

God Providentially Works In and Through People from Dysfunctional Families

Message 1 of 6 in the series: "Providence: The Story of Joseph"

A. The story of Joseph is a story of providence.

Providence = "God's faithful and effective care and guidance of everything which he has made toward the end which he has chosen." Holman Bible Dictionary

Note: God's ways/plans are beyond our comprehension. "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord. '**And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.**' Isaiah 55:8 (NLT)

Life Application: In order to have a personal relationship with the all-knowing, all-powerful, eternal creator God of the universe, we need to trust Him. "**Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.** Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT)

B. Joseph came from a very dysfunctional family.

"When **Joseph was seventeen years old**, he often tended his father's flocks. He worked for his half-brothers, the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. But Joseph reported to his father some of the bad things his brothers were doing. Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children because Joseph had been born to him in his old age. So one day Jacob had a special gift made for Joseph—a beautiful robe. But his brothers hated Joseph because their father loved him more than the rest of them. They couldn't say a kind word to him." Genesis 37:2b-4 (NLT)

Note: Joseph's dad, Jacob ("trickster") had been tricked by his father-in-law, Laban, into marrying Leah (Laban's homely, oldest daughter) before he could marry Rachel (Laban's beautiful, youngest daughter who was the love of Jacob's life). As a result, Leah always felt like a second-class wife and sought to earn Jacob's love by giving him more children than Rachel. "So Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, '**The Lord has noticed my misery, and now my husband will love me.**'" Genesis 29:32 (NLT) Rachel and Leah eventually got into a baby race that escalated until it involved their handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah, and resulted in Jacob having 12 sons and one daughter via four wives. Joseph was Rachel's first child and, therefore, Jacob's favorite.

Life Application: We must avoid showing favoritism. "My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others? ...it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin." James 2:1 & 8-9a (NLT)

"One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever. 'Listen to this dream,' he said. 'We were out in the field, tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine!' His brothers responded, 'So you think you will be our king, do you? Do you actually think you will reign over us?' And they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them. Soon Joseph had another dream, and again he told his brothers about it. 'Listen, I have had another dream,' he said. 'The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!' This time he told the dream to his father as well as to his brothers, but his father scolded him. 'What kind of dream is that?' he asked. 'Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow to the ground before you?' **But while his brothers were jealous of Joseph, his father wondered what the dreams meant.**" Genesis 37:5-11 (NLT)

Note: God can and does, on occasion, speak to people through dreams. "In the last days,' God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. **Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams.**'" Acts 2:17 (NLT) (*Joel 2:28*)

Life Application: We need to check all of our dreams and what others tell us from their dreams to see if they are consistent with the Bible. "**All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives.** It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right." 2 Timothy 3:16 (NLT)

Note: Joseph made his brothers furious with jealousy because he was young and lacked discretion. Discretion is knowing what to say, when to say it, and how to say it. It is also knowing when to say nothing at all. Like other forms of wisdom, it is developed over time, through experience, with wise counsel, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. "**Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.**"

Proverbs 2:11 (NIV)

C. Joseph's half-brothers became so jealous of him that one day they plotted to kill him.

"Soon after this, Joseph's brothers went to pasture their father's flocks at Shechem. When they had been gone for some time, Jacob said to Joseph, 'Your brothers are pasturing the sheep at Shechem. Get ready, and I will send you to them... Then come back and bring me a report.' So Jacob sent him on his way, and Joseph traveled to Shechem from their home in the valley of Hebron. When he arrived there, a man from the area noticed him wandering around the countryside. 'What are you looking for?' he asked. 'I'm looking for my brothers,' Joseph replied. 'Do you know where they are pasturing their sheep?' 'Yes,' the man told him. 'They have moved on from here, but I heard them say, "Let's go on to Dothan."' So Joseph followed his brothers to Dothan and found them there. **When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. As he approached, they made plans to kill him.** 'Here comes the dreamer!' they said. 'Come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can tell our father, "A wild animal has eaten him." Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!'" Genesis 37:12-20 (NLT)

Note: Sin is a heart problem. "Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. **These desires give birth to sinful actions.** And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death."

