

VALLEYS // Roots

Finding Hope in Life's Hardest Moments

If you've wondered where God is in the lowest moments of life, in the hardest moments of life, in the valleys of life, this series is for you.

Joseph had a rough life, and yet at the end of his life, he's not angry, resentful, or bitter at God and vengeful toward world. Joseph endured some of the worst things a human being can go through, and yet at the end of his life, he is kind, generous, merciful, gracious, and forgiving.

What we're going to discover in this series is hope in the hardest places. We're going to learn how to keep a soft heart in a hard world, and Joseph's story is going to lead the way.

In counseling, one of the many things a good counselor will do is dig into your roots, your family of origin, and dig into behavioral and thought patterns that were passed down to you and the history of your family. Because the reality is, while we might say we love and follow Jesus, many of us behave and react in ways that even surprise us from time to time.

"Jesus may be in your heart, but Grandpa lives in your bones."

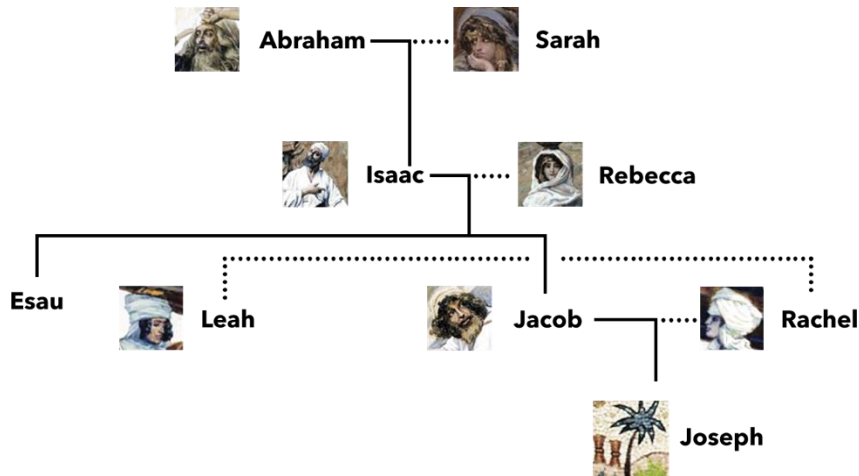
- Pete Scazzero, Emotionally Healthy Leader

Becoming aware of the generational patterns, both the positive and negative, that we've inherited from our family of origin is an enormous step in finding freedom from dysfunctional or self-destructive patterns of behavior.

And if we never dig into those places and never invite Jesus into those places, if we never allow God to do the difficult soul work that can lead to greater levels of freedom and joy in our life with God, those dysfunctional and destructive patterns of behavior are going to show up in one way or another.

There are patterns that we've inherited from our parents, and if we don't address them, face them, deal with them, and heal those wounds, we will pass them onto others.

Genesis 37:3, "Now Israel [Jacob, the Father of the family] loved Joseph more than any other of his sons."



Joseph's great grandfather was Abraham. Through Abraham came both the Jewish and Arab people, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all came from his descendants, and God promised to make him the father of many nations. He is hailed as a hero of our faith in Hebrews 11, and yet two different times (that we know of) he lied about his wife Sarah being his sister to save himself, and essentially allowed her to be trafficked. And, at Sarah's encouragement, Abraham slept with a slave woman named Hagar to try to help God along with the promised son. Through Hagar comes Ishmael, the Arab people.

But then through Abraham and Sarah comes the promised son Isaac. Joseph's grandfather, who followed in his father's footsteps and in Genesis 26, also lied about his wife Rebecca being his sister to save himself.

Then Isaac and Rebecca had two children, and Isaac clearly favored his son Esau over Jacob. Esau was strong, confident, outgoing. Isaac was quiet, reserved, contemplative, and Rebecca favored Jacob over Esau. Mom and dad both had favorites, and it created an enormous rift in the family.

So, Jacob grew up desperately lacking the love and affirmation of his father, Isaac, and continually followed the manipulative schemes of his mother Rebecca. And eventually, at her encouragement, tricks his aging father and steals the birthright of his brother Esau.

So, for Jacob, there was this gaping father wound, and the rejection, neglect, and internal inferiority drove Jacob's life. He became a master manipulator and deceiver.

Until he lays eyes on Rachel. The void in his life drove him to center his whole life on this woman who was incredibly attractive. Jacob looked at Rachel and thought, *"If I had her, then I would be whole. Then I wouldn't be carrying around the black hole all the time..."* Now, he did marry Rachel seven years after his uncle Laban tricked him into marrying Rachel's sister, Leah.

Jacob eventually wrestles with God. God gives him a new name “Israel,” and through Jacob came the 12 tribes of Israel, but through Rachel came two sons. They were the youngest of all of Jacob’s children. Joseph and Benjamin, and Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin.

Jacob’s whole life was centered on Rachel, and after she dies, Jacob takes all of that favoritism, all of his emotional focus and energy and invests it, not across all of his sons, but solely on Rachel’s firstborn son, Joseph.

Joseph became the new emotional center of Jacob’s life. His “favorite” child. Joseph became Jacob’s idol, his “god.” He was the ultimate center of all of his affection and devotion.

Genesis 37:1-4, “Jacob lived in the land of his father’s sojournings, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father’s wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. 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. 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.”

The robe of many colors, or a richly ornamented robe, in Hebrew basically means, “filthy rich.” In other words, Jacob lavished wealth on Joseph in way that he didn’t to any of his other children.

