

Portrait of a Dysfunctional Family

Genesis 37

When you think about your family, your mother, father,
brothers or sisters, if you have them,
How do you feel?

Do you get a sense of Joy?

Do you miss them?

Do you become sad?

Or perhaps you feel uneasy.

Do you feel angry?

Do you feel distant?

What memories come into your mind?

The reality is that you are who you are because of your family for good or ill.
Some of us deny or don't realize the depth of this influence.

Others of us know it and understand it.

The problem is that we can be blind or stuck to the sins of our families.

The Bible pulls no punches about the reality of those we want to call saints.
It is not a book of illusions but of reality.

We read the Bible not just because it's about people who live long ago.

That can get boring pretty quick.

But if you have eyes to see and ears to hear, the Spirit reveals you to yourself.

And more than that – what God invites you to.

This passage is about Jacob, also known as Israel.

Now Jacob had 2 wives and 2 concubines

who gave him a combined total of 12 sons and one daughter.

That is a lot of kids.

The Bible does not condone polygamy it just tells you what Jacob did.

And boy it had its consequences.

All the bible characters with more than one wife had massive problems.

But Jacob fed the dysfunction of his family by blessing one son over all others.

There is a myriad of reasons why a person shows favour.

Some reasons are good while other reasons are downright wrong.

Jacob loved Joseph because he was born later.

Because of this favour he caused the rift between the brothers.

He was insensitive and stupid.
To be favoured is not a blessing.
It has its own curses.
Jacob liked what he liked.
He does what he wants because he is the patriarch.
His word is law.
He doesn't care.

Joseph seems to play the innocent but he had his own issues.
He is a spoiled bratty kid who foolishly flaunts his favoured status.
He dreams, and note that although dreams in the ancient world were
deemed to be associated with divine revelation
Instead of being thoughtful and considerate,
Joseph rubs the noses of his brothers in them, not once but twice.
In the folly of his youth, Joseph is selfish and insensitive.
He doesn't care.

The brothers as you can imagine are not happy campers.
Given these circumstances they are not about to let this go.
They nurse sadness at being overlooked.
That sadness becomes jealousy and bitterness that is nursed into hatred.
They plan to murder him.
Reuben, the oldest reveals his weakness.
As the eldest he should by rights lead them.
He does not want to kill Joseph but at the same time is too cowardly and weak
To speak against his brothers directly.
In fact, some commentators find his inaction suspect.
Perhaps he wanted to get into his father's good graces
by going behind the backs of his brothers
but not risk himself to bring Joseph back.
He wanted to do good but did not have the courage to do the right thing.
Judah proves to be cold and calculating.
It is he who suggests that Joseph be sold into slavery for profit.
The brothers get their revenge on their insensitive father.
They wanted his love but when he withheld it, their pain twisted them.
Self-pity has that affect.
Eye-for-eye and all that.
I wonder if they felt remorse or satisfaction

when their father goes mad with grief.

Not a happy chapter.

Not a happy family.

But remember, the Bible is not about a fantasy world.

It is about our world.

In fact, it's about your family and mine.

Am I Jacob, blind to the needs of others and focussed on what I want and like?

Am I Joseph, foolish, and self-satisfied at being better than?

Am I like his brothers, nursing a wound that festers into a quiet bitterness that leads to something worse.

Am I Reuben, knowing the good I should do, but unwilling to pay the cost?

Am I Judah, seeing others as nothing to me but a commodity to buy and sell?

I know these people. I sometimes even know how they got this way.

I am no less self-centred at my worst.

This is about me and mine. You and yours.

But where is God?

That's the real question.

We can stop here and say, well that's just horrible!

Well, this is an ongoing story.

Not everyone turns out right.

This is no fairy tale.

Does Jacob realize his mistake and begin to love all his children? No.

Does Reuben find his courage to stand up and lead? No.

Do the brothers turn a new leaf and confess their crime? No.

But Joseph does learn to trust God and gets wiser –even to forgive his brothers.

And Judah does change.

From being a stone cold profiteer he is willing to give his own life

To save Joseph's younger brother Benjamin.

Redemption does happen.

Just never overnight.

It takes decades.

Our church is 3 years old today.

People ask me, has it really changed?

Have people really changed and grown?

Well, yes and no.

How long does it take to change a single person let alone a community?

God is not interested in merely changing your behaviour.

He is interested in changing you.

I will give you a tip on how this gets done:

Learn to face confess your sins so they no longer have power over you.

Turn and follow Jesus.

Amen.