

***The Belonging: A Study in Genesis 37-50***  
**Lesson 7 - Jacob's Family United**  
**Genesis 46-47**

**Every family has dysfunction; every family can experience God's redemption.**

The final piece of this family reunion is put into play when the brothers return home and tell their father that Joseph is alive. Remember that Israel (Jacob) has believed for over 22 years that Joseph is dead. Now the brothers are excitedly shouting that not only is Joseph alive, but "he is the ruler over all the land of Egypt" (Genesis 45:26). The scene is right out of a Hallmark movie! Except it's true and it's glorious!

**I. The Sacrifice of Israel (Genesis 46:1-7)**

Can you even imagine the drama that was playing out? Using my sanctified imagination, I think the scene looks something like this: Every day since his boys have left for Egypt, Jacob drags a chair out of his tent and situates it in the shade to combat the oppressive heat. As he settles himself, he mentally totals the number of days his sons have been gone. Perhaps today will be the day of their return. This has been Jacob's habit since the brothers left with Benjamin in tow. Day after day, he has searched the horizon for any sign of the boys' return, hoping against hope that Simeon will be released and Benjamin will be returned unharmed. In the distance he can make out the outline of a large and well-appointed caravan. As it draws near, Jacob recognizes the raised voices of his sons. He cannot make out what they are saying as they are all speaking at once. Jacob does a quick count and breathes a prayer of thanksgiving for the safe return of his clan—all eleven of them. When the brothers get within earshot of Jacob they exclaim, "Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt" (Genesis 45:26). As the Bible says, Jacob "was stunned, for he did not believe them" (Genesis 45:26).

As the impact of their words are processed, it causes the aged man to stumble backwards and sit down hard in his chair. Joseph is alive! Instinctively, he clutches at his heart in an effort to slow its pace. He wraps his robes tightly around him, buries his face in his hands and weeps uncontrollably. Overwhelmed, he utters groanings too deep for words. His boys fall on his neck and weep along with him. "When he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived" (Genesis 45:27). Pharaoh's gilded wagons glisten in the desert sun and groan under the weight of Joseph's gifts. Unbelievable as it may seem, this is proof positive that what the brothers have said is indeed the truth. "Then Israel said, 'It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die'" (Genesis 45:28).

I don't think it took long for Jacob to pack up his belongings and settle himself in the wagon Joseph had sent for him. He and his clan travel south until they come to Beersheba. There he pauses. When his grandfather Abraham had experienced a famine, he had gone down to Egypt without consulting the Lord and the results were disastrous (Genesis 12:10-20). Jacob's father, Isaac, had been forbidden by God to go to Egypt for relief during a famine (Genesis 26:2). Now, anxious to see his son, he does not dare take another step for fear of operating outside the will of God. There, on the southern edge of Canaan, Jacob "offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac" (Genesis 46:1). Bowing at the altar with his hands

raised to Heaven, praise and worship flow freely from Jacob's lips. In addition, Jacob seeks the Lord's presence and direction and puts himself in a place where he can hear from God. What an important spiritual principle!

As John Phillips writes,

Just because something looks like the right thing to do, just because all the circumstances point that way, just because one's own desires affirm the move, and just because everyone else urges it as the sensible thing to do, it does not necessarily follow that it is the will of God. The important thing to ask is, "What does God have to say?" We had best inquire of Him...Mere natural affection must not be allowed to sway decision (*Exploring Genesis: An Expository Commentary*, p. 344-345).

Not every reasonable opportunity we are presented with is God's will. Satan is capable and quite willing to tempt us to move forward without praying about it. When faced with a decision, we must seek the face of God and get His wisdom lest we move in a direction that is contrary to His will.

Then God speaks to Israel "in visions of the night" (Genesis 46:2). He tells Jacob not to be afraid, but to go to Egypt. There, God will make a great nation of his family. God allays his fears and reassures Jacob that he will not forfeit the covenant by leaving the Promised Land. Having heard from God, Jacob and the family migrate to Egypt, where their descendants will remain for four centuries, growing into a mighty people.

## **II. The Sons of Israel (Genesis 46:8-34)**

Jacob and his family arrive in Egypt along with the flocks and their herds. Judah, who is emerging as the leader, goes ahead to meet Joseph, who will lead them into the land of Goshen, where the family will relocate. Joseph cannot wait for the caravan to arrive. He prepares his chariot and goes to be reunited with his father. Joseph falls "on his neck" and weeps "on his neck for a long time" (Genesis 46:29). This dysfunctional family continues to operate in God's grace of redemption as Joseph champions the love gift of forgiveness.

Every family has dysfunction; every family can experience God's redemption. Dealing with difficult family is challenging at best, and impossible apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. I call these difficult folks "irregular people." Relationships, especially within the family, can be hard for a variety of reasons. Difficulties can arise because of the lost condition of family members. Varying levels of spiritual maturity in believers can add to the problem. And don't even get me started on differing religious affiliations or political parties. Personality or temperament differences may be the root cause. Generational differences, varying backgrounds, and even health issues can create conflicts. Blending families can cause difficulties. Holiday gatherings can be ruthless. In-laws turn into out-laws in some cases. Whatever the cause, every family is dysfunctional on some level, but every family can experience redemption. Without being overly simplistic or dismissive of how difficult these situations can be, let me share some insight. (A disclaimer: These do not apply to situations marked by abuse of any kind. In those cases, spiritual counselors can be very helpful in navigating the fall out of such relationships.)

