

Confrontation: Harsh Words

Scripture Reading — Genesis 42:1-17

As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. —

—Genesis 42:7

Does it surprise us that Joseph spoke harshly to his brothers, who didn't recognize him? We might expect this from someone who was bent on vengeance, but was Joseph that way?

Why didn't Joseph immediately reveal his identity to his brothers, invite them to come near, embrace them, weep over them, and then gently explain that God himself had sent him to Egypt ahead of them?

The rest of the story will make clear that Joseph does not have malicious intentions. But why might Joseph display such harshness now?

The truth is that Joseph's brothers were not exactly ready to be reconciled with Joseph and to receive forgiveness. Joseph may well have had a forgiving spirit, but that is not the same as extending or showing forgiveness, which will often happen later in the process.

Further, it was important that Joseph's brothers recognize their sin and confess it. So Joseph came up with a plan to get them thinking about their relationship as brothers and about their brother Benjamin, who had stayed home with their father. This was a first step in a long and painful but good process of reconciliation, as the brothers hear harsh words from a stranger in a richly ornamented robe.

Prayer

Lord, warn me today that if I ever think I am without sin, I am only deceiving myself and the truth is not in me (1 John 1:8). Search me deeply, and draw me to you. Amen.

Devotion topics: [Bible](#), [Bible Characters](#), [Joseph](#)

Written by Kenneth Koeman — <https://today.reframemedia.com/authors/kenneth-d-koeman>

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