him to honor his superiors, care dutifully for his aging father, and treat his fellow man generously ... even attempting to think kindly of men who clearly dislike him.’¹ Much like the biblical Joseph in the book of Genesis, Edmund Dantès in another book was given a special position that made those closest to him jealous of him, and they planned to betray him and have him taken off to a faraway land. Dantès is presumed to be dead by his father whose heart was broken by loss and grief over his son.

Due to no fault of his own, after being falsely accused for a crime he didn’t commit, this young man, Edmund Dantès was thrown into a dungeon prison for years. There he came into contact with one through whom he gets out of prison and comes to a position of great wealth and power. Once a free man again, Dantès views himself as an agent of providence, to be generous to provide for ones in need as people had helped him, and to make right many wrongs. It was years later that he again saw the faces of those once close to him who had betrayed him and made him go through all that. He knew it was them in an instant, but they didn’t recognize him. They thought he was no more. His appearance had changed and name changed. His new title ...?

It was also the name of that book: The Count of Monte Cristo by Alexander Dumas, author of The Three Musketeers [Monte Cristo=“Mount of Christ,” count=‘nobleman’]. Dantès had ups and downs much like Joseph. The book and movie differ in notable ways. Both give different endings than Genesis, where Joseph is also given a new identity and new name: Zaphenath-Paneah

Dantès’ story illustrates what can happen to man betrayed and put in chains ‘While in prison ... Dantès undergoes a great change. He becomes bitter and vengeful as he obsesses over the wrongs committed against him ... loses the capacity to feel any emotion other than hatred for those who have harmed him ... [when he escapes prison he finds treasure in Monte Cristo] He considers his fortune a gift from God, given to him for...punishing those who have hurt him ... Ten years later, Dantès emerges in Rome, calling himself the Count of Monte Cristo... None of his old cohorts recognize the mysterious [man] as Edmond Dantès...Dantès sets an elaborate scheme of revenge into motion.’² Genesis 37-41 presents a similar scene for Joseph and as we come to Genesis 42, human nature (fueled by Hollywood) leads us to expect the same from a disguised Count of Egypt as he sees his betrayers.

In the late Roman Empire the original root idea of *count* was a high-ranking military or administrative leader. Joseph in ancient Egypt is in the highest position next to Pharaoh, equivalent to a more modern title "prime minister" (in v. 10 he's referred to as lord, and v. 7 calls Joseph "ruler over the land")

Gen 42:6 Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.⁷ When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly. And he said to them, "Where have you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food."⁸ But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him.⁹ Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them, and said to them, "You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land."¹⁰ Then they said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food.

Now just pause there a moment, and remember in context, 2 of the brothers had deceived the Shechemites into an agreement, then murdered them. All 10 looted the land (Gen 35). The last time we heard of these brothers in Gen 37, they lied to their own dad about what happened to Joseph, they set up fake crime scene evidence with animal blood on exhibit A (Joseph's robe), and they kept up their dishonest and deceitful treachery for over 20 years. These men say in v. 11: *'We are all sons of one man; **we are honest men...**'*

Honest men?! Really?! It must have been hard for Joseph to keep a straight face and keep his composure at this point! Like an actor who loses it in the outtakes on DVD special features, Joseph may be on the verge of breaking his acting here into a spontaneous snort at 'we are honest men.' Or maybe he's not acting in v. 12 after they say 'we are honest men' and he says 'No!'

¹² *Yet he said to them, "No, but you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land!"¹³ But they said, "Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no longer alive." [most translations: "is no more"]¹⁴ Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you, you are spies;¹⁵ by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here!¹⁶ "Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies."¹⁷ So he put them all together in prison for three days.*

Now what's going on here? Is this about 'what goes around comes around?' Is this Joseph's way of saying 'how you like them shackles?!' Is Joseph just giving them a taste of their own medicine because of the bitter taste he had in his mouth? He had to be in prison because of them, so now it's their turn? Joseph as a slave had been spoken to harshly; is he now speaking harshly to them so they know how it feels? Does he want them to know what it's like to be falsely accused in Egypt and imprisoned without trial, like Joseph had been under Potiphar? Is Joseph like Edmund Dantès carrying out revenge?

