

Joseph the DreamerSeries: *Genesis: Rated M for Mature*

Genesis 37:1-4

07 25 2010 Sam Jones Memorial United Methodist Church

Scripture: Genesis 37:1-4**Introduction**

He was a **spoiled brat**—there’s just no better way to say it. Even his own brothers didn’t like him. Of course, it wasn’t really his fault—brats are made and not born. His parents had to take most of the blame. However, the kid did nothing to help himself, either. He was not only a spoiled brat but also an obnoxious braggart.

His name was **Joseph**, and he was the next-to-the-youngest of twelve boys and one girl. His family tree was a “Who’s Who” of the Old Testament. Joseph’s parents were Jacob and Rachel, his grandparents Isaac and Rebecca, and his great-grandparents Abraham and Sarah. Today we remember these men and women as the patriarchs and matriarchs of our faith; however, the Bible reveals that they were all too human.

I. Jacob’s Dysfunctional Family

Let’s begin with the recognition that EVERY family is **dysfunctional**. It’s just that some are more dysfunctional than others! Jacob’s family was messed up every way imaginable. The situation would have kept a DFACS office busy for months. The problems began long before today’s Scripture lesson.

Joseph’s father, **Jacob**, was a rogue and a rascal from birth—literally. He came out of the womb after his twin brother, Esau, with a hand on his heel, still trying to be first. His name in Hebrew can be translated as “*supplanter*” or “*deceiver*.” Over the years, he bargained for his brother’s birthright, deceived his blind father for the eldest son’s blessing, and played *Let’s Make a Deal* with God.

Without going into the details of the whole sordid story, Jacob ended up with two sisters for his wives who were named **Leah** and **Rachel**. For the single guys in the congregation, here’s some advice: it’s just never a good idea to marry two sisters at the same time. But wait, there’s more! Jacob also slept with their two maids. Between the five of them, the family included one father, four mothers, and thirteen children!

The Brady Bunch they were NOT! The family relationships and interactions WERE the stuff of soap operas and TV mini-series. In her wildest dreams, Danielle Steel could not have written such a novel! (Review Jacob’s family tree).

To make an awful situation even worse, Jacob loved Rachel more than the other three women in his life. And his favorite child was Rachel’s first-born named **Joseph**. Needless to say, this made for a less than ideal home life.

Jacob's blatant favoritism led him to give Joseph **THE COAT**. From the context of the story, the coat was obviously something very special. However, the description of the garment is ambiguous. The Hebrew phrase can be translated in several ways:

- ✓ The most familiar translation describes it as "*a coat of many colors.*" This is how *The King James Version* of the Bible reads. In the 1970s, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Timothy Rice popularized this image in their musical entitled *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat*.
- ✓ A second translation says it was "*a richly ornamented robe.*" *The New International Version* interpretation makes it sound like a fancy coat.
- ✓ A third translation is "*a coat with long sleeves.*" Envision an Oriental style coat with flowing, floppy sleeves. Part of the significance of such a garment is that it would keep the wearer from doing physical labor.

Regardless of the coat's appearance, it made a definite fashion statement. The special gift from his father set Joseph above the rest of his siblings. It symbolized to his brothers Joseph's special status as daddy's favorite. Their hurt turned into hatred. Anger festered into bitterness. A spirit of vengeance gave birth to a murderous fury. It got to the point where they could not even speak to Joseph peaceably.

II. Joseph's Character

It's hard to imagine making the situation any worse; however, Joseph managed to do so. He did nothing to defuse his brothers' feelings. In fact, the brat went out of his way to rub their faces in his favored status. He words and actions threw gas on the fire.

First of all, he was a typical 17 year old teenager—'nuf said! Secondly, he gave Jacob bad reports about his brothers; and no one likes a tattle-tale. Thirdly, he liked to flaunt his special coat as he strutted by his brothers.

And yet . . . God STILL saw something in Joseph. Something that could be used to serve the Lord's purpose and plan. Despite his exaggerated human flaws, Joseph possessed the potential for divine use. Which is amazing in and of itself—you would think that God could have done better.

You could describe every Biblical leader in the same way. When you read the Bible, you cannot help but be struck by the authors' brutally honest descriptions of the characters. Even the great heroes of faith are portrayed with all of their faults and flaws.

At the start of this worship series, I encouraged everyone to read the book of Genesis. Someone out there actually took my advice and emailed about the experience. When she got to the story of Jacob, she was struck by the boy's deceitfulness and dishonesty. She emailed to ask how God could sanction all of Jacob's deceptions.

1) I responded in two ways. You may recall that God later renamed Jacob as **Israel**. The Jewish nation gained its name from this guy I've been describing—not exactly a compliment if you think about it for a moment!

In some ways, Jacob is a caricature not only of Israel but also all of God's people. In other words, he is simply MORE of who we are! Although his bad traits are writ large in the story, we all have these same tendencies towards self-centeredness, deceitfulness, and dishonesty. However, the good news is that God uses us any way—both because of who we are and despite who we are.

2) Secondly, God uses our lives like a master weaver to work his will. Roman Catholic author, Andrew Greeley, is fond of saying: "God draws straight with crooked lines. If we zig away from God's will, then the Holy Spirit zags. Jacob illustrates this in his own life and the larger life of the name God later gives him of Israel.

