

THROUGH IT ALL: FAMILY DRAMA (GENESIS 37:1-11)



If you could describe your family with one word, what word would you choose? (Take 30 seconds and tell the person next to you).

Some of you may have said, "The one word that describes my family is... *complicated*." But if I was a betting man, I would bet that Joseph's family is more complicated than your family.

Joseph comes from a family with 1 dad, who fathered 12 boys by 4 different women. Two of those women are sisters. Jacob was married to all four at the same time and none of the women seemed to get along – including the sisters. Which leads us to the first point as we jump into Joseph's life story...

1. Joseph inherited a mess he didn't create.

Genesis 37:1–2a "Jacob [that's Joseph's father] lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. ² These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives..."

Before we go any further, I need to give you some background on Joseph's family. Otherwise, the rest of his story won't make sense...

- Joseph is 17 years old at this point (vs.2a).
- Joseph is the second youngest of 12 brothers.
- He and his brothers were shepherds over their father's animals (vs.2b).
- His dad (Jacob) had several wives, which caused tons of family drama (vs.2c).

Just because the Bible *records* what happened, it doesn't mean the Bible is *recommending* what happened. The Bible doesn't condone or promote polygamy. In fact, from the beginning, God warned against it.

Deuteronomy 17:17 *"And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold."*

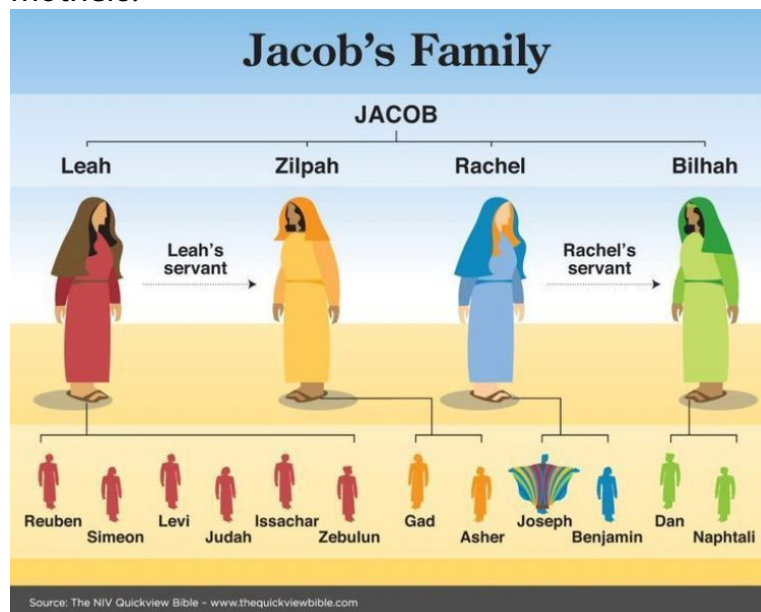
God was telling His people, "Excess cannot satisfy you." And this is one of the reasons we know the Bible can be trusted – because it doesn't portray the great men and women of faith as perfect people. The Bible simply tells the truth about what happened – the good, the bad, and the ugly.

The Mosaic Law included regulations for polygamous marriages, including provisions for inheritance and treatment of multiple wives, reflecting *accommodation*, not *approval* (Exodus 21:10; Deuteronomy 21:15-17). Scripture honestly shows the damage that sin causes, even in the lives of people that God used. God says, "Because you've already disobeyed and done this, here are some guidelines to live by. But just know, these relationships will be messy and filled with dysfunction!"

God's design from the beginning has been for one man and one woman to be joined in marriage and the two become one...

Genesis 2:24 *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."*

- Jacob is the father of all 12 boys, but the boys have different mothers:



- Even though Jacob had multiple wives, Rachel was his favorite and his other wives knew it.

- Each of these mothers favored their *own* children while Jacob favored Joseph – the son of his favorite wife.

Keep in mind, Leah and Rachel suggested that Jacob marry their maidservants (and Jacob was dumb enough to go along with it!). But once he married them, Leah and Rachel hated it.

Can you imagine how messy this family was! In fact, watch what happens...

Genesis 37:2b–4 “...Joseph brought a bad report of [his brothers] to their father. ³ Now Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. ⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated [Joseph] and could not speak peacefully to him.”

Notice: when we first meet Joseph in verse 2, he is “pasturing the flock *with* his brothers.” But at the end of verse 3, his dad pulls him out of that daily work routine, and he makes Joseph kind of an overseer – over his brothers.

We know this because he gives Joseph a “robe of many colors,” which would have been an ornate coat with long sleeves that most likely reached down to his ankles. In their day, this elaborate coat was a sign of nobility.