I believe Joseph here doesn't have revenge in mind, he has reconciliation in mind, and he knows full reconciliation involves true repentance. He knew God's grace through the shackles, through that same prison, through being mistreated, through learning in suffering how to deal with his past, and he wants his brothers to be transformed by the same grace. Joseph is a changed man and doesn't know if they've been changed yet, but he wants to know. I think the word "test" in v. 15 is key, he's doing this to test them. Notice the middle of v. 16 *that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you.* A wise man doesn't just welcome criminal mass-murderers into his home. Joseph has 2 sons to protect and needs to know if he can trust their uncles.

Joseph was probably the wisest man on earth, and I think v. 9 shows us he's also motivated by his faith, not by his feelings of hurt. In v. 9 he remembers what? He remembers his *dream*. This drives what he does. Remember what his dream was? His first was his brother's sheaves of grain bowing down to him. They all understood the implication and said to Joseph "*are you really going to rule over us?*" (37:7-8). Gen 42:6 has Joseph as "ruler over" all the land and the 2nd half of v. 6 has them literally bowing down to him for grain

There was also a 2nd dream with 11 stars bowing to him, interpreted by his dad as brothers bowing to him with even dad himself (the sun). But Joseph is good at math (he did it for much of NE Africa). He knows how to count and knows God is a God of details, but only 10 brothers bow here (v. 3, 6). This is not the fulfillment, so in v. 15-16 he's trying to get Benjamin there. But he doesn't know if he can trust these men to bring him here. Or if they find out he's Joseph, they may flee in fear and never tell or bring their dad.

This isn't revenge. Look at 41:50 *before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, bore to him.* ⁵¹ **Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household."**

I said last time I think this is a key verse in the whole story. Joseph becomes an Egyptian ruler who's given a wife from the highest ranks of the Egyptian religion of their false sun-god, he's given an Egyptian name by Pharaoh, but when Joseph has opportunity, he gives his son a *Hebrew* name declaring the *true God* who sovereignly graciously helped him not to dwell on his past! He didn't forget in the sense of amnesia, but God caused him not to recall or rehearse his hurts from his father's household. He forgave and forgot *in his heart in the sense that he didn't dwell on all his trouble or hardship*. It's like Paul in Philippians 3:13 "forgetting the things which are behind," then in Philippians 4:8 choosing to dwell, setting thoughts on what's good, etc.

Paul and Joseph didn't pretend nothing bad had happened in their past, but God enabled them to keep their past in its place and they moved on from it. God's grace doesn't erase our memory banks, we don't forget in that sense, but God's grace can cause us to forget in the sense of forgiving, not reliving the past. It's keeping things which are behind where they belong, pressing forward to what God has for us. We can choose what we dwell on (Phil 4:8)

By way of further application, Philippians 3-4 is key to study, meditate on. Joseph by grace was able to deal with his past abuse and affliction rightly, and in v. 18 he makes clear he is doing this because he fears God. Do they? More than wanting them to fear him, I think Joseph wants to test their fear of God or awaken it in v. 18: *Joseph said to them on the third day, "Do this and live, **for I fear God:** ¹⁹ if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, ²⁰ and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die."* And they did so.

Gen 41:51 tells us Joseph by grace had dealt with his past. But if these men will experience that grace, it will have to involve dealing with their past. In their case, the cork is about to pop off and what had been bottled up for over 22 years is now shaken up and about to come out, how they sold Joseph as a slave to Egypt. Their pent up emotions now spew out and spray and splatter.

²¹ *Then they said to one another, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us."*

²² *Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not tell you, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood."* ²³ *They did not know, however, that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them. ²⁴ He turned away from them and wept.*

Those aren't tears of anger, they're tears of affection by Joseph as he hears his brothers confess their sin. It affects him greatly as he hears how greatly affected they were by it and he learns Reuben had tried to stop them. They spill their guts and guilty consciences while they think this Egyptian man before them can't speak Hebrew, as he's only been speaking in Egyptian to the interpreter who's translating it for them. This private argument between brothers they asked the translator to leave un-translated. The prime minister then says something in Egyptian to his assistant explaining he has to leave the room for other business. He turns to find a private quiet place...to weep.

