

# Dysfunctional Families and God's Grace

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A Sermon series on the Life of Joseph

## Genesis 37:1-4

We are done with the series on Beatitudes, Advent and Christmas. I am moving to the OT and going with you on a journey through the life of Joseph. Our annual theme is “**Living Right Side Up in an Upside Down World.**” This was a reality for Joseph who was raised in tough family circumstances. One can easily wonder if anything good could come out of this mess. I mean his journey in life is a good example of how God can work in an upside down world, where everything goes against Joseph. He was rejected, abandoned, sold to slavery, falsely accused, forgotten. What else? Instead of being bitter, he refused to bear a grudge. One can wonder if the life of this man is real. **It is real**, and it is written in the Bible to teach us about **integrity and forgiveness**. It is there to teach that the sovereign God has a plan for humanities salvation.

-I love my family. Sometimes I miss the days when I was growing up along with my brothers and sister. Being the youngest among my siblings, I enjoyed some advantages. Yet I always questioned my brothers or sister about why they did not take me with them to the movies or with their friends. Anyway, I enjoyed my relationship with them overall. As I am getting older, I see how I have inherited from my parents certain good and bad characteristics. For the good ones, I am grateful; but for the bad ones, I wonder if I can change them. The world tells us we cannot change them; this is the way we were born. But the Bible teaches us that things can be changed and transformed. God can transform our lives. Joseph's story is one of those stories.

-Throughout my years of ministry I have often felt sad to see that family relationships can also become very bitter. I often helped brothers and sisters to reconcile. Sometimes I witnessed good results and other times no result at all. Disputes are usually about money, property, inheritance, and misunderstanding- “you said, he said” and so on. I have seen arguments when I had to literally stand between them so they would not hit each other.

**Joseph's family was very dysfunctional.** You need to understand in those days polygamy was permissible, which made family life even more complicated. To examine how in the world Jacob's family ended up this way, we need to go back.

-In **Genesis 12** we read that God commanded Abram (Abraham later) to leave his land and move on to a new place. **“I will make you into a great nation,”** God promised him, and Abraham obeyed and left. We learn a lot from the life of Abraham. We also learn from his mistakes. When Abraham, or Abram at that time, went to Egypt with his wife Sarah, he lied to the Pharaoh’s officials saying Sarah was his sister. Pharaoh took Sarah as his wife, and a plague hit pharaoh’s household. Pharaoh said to Abraham: **“What have you done to me?”** Do you think Abraham learned his lesson?

- **In Genesis 20** Abraham does the same mistake again. This time he visits **Abimelech**, the king of Gerar. Now Sarah was 90 years old and beautiful. Abraham lied one more time and said Sarah was his sister. Trouble came to Abimelech, the poor king who took Sarah. God is merciful. God visited this king and warned him to give Sarah back to Abraham. He did. Next morning Abimelech said to Abraham, **“What have you done to us?”**

**You think Abraham hopefully learned to trust the Lord.** Let me tell you that another person did learn; **Abimelech learned his lesson** (later we will see how).

Why did Abraham lie twice? Fear of losing his wife? Abraham acted out of fear, which was in his head. The text does not show that those people were going to kill him because if he said that Sarah was his wife. **He acted out of fear and not faith.** We all can fall in the same trap.

-Abraham and Sarah had promise from God to be a great nation. Both were impatient to see when God is going to fulfill this promise. So, they tried to fulfill God’s promise using human maneuvers. You all know that it did not work. You see that Abraham and Sarah did not trust God to give them a child. She even laughed when she heard that God was blessing them with a new child (Gen 18). **Isaac (he laughs) was born.**

**What you sow you reap.**

A generation after Abraham, his son Isaac repeats the same mistake.

- In **Genesis 26**, we read that Isaac and his beautiful wife Rebecca visit the same king, king **Abimelech of the Philistines** in G'ara. Like father, like son. When people ask him about his wife Rebecca, he says she is his sister.

Do you see how it passes from generation to generation?

-I have seen fathers who constantly lied. Unfortunately, their children did the same thing.

-Now this time (Gen 26:8) the king sees from his window that Isaac is "laughing" (it meant to have a sexual relationship) with Rebecca. The king says to Isaac, "**She is really your wife! Why did you say, 'She is my sister'?**"(Gen 26:9)

Same answer. "**I was afraid that...**"

Just before this incident, God spoke to Isaac, and told him He will bless them. He will keep His covenant with him, as He did with his father Abraham. I mean we expect Isaac to act differently after all the promises God gave him.

The question I ask myself again: **Do we trust God? Fear or Faith.**

Abimelech learned his lesson. He was careful. He ordered his men not to touch this woman.

Yet, **God's grace is greater than our sins and mistakes.** He blessed Isaac and Rebecca and gave them two boys, **Esau and Jacob**.

-Did they learn their lesson?

-I am not sure. **Isaac favored Esau** who was a hunter. **Rebecca favored Jacob** who was a cook.