But on top of that, we see in verse 2 that after tending the sheep with his half-brothers, the first thing he does is come back with a “bad report” about them. It means a false report, a lie, a half-truth about them to his father.

If you were Joseph’s brother, you would hate this guy! He’s lying and putting his siblings down to elevate himself, and yet he’s treated like a king while the other siblings are essentially ignored. This guy is an arrogant, pompous, entitled, liar. That’s what you get from the first four verses of his life story.

Genesis 37:5-11, “Now Joseph had a dream and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. He said to them, ‘Hear this dream that I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.’ His brothers said to him, ‘Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?’ So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, ‘Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.’ But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, ‘What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?’ And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.”

There is relational tension and pressure building up in this family and it is about to blow, and when it does, this family is going to fall apart like a house of cards.

Do you see that there's no good guy here. There's no redeeming human quality, there is just brokenness. Hate, bitterness, jealousy, pride... it's all bad. There's no glimmer of hope, no sign of virtue. It's all bad!

The purpose of stories like Joseph's are not to show you how you need to get your act together, try harder, or be better. The purpose of a story like Joseph's is to show you on every page, at every point, even in the darkest moments, the valleys of life where you're convinced that there is absolutely no hope of redemption, somehow, even in those moments, in those seasons of life, God's grace breaks in and rescues us from the nightmares of our own making.

Joseph's story is not about pulling yourself together and getting your act together. It's about God's commitment to rescue us from, and sometimes through the valleys of our own making.

We inherit and pass on both the good and bad qualities of those closest to us. This means that the primary work of a parent, a pastor, or anyone in leadership is their own spiritual/emotional health. If a person who is influencing others isn't healthy, they will pass that dysfunction on to those they influence.

Natalie Thomas Runion has some great material on this. One way to evaluate your level of emotional and spiritual health is to take inventory of your own life and behavior, how you're showing up in the world.

COMPETITIVE: Elevate yourself at the expense of others.

COMBATIVE: Insecure, easily offended, and defensive. You feel threatened and attacked when faced with questions, criticism, or disagreement.

CRITICAL: Tear others down without investing in or offering pathways for improvement.

CUNNING: Manipulative and deflective. Avoid accountability and use others to gain or remain in power.

CONCEITED: Believe you deserve special treatment. Leverage victimhood and martyrdom in order to gain sympathy and support.

Runion writes, *"There is no such thing as a perfect leader or a perfect parent...but humility and love ought to lead the way. Sometimes, it helps to ask those closest to us how we're showing up in the day to day details of life... often times, we think we're showing up one way, the coming across in another."*

Joseph inherits some really awful qualities from the favoritism of his own father. And yet in the midst of all this dysfunction, Joseph receives a gift from God. He has a dream.

God sometimes will speak to us in dreams. He'll give us snapshots of the future or truths that we've been avoiding.

Acts 2:17, *“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams...”*

God gives Joseph a dream, which was a good gift. But instead of pondering these things in his heart, conversing with the Lord about the meaning of the dreams, what did Joseph do?

He went and bragged to his brothers about how he was going to rule over them one day. And then, he receives another dream and does it again!

Joseph exercised zero wisdom, zero restraint. He shared the gift that God gave him at the wrong time, with the wrong people, with the wrong motive.

Wisdom asks the hard questions that force us to slow down. Is my motive in the right place? What's driving this decision? How will this impact those around me? Is this the right time to share it? Is this the right person to share it with?

The Lord was speaking to Joseph in his dreams! He was giving him a snapshot of the future. But we have to view the meaning of Joseph's dreams within the historical context. Remember, these people here were living in ancient societies which were extremely hierarchical and patriarchal.

Primogeniture was a rule of life, meaning the younger always bows to the older. It means children always bow to the parents and the younger children always bowed to the older children, especially the firstborn. The firstborn always got the majority of the inheritance, of the estate, and wealth.

So, Joseph, who is the second youngest of the 12... the 11th of the 12 children... has these wildly controversial dreams. God tells him, *“I'm going to bring into this family a salvation that absolutely flips this world's value system upside down, by choosing you, the younger to save the older I'm going to completely subvert what anyone expects...”*

But what God knew, and Joseph didn't, is in order to accomplish this, Joseph, was going to endure horrific suffering, abandonment, rejection in the process.

Joseph says, *“I know what God is doing. God is going to turn me into the prince,”* but he had no idea how hard it was going to be to get there.

Often, when we're suffering, when we're going through hardship or loss or pain in life, the first thing we do is wonder, why is this happening to me? What did I do wrong? Has God abandoned me? When we find ourselves in the lowest moments of life, we often feel far less assurance of God's love for us.

But what we see in Joseph's life is God was not absent in his suffering. But He was doing deep soul work in him, saving him, refining him, humbling him, through the lowest moments of his life, and in the end, through Joseph, God brought a salvation to his family that couldn't have happened any other way.

Joseph could only save his family by being rejected by his family. Joseph could only rescue his family by being betrayed by his family. Joseph could only redeem his family, by being thrown into the pit by his own family. Through weakness, humiliation, and abandonment, Joseph became a savior for one human family.

And centuries later, another one came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. He was rejected, betrayed, cast out, thrown into a pit of despair and sold for 30 pieces of silver.

Joseph was involuntarily turned into a savior for one human family. Jesus Christ gladly came to give his life as a ransom for us all. Christ's suffering means that no matter what God is with us in valleys of life.

Psalm 23:4, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me..."