Joseph’s brothers had coats too but theirs would have been short-sleeved and short-waisted, making it easier for them to do their work. ¹ In other words, Jacob was saying in a very visual way, “Joseph, you will no longer work *alongside* your brothers; you will now work *above* your brothers.” ²

So, every time Joseph puts on this robe, it’s a visual reminder to his brothers that their father loves Joseph more than them. And verse 4 says “they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.”

And it really is amazing that Jacob would show this kind of blatant

¹ The *Jeremiah Study Bible*

² Charles Swindall, *Joseph: A Man of Integrity and Forgiveness*

favoritism because he knew firsthand how destructive it was to a family. You see, *his* parents had shown great favoritism between him and his brother (Genesis 25:28; 27:5–29), which caused tons of drama when he was growing up. But now he's continuing the same destructive pattern in his own family.

Life Lesson:

You may not be responsible for the dysfunction in your family, but you *are* responsible for how you respond to it. You may come from a family marked by divorce, conflict, favoritism, addiction, neglect, or constant arguing. But those things don't have to define you.

- **Your family's behavior is not an excuse for your own sin.** Like Joseph, we have to decide: Will I allow my family's mess to define me? And will I pass this mess to *my* kids, or will it stop with me?
- **It's your responsibility to pursue healthy community.** If home is difficult, find healthy community in your spiritual family – the family of God (Galatians 6:2; Proverbs 15:22). Find healthy relationships among trusted, mature Christian friends and adult mentors.

That's why your Connection Class teachers/co-teachers, D-Group leaders, and the adults in this room are so important.

So, we see how years of dysfunction has created a powder keg that's on the verge of exploding in Joseph's family. All it needed was a spark and Joseph is about to be that spark. Which leads us to our next point...

2. Joseph needed to learn how to read the room.

Joseph is an amazing young man, but he's got some maturing to do. Watch what he does...

Genesis 37:5–8 "Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. ⁶ He said to them, "Hear

this dream that I have dreamed:⁷ Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.”⁸ His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.”

Joseph says, “Guys, let me tell you about this amazing dream I had! We were out gathering bundles of wheat and my bundle stood upright. And your bundles all gathered around and bowed down to mine. Isn’t it awesome what God has in store for me!”

His brothers are FUMING at this point and they said, “Are you kidding? Dude, we will *NEVER* bow down to you!” And Joseph says, “Wait, it gets better! I had another dream also.” He says...

Genesis 37:9–11 “Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”¹⁰ But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?”¹¹ And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.”

When his dad hears the dream he says, “Now wait a minute Joseph. Are you trying to tell us that I’m the sun, your mother is the moon, and your brothers are the 11 stars? And we’re ALL going to bow down to you? Joseph, now *I’m* concerned about you.”

You see, Joseph’s story is so amazing because he’s a *real* teenager. Though we’ll see his incredible faith throughout his journey, we also see a teenager who is learning some things the hard way.

For example, he’s learning when to speak and when to keep his mouth shut. He’s also learning not to brag about himself. Even though these dreams *will* come true, Joseph is learning a valuable lesson found in the Proverbs...

Proverbs 27:2 “Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.”

Life Lesson:

- **Don't turn blessings into bragging.** To be fair, what 17yr old wouldn't want to tell *everybody* that the entire nation will one day know their name and bow down to them? But even though these dreams *will* come true, he had to learn not to brag about himself

So, before you speak, ask yourself: Am I sharing this to honor God or to impress people?

You see, you may be talented, intelligent, attractive, athletic, or spiritually gifted, etc. but those are gifts from God, not reasons to feel superior (1 Corinthians 4:7).

So, if you feel the urge to brag about yourself, brag about the Lord instead (1 Corinthians 1:31). He is the hero of your story, not you!

- **Seek character more than a platform.** You may want to be a leader, influencer, the captain on your team, or a speaker. But first, learn to serve faithfully when nobody is watching or applauding (Luke 16:10; Mark 10:43–45).

These are the things that God is working in Joseph, and He wants us to learn them as well. So, Joseph is learning a lesson in HUMILITY. And this leads us to our final point...

3. Before God could use him greatly, Joseph had to grow deeply.

Remember, God cares more about who you're *becoming* than what you're *accomplishing*. You see, Joseph's story isn't simply about a 17-year-old kid who went from the pit to the palace. It's about how God used *every* season of Joseph's life to shape him into the man he needed to become.

So, you may not understand what God is doing in your life right now, but God may be using this season of your life to prepare you for what comes next (or later) in life.

Now: Joseph drops this spark (telling his brothers about his dreams) into the powder keg of their family dysfunction, and the explosion is about to happen...

But you'll have to come back next week to see it!

Small Groups