I don't know what do you think, **but favoritism in families** destroys relationships. I don't know how healthy will be your family when you prefer one child to the other. Sometimes people ask me, "Who do you love more? Your son or daughter?" What a sad question.

-**This is a human tragedy.** **Sin destroys relationships.** Like grandfather, like father, like son. This time **Jacob lies to his father** to receive the blessings.

I don't know why Isaac was rushing to give his blessing to Esau. Interestingly, he lived for 40 more years after this event. Again, fear in his head motivated him to take action. Coming back to the story, he ordered his son Esau to hunt and bring

food so he could bless him. But Rebecca and Jacob tricked their husband and father. **Jacob received the blessing.**

-The problem continues after this. While humans are making mistakes, God is not giving up from humanity. God is walking with His creatures day-by-day. Jacob learned many lessons to trust God in his life. God gave Jacob (deceiver) a new name Israel (God strives).

Yet, going back and looking to Jacob's family; it was a big mess. **Two wives** (Leah and Rachel), two **maidservants** (Bilhah and Zilpah) and twelve children.

**Think about the problems in this house.**

Joseph had  
three stepmothers,  
ten stepbrothers,  
a stepsister  
a brother,  
and all living in the same area, probably different tents. **Talk about a dysfunctional family.**

There was favoritism. There was gossip. There was jealousy. You name it...

**The problem moves from generation to generation.**

-**Dina was Jacob's daughter.** She was raped. The man was not a Jew. **Shechem** was a Hivite. He loved Dina and asked his father to speak to Jacob to give him Dina. It seems Jacob's brothers were more interested in family honor than Jacob was.

They agreed that everyone should be circumcised in the village, then they would give their sister to them. They did circumcise all the men of the village. When they were in pain of the circumcision, two brothers **Simeon and Levi** went and killed all the men in the village. Then eight brothers, instead of disagreeing with them, went and looted the place.

Lying, killing, robbery, not keeping a promise. Jacob was sad and worried.

**Joseph grew up in this mess.**

**A. Daddy's favorite.**

Let us talk about Joseph. His mother Rachel was barren for a long time. In Genesis 30:22-24 we see how God remembered Rachel and He opened her womb and

Joseph was born. Rachel named her child Joseph which means: “May He (God) add”. I believe she was asking God for more children. Jacob loved Joseph.

**Now Israel 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. (Gen 37:3 ESV)**

Joseph was treated differently. He wore a long, colored garment given by his father. His garment was different from those of his brothers’. He wore “a tuxedo” when he went to the fields. He was 17, and he was told to keep his eyes on his brothers’ affairs. He did that and delivered a bad report to his father. How dangerous was his job?

The text tells us that his father favored him, but the text does not tell us if Joseph was spoiled. Those brothers were not easy people. Reuben had slept with his father’s concubine (Gen 35:22); Simon and Levi had killed all the tribe of Shechem. The circumstances around him were not in his favor. We read:

**But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him. (Gen 37:4 ESV)**

## **B. Dreams**

Joseph had some dreams, which he shared with his family. Why did he tell his dream to his family? The Bible does not tell us the reason but we are glad he did. (Later we will see how God used those dreams to reveal God’s plan). They did not like them. They also mocked Joseph. Please notice God is talking to them via the dreams of Joseph and they are refusing to listen. I am not sure if Joseph understood what his dreams meant. He ended up in a big mess. He shared his dream (the voice of God) and he ended up in trouble.

How many times we see the same situation in the Bible. Sharing His Word does not mean everything will be OK. Just look at the life of Jesus.

### **Application:**

**Who controls you?**

These days we keep hearing that we inherit certain problems from our family. I even heard that day that scientists found that men who carry a certain chromosome type will be disloyal to their wives. Funny that humanity tries to find someone to blame. "It is not our choice."

OK, I understand. There are things we can inherit from our families. This is the end; this is my destiny.

Do you remember badveli Kevin's sermon:

Do circumstances control our faith?

Or does our faith control how we engage circumstances?

Can the situation be different? Of course. **Learn from Joseph.** He stood firm. Later we will see that even in Egypt He learns to trust God daily. Joseph learned things in Egypt, that later in his life would be very important. Maybe he did not understand why these things were happening.

Joseph was not perfect. He was human like you and me. One thing was very important for him; He learned to walk with the Lord despite unpleasant circumstances.

**One can have an imperfect family (dysfunctional background), but God is able to grant us a new life.**

## Dysfunctional families and God's grace.

If I am not born above, born from God, born from Spirit of God, born of Jesus, I am nothing. My DNA's and my genes are nothing. God transforms our minds. Paul says,

**But by the *grace* of God I am what I am, and his *grace* toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the *grace* of God that is with me. (1 Cor. 15:10 ESV)**

**Today some of us struggle with things we inherited.**

Why am I acting like this?

Stop blaming others or situations. See how God can lead you day by day. He knows better. He has a plan for your life. Stop blaming others. Learn to trust God.

Please do not leave without prayer. May God lead you to trust Him more rather than acting out of your fears.

Amen