The drama or emotion couldn't be higher as Egypt's highest official leaves. He sees evidence of grace at work, the beginnings of repentance, of change. There may be joy mixed in with his tears, but their testing isn't complete or conclusive yet. In his mixed emotions, he loves them but can he trust them?

Maybe a story illustrates it best. Voddie Baucham in *Joseph and the Gospel of Many Colors* writes: 'My father didn't raise me. Instead, my mother, still a teenager, was left to raise me alone ... Later in life, my father had a drug problem. This only complicated things. Now, not only was it difficult for me to navigate the boundaries of our relationship in light of our past, it was also difficult to trust him because of his addiction. Would he be able to stay sober? Would he go away to rehab again, and disappear for months? Would he steal from me to buy drugs? Can we trust him around our children? ...

In time, my father was converted ... my brother in Christ, but he still struggled with addiction. I know we've all heard testimonies of people who came to Christ and immediately stopped drinking, smoking, or doing drugs ... truth is that most people continue to struggle with addiction long after ...

When my father was sober, he would call and want to reestablish contact with me and my family. He loved his daughter-in-law and his grandchildren ... he was a *great* grandfather! I absolutely loved seeing him in that role. [But] when he would have a setback, it was difficult to know when and how to trust him again. Sometimes I wondered if it wouldn't be better to write him off altogether. He had hurt me, and now I was giving him an opportunity to hurt my wife and my children. How much latitude should I give him? How much of a risk should I take? This, in many ways, is the dilemma facing Joseph in Genesis 42 ... there are many unanswered questions that may determine how and when he reveals himself.'³

So taking the key word "test" from v. 15-16, we can approach and outline Genesis 42 as a series of tests, all for the key question: *are you changed?*

And by way of application, we need to put ourselves to the same tests to see if we are changed people, if we are truly repentant brothers. Am I changed? Am I changing? Are you? As Joseph examines them, may Jesus examine us

Test #1. Do You Confess Your Sin?

Joseph's examination or testing brings them to this point that we also need. Paul told the Corinthians "*examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith, test yourselves*" and in the communion passage he said "*let a man examine himself, and in so doing, let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup*" (1 Cor 11:28, 2 Cor 13:5). For those who have examined themselves and know they are in the faith, there is a regular self-examination at every communion where there should be confession of sin to God, and others were needed. If we have offended someone we're to go, and as much as possible and as far as it depends on us, to be at peace. Keep short accounts with God and man.

Some sins are just between us and God and we can just confess in prayer, but if our sin affects others or if we need their help, James 5:16 also says to us "*confess your sins to one another...*" Sometimes we need to confess out loud to others what has been plaguing our conscience, for our soul's good.

One pastor told a story about a young man driving a car that wasn't his. At the intersection there was a policeman directing traffic. The sun was shining in the cop's eyes and he was squinting and the young man thought the cop was glaring at him. Then after a few moments that seemed unbearably long, he got out of the car, and confessed 'Yes, I did it. I stole this car. I'm guilty'

Here in v. 21 the brothers feel the glare of providence and they blurt out 'we are guilty!' They confess 'yes, we did it, we deserve this punishment for our crimes. Surely our sin has found us out!' Reuben calls it in v. 22 'reckoning for his blood' or 'an accounting for his blood' (like Cain for Abel in Gen 4). We don't know if they had written records from Noah, but as the family of faith they must know the stories by word of mouth if not written Word, how God told Noah of man's accountability for the blood of others (9:5-6), how from the first brothers ever God taught us that blood-guilt cries out to God, how we *are* to be our brother's keeper, how we must master our sin (4:7-10)

Are you living with guilt you haven't confessed or dealt with? Do it today. Unresolved unconfessed guilt and sin paralyzes. I think we see that in 42:1: *Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, "Why are you staring at one another?"* [i.e., why are you standing around!]

² *He said, 'Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy some for us from that place, so that we may live and not die.'* [The sons must have heard before also of grain in Egypt, but none of the 10 want to go to Egypt, the very name Egypt, that place reminded them of their sin]

Now in v. 21 they feel cursed in this cursed place, but it's a place of grace, as they'll later see. In v. 10 they call Joseph their lord, but there's a greater Lord at work here, the Lord of lords is at work here, first in their confession

#2: Has God changed your nature to love your brother?

