

THROUGH IT ALL: BETRAYAL (GENESIS 37:12-36)

Let me remind you of Joseph's situation. He's 17yrs old and he's been raised in 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.

His father openly favored Rachel (his favorite wife) and Joseph (their first-born son). So, this family is COMPLICATED to say the least.

And even though Joseph was one of the youngest brothers, his dad pulled him out of the daily work routine, and he made Joseph kind of an overseer – over his brothers.

Jacob made this clear by giving Joseph a “robe of many colors” – a sign of nobility. It was a visual reminder that their father loved Joseph more than them, and they hated Joseph for it.

And when we left off, Joseph had told his family about two dreams that God had revealed to him – dreams of his future greatness where his entire family would bow down to him. And this only made his brothers hate him even more. They couldn't stand the sight of him.

So, we see how years of dysfunction has created a powder keg that's on the verge of exploding in Joseph's family. And we're about to see the explosion take place, which leads us to our first point...

1. Even when you do things right, people will still sometimes betray you.

Genesis 37:12–14 “Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. ¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.” And he said to him, “Here I am.” ¹⁴ So he said to him, “Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and

bring me word.” So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.”

As we learned last week, Joseph certainly has some maturing to do but he really is a great young man. He doesn't deserve what is coming. He was simply:

- Obeying his dad.
- Looking for his brothers.
- Checking on the sheep.
- Doing what he was told.

So, his dad really put Joseph in a bad spot by asking him to go by himself to check on his brothers. Jacob knew full well how much the brothers hated Joseph. But, it's even more surprising that the brothers were grazing the animals in a town called Shechem.

Backstory: You see, earlier, when Joseph's family had passed through that area, their sister (Dinah) was raped by a leader in that town (Genesis 34:1-31). So, to get revenge, Joseph's brothers devised a trap and they killed all the men in Shechem – carrying off all their wealth, their women, and their children.

They said:

- If you abuse *one* of our women, we'll take ALL of your women.
- If *one* of your men committed this crime, we'll kill ALL of your men.
- You want to take away our sister's innocence, we'll take ALL the wealth from your city.

So, their version of justice was WAY overboard with vengeance. And their dad was furious when he heard about it.

So, we see that Joseph's brothers are capable of serious sin, violence, and poor choices. And here they are *back* at Shechem like nothing ever happened, which shows how reckless they really are.

Now let's see what happens when Joseph shows up to check on them...

Genesis 37:17b–20 “...So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. ¹⁸ They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁹ They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.”

When his brothers recognized him from afar (they saw his coat), they said, “Let’s kill him, throw his body in a pit, and tell our dad that a wild animal killed him. Then we’ll see what becomes of his dreams!” In other words, they would rather *murder* their brother than one day bow down to him.

But then an unlikely person steps in as a voice of reason...

Genesis 37:21–22 “But when Reuben [the oldest brother] heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” ²² And Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father.”

Reuben’s plan was to save Joseph’s life. And when you read that, it may seem like Reuben is a good dude. But there’s a backstory on his family drama as well.

Backstory: You see, several years earlier, Joseph’s mom (Rachel – the favorite wife) was giving birth to the 12th son, Benjamin (Genesis 35:16-22). Scholars believe Benjamin was around 6 yrs younger than Joseph. But Rachel died while giving birth. So, Jacob’s favorite wife was dead, but while he was still grieving, Reuben secretly slept with Bilhah – one of his father’s wives (Rachel’s maidservant).

So, Reuben's plan is to save Joseph's life...

- Maybe because he feels bad for sleeping with his father's wife.
- May because he feels bad for murdering those men in Shechem, and he doesn't want any more blood on his hands.

Whatever his reasoning, his plan is to throw Joseph into a pit to teach him a lesson, then return later, rescue Joseph, and take him back home...

Genesis 37:23–25a “So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore.²⁴ And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.²⁵ Then they sat down to eat...”

So, when Joseph arrives, the first thing they did was strip him of the coat they hated so much. Then they threw him into the pit, which was an empty cistern.

Cisterns were large pits that held water when it rained but this one was empty. And it was way too deep for Joseph to reach the opening at the top and climb out. So, somebody would have to lower a rope and pull him out.¹ And this leads us to one quick point of application.

Life Lesson:

- **Being faithful doesn't mean you'll never experience pain.**
 - You can be a good friend and still get betrayed.
 - You can be honest and still get blamed.
 - You can love someone and still get hurt by them.
 - Being faithful doesn't mean you'll never experience pain.

Notice: when they threw Joseph into the pit, his brothers sat down and ate a meal like nothing had happened! (vs.25). Remember,

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1997). *Be authentic* (p. 85). Chariot Victor Pub.

these guys are already guilty of mass murder. So, this doesn't even phase them! And this leads us to our next point...

2. Betrayal happens when we underestimate someone's worth.

Genesis 37:25–28 “Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt.²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him.²⁸ Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.”

So, instead of killing him, they decide to get rid of Joseph and make some money in the process. And, with one final insult, they sold him for just 20 pieces of silver – the price of a *handicapped* slave.² It was one final way to diminish Joseph's worth.

You see, the way you treat people reveals how you value their worth. Their jealousy and resentment had caused them to view Joseph as worthless. But that leads us to our third point...

3. Betrayal and deception eventually comes back around.

Genesis 37:29–33 “When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes³⁰ and returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?”³¹ [they said, “Relax, we’ve got a plan.”] Then they took Joseph’s robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood.³² And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, “This we have found; please identify whether it is your son’s robe or not.”³³ And he identified it and said, “It is my son’s

² Charles Swindall, “Joseph: A Man of Integrity & Forgiveness”

robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces."

So, as Joseph's caravan was winding its way across the field and out of sight, his brothers killed a goat from their flock, and dipped Joseph's robe in the blood. They took it back to their father, tossed it on the floor and said, "We found this. We think it might be *your son's* robe."

Not *Joseph's* robe, *your son's* robe. They hated him so much they wouldn't even say his name! And here's where I need to give you one more backstory.

Backstory: You see, it's ironic that Jacob's sons deceived him by killing a goat because, years earlier, Jacob had deceived his own father the same way – by killing a goat and using its skin to deceive *his* father, Isaac (Genesis 27). And this leads us to another point of life application.

Life Lesson:

- **We reap what we have sown.** If you practice deception and betrayal, just know that it will eventually come back around. Jacob deceived his own dad by killing a goat and now it's come back around – his own boys are deceiving and betraying him the same way.

The chapter ends in verse 36 by telling us one final detail...

Genesis 37:36 "Meanwhile the Midianites had sold [Joseph] in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard."

- From **Joseph's perspective:** *"My life is over."*
- From **his brothers' perspective:** *"We've finally gotten rid of him."*
- From **God's perspective:** *"Joseph is exactly where I want him to be."*

That's the perspective Joseph couldn't see yet. But, THROUGH IT ALL, God was with him...

- Even in the pit.
- Even when his brothers betrayed him.
- Even when he became a slave.
- Even when he couldn't understand what was happening.

You see, sometimes faith isn't knowing what God is doing—it's trusting God when you don't.

Small Groups