

Midweek Study

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TRUSTING GOD IN THE DARKNESS

Genesis 37-50

Awakening the Conscience

(Genesis 42:1 – 44:34)

*Don't let your conscience be your guide unless **God guides your conscience.***

1. The **Visibility** of Conscience (Genesis 42:1-2)

v.1 – Why do you look at one another? (Why are you sitting around twiddling your thumbs?)

7 Characteristics of Conscience:¹

- A **weak** conscience (1 Cor. 8:7)
- A **defiled** conscience (Titus 1:15)
- An **evil** conscience (Hebrews 10:22)
- A **seared** conscience (1 Timothy 4:2)
- A **pure** conscience (2 Timothy 1:3)
- A **good** conscience (1 Peter 3:16)
- A **clear** conscience (Heb. 13:18)

The United States government has had a “conscience fund” for many years to provide relief for people who feel guilty about cheating the government. Thousands of letters and millions of dollars have been anonymously mailed to the fund over the years... One man sent in \$150, admitting he had cheated on his income taxes. His letter concluded, “If I still can’t sleep, I’ll send the rest later.”²

2. The **Violation** of Conscience

1 Timothy 4:2 says, “Speaking lies in hypocrisy and having their conscience seared with a hot iron.”

Titus 1:15 says, “To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.”

¹ W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 410.

² Bob Russell, *Life Preservers* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing, 1997), 85-86.

Charles Swindoll writes, “Do you remember Edgar Allan Poe’s short story *The Telltale Heart*? In it the murderer couldn’t sleep because he kept hearing the beating heart of his victim down in his basement; he wasn’t hearing the victim’s heart, of course; he was hearing his own heart, pounding in his chest, reverberating through his skull. His own guilt awoke him, and it finally led to the revelation that he was the murderer. The brothers’ crime was now more than two decades old, but they still felt the distress of it. Time doesn’t erase distress. We have evidence of that in our own lives. We know from experience the inescapable reminders of our guilt. The emotional entanglements brought about by the consequences of our own sin can be so devastating that we become physically sick, which is precisely what happened with David following his adultery with Bathsheba and his murderous plot to have Uriah, her husband, killed. Remember his heartsick admission?³

Psalm 32:3-4, “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away; Through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with a fever-heat of summer.” [MSG paraphrases, “*The pressure never let up; all the juices of my life dried up.*”]

3. The **Voice** of Conscience (**Genesis 42:21-22**)

Tony Evans writes, “In an ironic twist, Joseph detained his brothers in a prison, just as they had done in throwing him into a cistern (42:16–17). We aren’t sure what all of Joseph’s motives were: was he paying his brothers back? Trying to orchestrate contact with his younger brother? Attempting to drive his brothers to repent? Perhaps it was some combination of these. What we *do* know is that God was working through Joseph to bring the brothers to a place where he could use them. God was driving them to a place of repentance, which would ultimately lead to restoration... They had ignored Joseph’s cry for help, and they saw that they were reaping a similar response during *their* cry for help against unjust accusations.”⁴

Genesis 42:21 in Hebrew, the “we” is emphatic – “WE are responsible!”

Genesis 42:22 (NASB) reads, “Now comes the reckoning for his (Joseph’s) blood.”

To awaken their conscience and to see if his brothers had changed, Joseph tests his brothers in several ways related to what they did to him 20 years before.

- Test of **Accusation** (42:7-9) – How will they handle being treated harshly?
- Test of **Argument** (42:21-24) – Will they blame each other or take responsibility?
- Test of **Abandonment** (42:24) – Will they leave Simeon (and later Benjamin) in Egypt?
- Test of **Accumulation** (42:25-28) – Do they value deceitful gain or will they give it back?
- Test of **Affection** (43:34) – Will they despise generosity poured out on Benjamin?
- Test of **Anguish** (44:34) – Do they care about what the loss will mean to their father?

³ Charles R. Swindoll, *Joseph: A Man of Integrity and Forgiveness* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998).

⁴ Tony Evans, *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019), 95.