James 1:14-15 (NLT)

Life Application: We all need spiritual heart transplants! "And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. **I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you** so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations."

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (NLT)

"But when Reuben heard of their scheme, he came to Joseph's rescue. 'Let's not kill him,' he said. 'Why should we shed any blood? Let's just throw him into this empty cistern here in the wilderness. Then he'll die without our laying a hand on him.' Reuben was secretly planning to rescue Joseph and return him to his father. So when Joseph arrived, his brothers ripped off the beautiful robe he was wearing. Then they grabbed him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. Then, just as they were sitting down to eat, they looked up and saw a caravan of camels in the distance coming toward them. It was a group of Ishmaelite traders taking a load of gum, balm, and aromatic resin from Gilead down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, 'What will we gain by killing our brother? We'd have to cover up the crime. **Instead of hurting him, let's sell him to those Ishmaelite traders. After all, he is our brother—our own flesh and blood!**' And his brothers agreed. So when the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, came by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt." Genesis 37:21-28 (NLT)

Note: Joseph didn't go quietly. Over twenty years later, his brothers would still remember Joseph's pleadings. "Clearly, we are being punished because of what we did to Joseph long ago. **We saw his anguish when he pleaded for his life,** but we wouldn't listen..." Genesis 42:21b (NLT)

"Some time later, Reuben returned to get Joseph out of the cistern. When he discovered that Joseph was missing, he tore his clothes in grief. Then he went back to his brothers and lamented, 'The boy is gone! What will I do now?' Then the brothers killed a young goat and dipped Joseph's robe in its blood. They sent the beautiful robe to their father with this message: 'Look at what we found. Doesn't this robe belong to your son?' Their father recognized it immediately. 'Yes,' he said, 'it is my son's robe. A wild animal must have eaten him. Joseph has clearly been torn to pieces!' Then Jacob tore his clothes and dressed himself in burlap. He mourned deeply for his son for a long time. **His family all tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted.** 'I will go to my grave mourning for my son,' he would say, and then he would weep. Meanwhile, the Midianite traders arrived in Egypt, where they sold Joseph to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Potiphar was captain of the palace guard." Genesis 37:29-36 (NLT)

Life Application: God works in and through people from dysfunctional families. "The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. He does not punish us for all our sins; **he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve.** For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. **The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust.**" Psalm 103:8-14 (NLT)

Connect Group Discussion Questions:

Read Genesis 37, and then discuss the following questions:

1. If dysfunctional is a "1" and well-adjusted is a "10", where would you rate your family growing up?
2. How does it make you feel to hear that God works in and through people from dysfunctional families? (Psalm 103:8-14)
3. Why do you think Joseph's half-brothers hated him enough to kill him? How did Joseph make things worse?
4. Discuss the following statements:
 - We need to check all of our dreams and what others tell us from their dreams to see if they are consistent with the Bible. (Acts 2:17, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, John 17:17, Acts 17:11)
 - Sin is a heart problem. (James 1:14-15, Matthew 5:21-22)
 - We all need a spiritual heart transplant. (Ezekiel 36:26-27, Philippians 2:13)
 - God's ways are beyond our comprehension. (Isaiah 55:8-9)
 - In order to have a personal relationship with the all-knowing, all-powerful, eternal creator God of the universe, we need to trust Him. (Proverbs 3:5-8)
5. Why did Joseph's brothers think they had put an end to Joseph's dreams when they sold him into slavery? Is it possible for anyone to thwart God's plans?
6. Quotes worth considering:

"Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you." Solomon in Proverbs 2:11 (NLT)

"Discretion is the better part of valor." William Shakespeare

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Paul in Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)

"Tact is the art of making a point without making an enemy." Isaac Newton