



gracefellowship

Joseph: Living Between Dreams and Reality

April 15, 2018

Tension in the Family

:: Genesis 37:1-4

Introduction: I don't know what kind of family you grew up in, but today we are starting a series looking at the story of Joseph. There is one word that would perfectly describe his family: Dysfunctional. This family put the fun in dysfunctional! They are the Kardashians, Jersey Shore, and The Desperate Housewives of every city on the planet all rolled up into one family!

But here's the good news: **God works in and through difficult, messy families!**

Your messed up family doesn't mean God has abandoned you or that some cloud has come over you that will not pass and your life can't be used for God's greater glory.

That's the story of Joseph. He's a man caught between dreams and reality. What we are going to see is that God is sovereign through life's messiest, darkest times to orchestrate His perfect plan to not only save a family, but the entire world.

To understand the part of Joseph's life we are going to look at today we need to go back and look at his family tree.

- Joseph is the Great Great Grandson of Abraham. God had established a covenant with Abraham, promising to make him a great nation, to give him a great land and to bless the whole world through his descendants. Abraham made his share of mistakes as far as family goes, twice passing his wife off as his sister in order to preserve his own life, for fear that people in lands they traveled to would kill him in order to get his beautiful wife, Sarah.
- Abraham and Sarah had one son, Isaac, who married Rebecca. Taking a page from Dad's playbook, Isaac also once tried to pass Rebecca off as his sister instead of his wife. These guys were really model husbands, huh, ladies?
- Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons who could not have been more different. Esau was an avid outdoorsman and hunter. Jacob was a pretty boy who stayed in the tent. Isaac loved Esau, while Rebecca loved Jacob. It was apparent that there was favoritism at play, which caused a huge rift in the family- ultimately causing Jacob to run for his life after tricking Esau out of his birthright and the blessing reserved for the oldest child.
- While he is on the run, God meets with Jacob, changing his name to Israel and reconfirming His covenant, originally made to Abraham.

- Jacob married Leah and Rachel- sisters, who had their own sibling rivalry. Leah could have children almost at will, while Rachel, who Jacob loved more, was barren. Eventually, to keep pace Rachel offered one of her servant girls to Jacob to have children with in her place. So, Leah did the same. Finally, after having 11 sons and at least one daughter, a 12th son was born, this one from Rachel, Jacobs favored wife- his name was Joseph.

That's quite a family, isn't it?

You would think that Jacob would have learned his lesson from a mother and father who played favorites between he and his brother, but look with me at verse 3:

3 Now Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him.

He was born to Jacob in his old age, but he was also the only son Jacob had with his favored wife, Rachel. So, Jacob makes an ornate robe- or a tunic with many colors.

According to James Boice, the real idea behind the ancient Hebrew phrase for tunic of many colors is that it was a tunic extending all the way down to the wrists and ankles, as opposed to a shorter one. This was not what a workingman wore. It was a garment of privilege and status. The man who wore a tunic of this nature watched others as they did hard physical labor.

It was also a way of conveying the idea of favor, and that even though Joseph was the youngest sibling, he was going to receive the treasured birthright- a double portion of all the father possessed, and the headship of the family.

4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Their hatred was so strong they couldn't even speak kindly about Joseph. Now, there are things going on here Joseph can't control. But what happens next Joseph can control he just does it poorly!

Charles Swindol once wrote this about our responses to the things that happen to us in life: **"I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you- we are in charge of our attitudes."**

- **Charles Swindol**
 - Joseph's attitude was that he was favored and that made him untouchable.
 - Joseph begins having dreams packed with meaning- and he decides to share them.

:: **Genesis 37:5**

5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more.

6 He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had:

7 We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.”
8 His brothers said to him, “Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

Joseph proudly, maybe defiantly, tells his brothers his dream, knowing it represents the idea they will all bow down to him as he rules over them. There is a growing level of hatred toward Joseph, who is already hated so much they can't speak kindly about him. Now, their hatred is mounting and they are seething.

Where are the older siblings in the room? How do you feel if your younger brother/sister comes to you with this dream?

Joseph isn't doing himself any favors with his family. He shows an arrogance and pride that is overwhelming!

He doesn't just have a dream and keep it to himself, he proudly shares it with his brothers, knowing it will get a rise out of them! We know the buttons to push to anger our family members, don't we?

And it doesn't stop with one dream.

:: Genesis 37:9-11

9 Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”

10 When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?”

11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Now, to be fair, God is giving these dreams to Joseph- and they will come true! But when God reveals things to us, we must be willing to relay the information with a sense of humility, gentleness and respect.

- The Gospel message is like that. We have the greatest news ever given to mankind. But how we share it is just as important as that we share it.

I'm not sure that attitude was reflected by Joseph. He was brash, he was arrogant and he was prideful.