In the 2nd part of v. 24, it says. *"But when he [Joseph] returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.*

He had given them 3 days for one of the 10 brothers to volunteer to go and no one did, not one rises up as a selfless leader, so Joseph picks Simeon as ransom. Reuben was the firstborn but maybe Joseph showed mercy because of the mercy he heard Reuben had on himself as he was bound before the eyes of these same brothers and taken away? The 2nd born Simeon, the one most responsible as the oldest one present when Joseph was betrayed, and the ringleader of the Shechemite deception and massacre, he's hand-cuffed in their sight. Will they care to leave him that way as they did with Joseph?

Joseph's brothers in Gen 37 saw him as a spy, sent by daddy to tell on them. Now Joseph accuses them of being spies. They had young Joseph bound in their sight and taken away to stay in Egypt, while they went back home, and now the sandal is on the other foot of the oldest most responsible brother. It is no accident that Joseph sets this up to see if these brothers have changed.

Kent Hughes says 'Joseph needed to know what was in his brother's hearts. Were they the same callous, murderous lot? Were they as heartless as they had been ...? Would they resort to similar expedients ... when pressured? Would they sacrifice another to save their skins? Joseph needed to know the truth. And he knew that he might never know if he revealed who he was. Moreover, a pardon would allow the truth to be glossed over.'⁴

What's going through their minds or Simeon's, in going through what he'd made his little brother go through, thrown in a pit, bound before their eyes, abandoned to Egypt, then the rest go back to Jacob? Can Simeon trust these guys to come back for him? 'Please guys,' he may have pleaded, and maybe remembered how Joseph sounded when he pleaded with very similar words.

It was not in their nature years earlier to love their brother, but supernatural grace is at work in changing these men to love beyond their natural hearts. Don't think of the love natural to human hearts, think of *agape* love that can only be explained as being from God, because it's not how you once were by nature. "*The fruit of the Spirit is love*" Paul says, that's a self-sacrificing supernatural love, produced by the Spirit when He regenerates, saves. The brothers by grace pass this 2nd test as the story unfolds, but there's a third:

²⁵ Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain and to restore every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. And thus it was done for them. ²⁶ So they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed from there. ²⁷ As one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money; and behold, it was in the mouth of his sack. ²⁸ Then he said to his brothers, "My money has been returned, and behold, it is even in my sack." And their hearts sank ...

Now remember, one of their brothers had been traded for money earlier, for a bag of silver pieces, now one of their brothers finds silver pieces in his bag. Judah had appealed to their materialism and love of money in Gen 37 when the chumps got change for their brother. Does money still drive them?

#3 test: Has God changed you from loving and living for this world?

If these brothers still loved and lived for wealth and the world and its things, they would have felt this was a sweet score, but instead they feel sorrow. As they see the money, their hearts don't sing for joy, they sink. They had lied to their dad the last time a brother didn't come back with them in Gen 37, so they could have made up a lie on the long trip back this time if they wanted. They could have justified taking the money and not going back. After all, if they went back, this harsh Egyptian might do much worse to more of them this time. After all, maybe this is God's judgment on Simeon for killing the Shechemites, which made Israel so hated in the land. Maybe it's providence bringing justice to the oldest brother for what happened to the youngest one.

But in v. 29 they tell their dad all that happened, retelling the story till v. 34. *³⁵ Now it came about as they were emptying their sacks, that behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. [why? Their love for Simeon]*

They don't celebrate hitting a money jackpot, they fear for Simeon's life.

And in the end of v. 28, we see that they're even more concerned about God
 "... *their hearts sank, and they turned trembling to one another, saying,*
 "*What is this that God has done to us?*" [first time any of them says "God"]

These brothers who were once driven by gold and silver, looting Shechem for it, selling their brother for it, they're now consumed by God, not gold. It isn't that Egyptian lord they fear most...they fear their heavenly Lord most. Joseph's test succeeded in them repenting of guilt and now recognizing God

One writer pictures v. 28 this way: 'Imagine the scene at the first stopping point, as the donkeys were being refueled, when one of the brothers found his money in his bag. Now these "honest men" were looking like they had not paid for their purchases. The rest of the way home to Canaan, they would have been watching the rearview mirror for a chariot with flashing lights ... Joseph was creating a test that mirrored their betrayal of him ... trading his life for silver. Would the brothers now demonstrate repentance and changed hearts, or would they just "take the money and run?" ...[years before they took the cash and lied about why Joseph was missing] Here they were, once again a brother short, with an incredible story and flush with cash. Were his sons playing some twisted television reality show [where] each week a new brother gets voted off the island and sold into slavery?

