



Surviving Your Childhood

Adapted from “How Dreams Come True” series by Dr. George O. Wood

Depending on your family situation you may have an idea of what it was like in Joseph’s household. We live in a day of serialized parenting. Where a child growing up in America may go through a number of parents in the course of their adolescent years. Joseph had a situation where he had several parents all present at the same time. We know that his father had two wives and two concubines. The concubines stood alongside the wives and really, in effect, we would regard them as legal wives in our culture. In addition to that, he had eleven brothers and one sister that we know of and probably a lot of other sisters that are not named.

We know that some of the adults in his life, especially his step-mothers, could not have been the most positive influences upon his life. Leah had real problems with her own self-image. We know that she knew she was not pretty. We know that she knew she did not have Jacob’s favor. We also know that she participated in deception to get Jacob to marry her. Leah paid a drastic consequence for this. Later, when Bilhah and Zilpah came into Jacob’s life as his concubines and children were born by them, the family environment only became more dense.

While we must avoid looking at Jacob from our own culture we know that archeologists in the Near East have uncovered contracts of marriage that obligated a wife to provide a substitute woman to have children in the event that the wife herself was barren. Jacob was simply following the custom of the day. The law of Moses had not yet been given. We could say these things even though he had some revelation of God.

It’s interesting to see as Joseph emerges that he does not become like his father Jacob. Nor does he become like his grandfather Abraham who himself had concubines. But rather he becomes a person of a higher moral order. We may presume that there was an awful lot of sibling rivalry in the family. I think any one of us could excuse Joseph if he did not have any life goals. He, after all, was the eleventh son. That means only one son followed him – Benjamin. And anyone in a large family knows that the baby son always gets the best treatment! So, Joseph only had it for a year or two until Benjamin come into existence. Somehow, though, he was a child who pleased and became the favorite of his father.

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He could have said, “My environment has made me what I am! There’s no chance growing up in a household like this. No opportunity in Palestine for me. I’ll never succeed in my family because I was not the first born. Therefore, there is no special lot that I’m going to play in life. I’ll just pass my years of existence like any other person.” He could have pointed to the negative factors and chosen not to do anything. But Joseph did not live to become the person that his family situation represented.

COURAGE

C1: Describe your childhood growing up and how your parents were or were not involved in your childhood? Whether you are married with children or single, have you ever thought about how your parents raised you and how you would raise your children? Describe your thoughts. What would you do the same as your parents and what would you do differently?

C2: Read and answer the following.

Genesis 37:1- 36 (ESV)

- What were the similarities between how Joseph grew up and your own childhood?
- What was the most strikingly familiar part of Joseph's life and yours? Be specific.
- Did you grow up with any siblings? How were your relationships as children? How are they today and can you find any similarities to how Joseph and his brothers related to each other?
- How was being in a relationship with God shared in your family? Is it something you are or will share with your children and why?
- Describe three mistakes of parenting by Jacob.
- How can you relate to the three mistakes of Jacob in how you were parented? And if you are a parent how can you relate it to how you are parenting today?



C3: Joseph did not grow up like his father Jacob or his grandfather Abraham, but grew up as an individual. How are you like or unlike your father/grandfather? Why are you alike or unlike your father/grandfather?

STRENGTH

S1: Describe your childhood. How did you find strength in God during the rough times?

S2: Read and answer the following.

Genesis 37: 1- 36 (ESV)

- Joseph was amazingly immature and naive. In what areas of your life were you immature and naive when it comes to your childhood? Be specific.
- Joseph is the most consistent dreamer in the scriptures. Do you believe that God can speak to you in your dreams? Has He?
- Joseph's family situation was a strike against him. How has your family situation been a strike against you or for you? Be specific?
- Joseph's family situation could have influenced him negatively. Joseph emerged not like his father Jacob or his grandfather Abraham. How are you like or unlike your father and grandfather? Do you consider that a good or bad thing? Why?
- Joseph survived his childhood in spite of the parenting mistakes made directly by his father. Describe at least three parenting mistakes made by Joseph's dad. How could those mistakes have effected Joseph differently?
- Are there any similarities between how Jacob raised Joseph and how you were raised? What were they?



S3: How have you found the strength in Christ to be like Joseph and follow where God is leading you regardless of your childhood? How would you share with another man the importance of grace and how God can and does overrule your mistakes?

S4: God in His grace and sovereignty worked through Joseph's troubled family situation to bring about His purposes. How has God accomplished that in your life?

ENDURANCE

E1: In the next thirty days, meet with three men and discuss your childhoods. In the discussion include how your childhoods impacted your lives. What did you glean from the conversation?

E2: In the **Genesis 37**, you read about a young man named Joseph and the relationship between his father, brothers and himself. Describe your childhood and how you were raised? How are you allowing your childhood to either help you mature in Christ or keep you from maturing in Christ?

E3: Read and answer the following.

Genesis 37: 1- 36 (ESV)

- Joseph's father Jacob made some mistakes in raising him. From these verses, what are three mistakes Jacob made? Looking back at how you were raised, do you see any similarities between Joseph and you? How has your past impacted the way you raise your children or interact with children in your extended family?
- Joseph broke away from his dysfunctional home. How would you disciple young men about the importance of not letting their childhood struggles keep them from being all that God is calling them to be?

E4: God has given you the freedom to choose and you are becoming what you are choosing. Not just what your parents have made you. Not what your environment has made you. Not what your church has made you. You are becoming what you are choosing to be. Like Joseph, we should choose to follow God. How are you choosing to follow God despite what life has dealt to you? Write out a plan on how you can help other men choose to follow God in spite of what life has dealt them? Make sure to include lessons from your life that you have learned.