

Genesis 37v1-11

37 *Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.*

² *This is the account of Jacob's family line.*

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

³ *Now Israel 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^[a] robe for him. 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.*

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.*

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.*

It is amazing to think that in few weeks' time we will be half way through 2025 and half way through our *year of discipleship* here at All Saints. I do hope that over the last five to six months you have found yourself encouraged to grow in faith and go deeper in your walk with the Lord. I certainly have, but it hasn't just been about learning spiritual formation through a course and sermon series, it is also about the Holy Spirit moulding and shaping us through the nitty gritty of life in community as we navigate tough challenges and experience wonderful answers to prayer together.

So that is why I am really excited to be starting our new series today called *living the dream* because it is all about the nitty gritty of faith and family life. The tale of Joseph in

the latter chapters of Genesis is an amazing story of an unlikely lad from a dysfunctional family who had to endure great hardships but grew in wisdom and discernment until he became the saviour of a whole nation. Somehow in His grace the Lord took a young Dimwit Dreamer and made him into a wise Godly Governor.

Joseph's story is packed full of further discipleship lessons for us today because it is all about learning to navigate complex relationships. As we recognise our own dysfunctions and insecurities, we are invited by the Holy Spirit to let him come and heal our hurts, change our thinking and grow our character. It might take years to sort us out but God is here for the long haul and the story of Joseph shows us that however desperate things can look, God is able not only restore relationships but also to redeem lost time and fulfil forgotten dreams.

Joseph is mentioned in Hebrews 11 as one of the heroes of the faith, so it is perhaps surprising to note that God is not even mentioned in our opening passage of his story. But that is part of the point. Even before we might acknowledge his presence, God is already at work in the world fulfilling his purposes in people's lives. What we need to do is to learn to spot his hand and follow where he is leading. We can either push him away or step into the opportunities in front of us to step into our destiny as a son or daughter of the King.

The writer of Genesis simply starts by telling us this is the account of Jacob's family line. Jacob was Joseph's Father who was also named *Israel* meaning 'one who struggles with God'. Jacob had a lot of struggles in his life. He struggled with his older brother Esau, eventually tricking him out of his birthright inheritance. Jacob struggled with his uncle Laban who deceived him into marrying his older daughter Leah before eventually being able to marry Rachael whom he loved after seven years hard labour. He struggled with impatience and fathered more children through Rachael and Leah's servant girls Bilhah and Zilpah when they were offered to him. But most significantly Jacob also struggled with God. At Bethel dreamt he saw the Lord and a stairway to heaven with Angels ascending and descending on it, and this spiritual awakening began a lifelong pursuit of God's covenant blessings, culminating with Jacob physically wrestling with an Angel at Peniel and not letting go until God finally blessed him. (Although he did walk with a limp from then on.)

So when Joseph was born, we have born into a total mele of family dysfunction, rivalry and deception all mixed up with a God's covenant promise and divine favour upon Jacob and his descendants.

It might have been inevitable for Joseph to perpetuate the dysfunction unless God had stepped in to break the cycle with a radical alternative plan for his life. That is why Joseph's story is really one of salvation and redemption.

It is important to note that Joseph never lied or deceived anyone -he only spoke truthfully, but as a young man of 17 he clearly lacked a fair bit of humility and social filters!

V2 tells us He gave a bad report about his brothers to their Father. They might indeed have been bad boys but nobody likes a snitch!

Then when Jacob perhaps foolishly showed favouritism and gave Joseph a richly ornamented robe, he wore it in front of his brothers and flaunted his favoured status. Surely, he should have known this was a dumb idea? Paul wrote in Galatians 5v26 'let's not become conceited provoking and envying each other.'

The Hebrew phrase for the robe, "ketonet passim", is debated. It might mean: "A robe with long sleeves" (suggesting a noble or non-labouring status) "A richly ornamented tunic" (luxurious clothing) Either way, it implies Joseph was not expected to do hard labour like his brothers—a social distinction that deepened their resentment.

Then finally Joseph shared his two dreams with them and that would have been the final straw. He shared how he saw his brothers' sheaves of grain bowing down before his own. And then the Sun moon and eleven stars bowing down before him. Clearly it came across as extraordinarily arrogant.

And yet the dreams were indeed prophetic and in due time of course, his brothers, his father Jacob and in fact the whole family would bow down before him in Egypt.

But the whole passage does raise some interesting questions about family dynamics, dreams and discernment.

Was Joseph right to share what he did? The bible doesn't comment except to say that Jacob rebuked him. But whenever we dream something or hear God's voice or have a spiritual impression we need to be discerning about how we share that information. Certainly, in the NT we are taught that prophecy and spiritual gifts must only be applied in a context of love and encouragement.

Truth without grace is mean, but equally grace without truth is meaningless.

Joseph needed to learn to apply both and thankfully during his time as a slave in Egypt followed by time in prison his arrogance was dismantled as he he learned to rely on the Lord.

Some early Church fathers and contemporary scholars point to Joseph as a type of Christ, one of the OT characters who foreshadowed Jesus. Like Jesus, Joseph was betrayed and suffered for telling the truth, was vindicated and rose up as a mighty ruler, whose forgiveness saved both his own people and those of the surrounding nations too.

There are certainly some similarities. But for me, there is a key difference in that Jesus didn't need to learn grace, because he already fully embodied the love of God. John 1 tells us ¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, **full** of grace and truth.

From day one Jesus was both human and divine, full of grace and truth. But Joseph needed to encounter God's grace in his life. He had his character deconstructed through enduring the pain of injustice and broken relationships. We learned about the importance of meeting God in pain and suffering in session 5 of Practicing the Way. But along the way Joseph experienced God's love and favour and that is why he was able to show love, kindness and forgiveness during his latter years as ruler of Egypt.

Relationships are where the rubber hits the road in discipleship. You may be here this morning carrying pain from a fractured relationship, whether that be a family member or a lost friendship. It feels particularly painful when that fracture may have been caused because of your faith or maybe it's because of careless words spoken without grace. Perhaps, like Joseph the words spoken may have been true, but they caused offence which has grown into a root of bitterness.

John Bevere calls this 'the bait of Satan' when picking up an offense allows the devil to bring division and relational breakdown. We need to be aware of the devil and his schemes.

The good news from this story of Joseph is that there is hope. God knows everything and has grace for you this morning. Where grace and truth combine there is always hope for healing and restoration.

Romans 8v28 is perhaps the key takeaway from the story of Joseph: ²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

We have a purpose and a destiny as disciples of Christ, and that is to be carriers and conduits of Grace and Truth. It might take years and may be painful to get there, but if we put our trust in Jesus and his forgiveness, pray and seek first the kingdom of God, all these things will surely be added to us.