Illustration: Lebron James- Eight years ago Lebron James held a press conference to announce that he was leaving the Cleveland Cavaliers to take his talents to Southbeach! Then when he got to Miami, he joined his new teammates in a public spectacle where he promised not one ring, not two rings, not three rings...all the rings for the rest of time...

were coming to Miami. He went from being a beloved player in the league to being hated by fans everywhere (except Miami). All because he handled the situation with such over the top arrogance and pride.

Pride isolates us from the joy of community because it is incredibly divisive.

Solomon wrote this in Proverbs:

:: Proverbs 16:18

18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Note: This isn't all Joseph's fault. His brothers are filled with hatred and their hearts are wicked from years of dysfunction and fighting and bitterness between a husband, his four wives and their 12 sons. Ultimately, this is all the result of a father wound. They knew Joseph was favored by their father and it left them with scarring and pain.

Perhaps you have a wound like that in your life. You've been hurt by your father or mother, or a trusted person in your life and now in your heart anger has built up and there is pain you haven't dealt with. Holding onto that pain only continues to hurt you. It's like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die! If you have a wound like these brothers in your life, let me share a few thoughts to deal with that pain appropriately and give you better perspective:

1. Choose to forgive the person who hurt you.

There is so much freedom that comes from offering forgiveness to the people who wound us.

:: Matthew 6:14-15

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

2. Believe in and wait for God's justice.

:: Romans 12:19

19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

It isn't our place to pay people back for the evil they have done to us. God calls us to forgive, let Him bring healing to us through that action, and then trust him to bring justice to the situation.

3. Don't confuse the role of God as your heavenly Father because you've had a poor earthly model or authority.

:: Psalm 68:5-6

5 A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.

6 God sets the lonely in families...

Guess whose family he is talking about- His! You may have come from the most dysfunctional background imaginable, and as a result you have a difficult time trusting God as Father, or trusting the church as a family of faith. But God isn't like your earthly example of authority; He is perfect in every way and loving without end.

One of my great hopes for our generation and the generations we are raising, is that we will get back to doing family God's way. There has been enough hurt, enough brokenness, enough dysfunction as generations before us have raised children without a true understanding of who God is and how to live in faithful obedience to Him. Let's not repeat the mistakes of former generations about marriage and parenting; let's commit to honor God and build marriages and families on the foundation of God's truth and a relationship with Jesus!

Back to Joseph...

In verses 12-17 we see Joseph's brothers have taken the sheep to graze and find pasture, so Jacob sends Joseph to see how things were going. Pick up in verse 18.

:: Genesis 37:18-20

18 But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

19 "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other.

20 "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams."

The brothers see an opportunity to deal with the hated dreamer and plan to kill him. But Reuben, the eldest, attempts to stop them with the intention of rescuing him and sending him home.

Judah comes up with another plan...

:: Genesis 37:26-27

26 Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?"

27 Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed.

I don't know how this will land on you, but it's actually a pretty amazing picture of God's redemption plan. As we study the life of Joseph you're going to see that Joseph is a Christ figure in the O.T. He will save a generation from certain death and bring healing to a nation.

Joseph's life is spared when Judah decides to sale him into slavery rather than kill him, so it's Judah who preserves the life of this O.T. messiah figure. As we turn our gaze toward the N.T., we see that Jesus is born from the tribe of Judah! When God wants to put a

savior in place for His people, it comes through Judah. This is just one of hundreds of pieces in God's giant plan to redeem humanity.

To close let's look at one more aspect of the story together:

:: Genesis 37:28-36

28 So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

29 When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes.

30 He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?"

31 Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood.

32 They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe."

33 He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces."

34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days.

35 All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave." So his father wept for him.

36 Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

A couple observations:

1. You have to hate your brother tremendously, with the hardest of hearts to send him off into slavery and possible death.
2. You have to despise your father immensely to allow him to grieve like that and not share the truth as a form of revenge for his favoritism.

Can you imagine how Joseph feels in these moments? He has been sold by his brothers to a foreign land. He's alone and scared. His dreams and his reality don't match up- all his dreams for his future are dead. He went from being the most favored son to being a slave. And I wonder how he felt about God in those moments?

- Where is God in our darkest moments?
- How do we deal with hurt and pain when God allows tragedy to unfold in our lives?

We will see the answer to those questions next week! I hope you'll be back to join us. Until then...

1. Ask God to show you the areas where you have hurt and need to offer forgiveness.

2. Be honest about times you have felt like God left in you in the dark and instead of ignoring that hurt, ask God to reveal His plan to you through the pain you experienced.

Discussion Questions:

Read Genesis 37:1-11

1. Who do you most identify with in this family? Why?
2. How have you seen values (good or bad) passed down in your family over the years?
3. In worship we talked about forgiving those who have hurt us. Who in your life have you had to forgive for something they've done against you?

Read Genesis 37:28-36

4. Put yourself in Joseph's shoes for a moment; what do you think was going through his mind in the pit and once he was sold as a slave?
5. Where do you think God is during your darkest moments in life?