Just like with Jacob, God saw more in Joseph's life than was apparent on the surface. And the Lord continues to work in our lives in the same way. Our heavenly Father has the uncanny ability to see more in us than we can see. The Lord uses both our strengths and weaknesses in his service. The Holy Spirit is a **talent scout** who graces us with talents and spiritual gifts. Oftentimes, it is simply the willingness to be available that enables God to do the miraculous in our midst. We find ourselves amazed that Christ did something in and through us that we would have never imagined possible.

The 16th century Italian artist, **Michelangelo**, is famous for his paintings and sculptures. He believed that the job of a **sculptor** was to free the forms already present inside the stone. Michelangelo believed that every stone had a sculpture within it. His job was to chip away everything that was not a part of the figure. The sculptor once said: "*I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.*"

The world looks at our lives and sees dull rock. God's Spirit looks deeper and sees living stones that build up Christ's church. The Holy Spirit chips and hews at our lives, taking away the sin that mars our lives. Through the Master's touch, something new and beautiful emerges in our lives.

III. The Master Dreamer

I do not know what God saw in Joseph's life. Certainly one wouldn't expect much from him in the beginning moments of the story. He's a spoiled brat and arrogant braggart. However, I can tell you that Genesis 37 – 50 are devoted to telling the story of his life—thirteen chapters equaled only in Genesis by the story of Abraham himself.

There was this one ability that was immediately apparent in the young man's life. Joseph had the ability to **dream** . . . and to interpret dreams. In *The Living Bible*, his brothers derisively called him "*the Master Dreamer.*" At the time they were plotting his murder, so this wasn't exactly a term of endearment. However, they were more accurate than they ever imagined. In an unforeseen twist of fate, Joseph's dreams would eventually save his brothers' lives along with their entire families. (But you'll have to read the rest of the book to hear THAT story!)

God gives us talents, abilities, and spiritual gifts, but we decide how to use them. Joseph did not exactly distinguish himself with his first recorded dreams. Giving such ability to a 17 year old teenager was like giving a five year old a hammer. More than just nails are going to get hit!

Joseph had **two dreams** that he couldn't wait to share with his brothers. In the first dream, they were binding sheaves of grain in the field. Suddenly Joseph's sheaf rose and stood upright while all his brothers' sheaves bowed down before it!

The second dream revealed a similar scene. Joseph modestly told his brothers that he dreamed how the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him! One hardly needed to be gifted in dream analysis to interpret what Joseph meant.

Needless to say, this did nothing to endear him to his already angry and envious siblings. They began to make plans to kill their bothersome brother. Ultimately, they sold him into slavery instead; however, I imagine any lawyer could have got them off on a plea of justifiable homicide!

Joseph had to **grow into his gift**. When he finally gained some mastery over his ability, it would deliver him from Egyptian slavery. He eventually became the pharaoh's right hand man. This would set the stage for the Jewish people spending four hundred years in Egypt before the great Exodus that would lead them to the Promised Land of Abraham. However, the entire future rested upon a young boy's dreams.

IV. The Power of Dreams

The story of Joseph's life reminds us of the importance—and the power—of **dreaming**. Studies reveal that most men dream in black and white. Women tend to dream in color. However, to borrow a line from Andrew Lloyd Webber and Timothy Rice, Joseph must have dreamed in vivid Technicolor. It shaped not only his life but the course of an entire nation . . . and eventually the history of the world.

Henry David Thoreau once wrote: *“If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life he has imagined, he will meet with success unexpected in common hours.”*

Dreams are revolutionary acts that imagine a future different from the present. They challenge the status quo of how things have always been. They ask radical questions such as “What if,” “Why not,” and “Shouldn't someone do something.” They make radical statements such as “If only,” “It's possible,” and “I'll try.”

A Ziggy cartoon shows the familiar, round-headed character looking at a map. An arrow points to his location with the caption: *“You are here . . . you're SO predictable!”*

What if tomorrow could be different from yesterday and today? Like Joseph, we are called to be God's dreamers—to envision what the Lord can do in our lives, families, church, community, nation, and world. The Holy Spirit is constantly waiting to do something new in the lives of those who dare to dream.

✓ Self

✓ Others

✓ The church.

Conclusion

There was an article in *Harvard Business Review* entitled “*Market Myopia*.” It discussed how short-sighted people don’t always realize what business they are in. Historic examples included the railroad companies who didn’t realize they were in the transportation business—they thought they were in the railroad business. If they had realized they were in the transportation business, they would have invested in airplanes. They didn’t know what business they were in.

Another example was the telegraph people who thought they were in the telegraph business rather than the communication business. In 1886, they could have bought all the telephone patents for \$40,000; but they saw no future in the telephone. They didn’t know what business they were in.

Looking back, these examples of “market myopia” are obvious. This morning, however, I would pose the question: “What business is the church in?” Why do we worship each Sunday? Why do we gather during the week? Why do we provide programs, opportunities, and ministries for children, youth, and adults?

You know the answer—it is found in Matthew 28 and reflected in our church mission statement. Our business is making disciples of Jesus Christ. We are in competition—but not with the other churches in the area—but with the world. And if we are going to successfully compete with materialism, addiction, immorality, family erosion, and the dark powers of this world, then we need to tend to our own business.

Our business is dreaming: Self, family, others, Sunday School class, Bible study, choir, worship service, congregation, school, civic organization, community, etc. Allow the Holy Spirit to inspire you with a vision of the future different from the present.

God can accomplish miracles with a people who dare to dream . . . and who then roll up their sleeves and get to work.