... The great turning point in the brother's self-awareness came [in v. 28] when they began to see that the evil they had done against Joseph was first and foremost a sin against God, deserving of punishment...Long before they realized their guilt, God had already put everything in place to save their lives. Most amazing of all, their salvation hinged on God using their worst sin to accomplish his saving purposes ... means by which God raised [Joseph] to a position of power and influence for the saving of many lives.

Just as a room may be lit, so that through a doorway you see someone's shadow on the wall before they themselves walk through, so Joseph foreshadowed the coming so many generations later, of his distant nephew, Jesus. Jesus, the beloved Son of his Father, became our brother in order to suffer injustice, humiliation, and death at our hands ... Jesus then rose ... and was exalted to the highest place. From there he gives new life...

So when Jesus calls us to believe in him, it is the call to recognize him as our brother, like us in every way except sin, and as our Lord...⁵

Hebrews says the Lord became like His brethren so He identifies with our suffering and is able to help us in time of need as we come to His throne of grace. And despite our sin toward Him He's not ashamed to call us brethren

Jesus was bound before His brethren and led away, He was their ransom. Jesus also disguised Himself after His glorification so some wouldn't at first recognize Him on the road to Emmaus. He spoke harshly to Simon at times (*get behind Me Satan!*). Jesus also tested him 3x after He had betrayed Him: *Simon, do you love Me more than these? ... Care for my brothers* (John 21).

The end of this chapter really goes with the start of the next chapter and the next message, but turn in closing to the book of 1 John 5. 1900 years later John also put his brethren through a series of tests to see if they were saved. To see if they were changed, he also gives several examination questions.

Look at 1 John 5:13 *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”* What things? Go to chapter 1. A first thing that marks true believers is: **1:9** *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Do you confess your sin? #1 test*

#2 test: Has God changed your nature to love your brother?

Look at 1 John 2:9: *The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.* ¹⁰ *The one who loves his brother abides in the Light...*[chapter 3-4 unpacks further loving brethren marks Christians]

#3 test: Has God changed you from loving and living for this world?

2:15 *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* ¹⁶ *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.* ¹⁷ *The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*

The same 3 tests in the same order for the same question: are you changed? Are you saved? These things were written for those who believe the name of Jesus, so they can know for sure they have eternal life, if they confess sin and love brethren they never could have before if God hadn't changed them, and they no longer love and live for this world, but for the will of God now. It's not a perfection of life, it's a new direction, and if they sin, they repent.

Does this describe you? Do you pass the test? Are you changed? Paul writes *“if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. Old things have passed away, new things have come”* (2 Cor. 5:17). Then Paul says a few chapters later (13:5) *“Examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Test yourselves...”*

The way to know you are in the faith is not from raising your hand and slipping it down quietly while every head is bowed and every eye closed, it's not even from standing up afterwards or walking down an aisle to the altar, it's not repeating the words of a sinner's prayer word-for-word and pronouncing them all right, it's not even feeling you sincerely meant it at that moment, it's not going underwater in baptism, and it's not getting all the jewels possible on an AWANA vest. God can and does save people who do those things, but none of those things in the Bible is how you *know you are in Christ*. The question is 'are you changed?' Are you a new creation, a new person, with new things come from God's Spirit who regenerated you?

If not, confess your sin, confess your love for the world and your lack of love for Christian brothers, call upon the name of the Lord to be saved and changed. Cry out to his Lord who not only tests you but can transform you.

¹ www.sparknotes.com on *Count of Monte Cristo*.

² *Ibid.*

³ Voddie Baucham, *Joseph and the Gospel of Many Colors*, p. 87-90.

⁴ Kent Hughes, *Genesis*, p. 494.

⁵ Iain Duguid and Matthew Harmon, *Living in the Grip of Relentless Grace: The Gospel According to Joseph*, p. 94-97.