Now, practically speaking, how can you deal with an “irregular person” in your life?

**A. Mentally Accept.**

The first step is to realize that this person is set in their ways, and they are probably not going to change, so don't keep tormenting yourself hoping against hope that they will. You cannot change them. Accept them as they are and keep trusting the Lord. He does not hold you accountable for their actions or reactions to you. He only holds you responsible for your response. Release your own expectations to the Lord and rest in Him.

**B. Emotionally Detach.**

For the sake of your own emotional well-being, it may become necessary to emotionally detach yourself from them so they cannot continue to wound your spirit. This does not involve being unkind, “canceling” them or cutting them out of your life, or using the silent treatment. It is merely an emotional distancing from them in order to protect yourself as you lower your expectations. You may never know the root cause of their behavior. Maybe they were emotionally crippled in their past. Whatever the cause, you cannot afford to make yourself sick in order to make them well!

**C. Physically Separate.**

It may be helpful, and even necessary, for you to minimize the time you spend with your irregular person if possible. This may help you stop being drawn into their drama and/or dissatisfaction with you. It is a truism that “hurt people hurt people.” You can lessen the impact of their behavior if you limit your exposure.

**D. Ministry Oriented.**

While we must accept them for who they are and come to grips with the fact that they may never change, we must first and foremost look on them as an opportunity to minister for the Lord Jesus. We cannot afford to be dissuaded by their lack of love and acceptance of us. We are simply to keep on doing what is right in the sight of the Lord and leave the results with Him.

Additionally, continue to build a strong group of likeminded friends in the faith to help you maintain your spiritual equilibrium and keep a Biblical perspective as you deal with your irregular people. Proverbs 18:24 says, “There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Spending time with dear friends in the Lord will help fill up your spiritual tank that is often depleted by interactions with your irregular people.

Joseph is the champion when it comes to dealing with irregular people. And he had a lot of them. His brothers. Mrs. Potiphar. The cupbearer. It's quite a list! And all the while, Joseph refuses to seek revenge against all who wronged him without cause. Joseph is the premier example of doing the hard thing, forgiving those who deserve it the least and leaving the results with the Lord.

**III. The Sojourn of Israel (Genesis 47:1-31)**

During his years in Egypt, Joseph has observed and studied Pharaoh and his people. The Egyptians despised shepherds. John Phillips explains,

Unlike the Egyptians who were a settled, agricultural people, shepherds were a nomadic, migratory people, ever on the move, never sending their roots down deeply

into any one spot. That was of vital importance. Unless the brethren held onto their shepherd character, pilgrim character all would be lost. The Lord would also have us be pilgrims and strangers on the earth (*Exploring the Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*, p. 348).

Knowing that shepherds are loathsome to the Egyptians, Joseph has already spied out the perfect location in Goshen for his family encampment before they arrive. Furthermore, Joseph wants to keep a clear line of demarcation between God's people and the Egyptians. Residing in Goshen would secure their separation. Also, Goshen was on the Canaan side of the land. Settling there would allow them an easier exit when it is time to leave Egypt.

Joseph takes five of his brothers to represent his family and speaks to Pharaoh on their behalf. Then he introduces his father who blesses Pharaoh. Joseph provides for all the needs of his family. Grace upon grace.

The famine continues to rage in Egypt, gradually impacting the residents and putting their livelihoods at risk. The people begin to panic as the famine worsens, putting their survival at stake. They have spent all their money to buy grain. Joseph allows them to barter livestock for food. The following year Joseph buys all their land and allows them to work "as slaves to Pharaoh" (Genesis 47:19) in exchange for grain. He redistributes them evenly throughout the land, moving them out of the well-populated regions. After their relocation, he gives them seed to sow on their land. He requires one fifth of their harvest to be given to Pharaoh while the remainder is for them and their families.

Meanwhile in the land of Goshen, Israel (here used to identify the nation rather than just the patriarch) "acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous" (Genesis 47:27).

Israel (Jacob) lives in the land for seventeen years. He is one hundred and forty-seven years when he becomes sick unto death. Knowing God had promised the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the Promised Land, he asks Joseph to bury him in Canaan. Egypt was the place he sojourned to in order to survive the famine, but Canaan is the place God has prepared for His people. One day, in His timing, God will lead His people out of Egypt and into Canaan (Genesis 15:13-14). Joseph swears to Israel that he will honor his wishes.

This chapter ends with Israel bowing in worship before the One True God, the One whom Jacob had both wrestled with and served. Jacob's faith walk has truly had its ups and downs, especially in the early days (I think we can all relate). He struggled with fleshly behavior, resorting to sinful habits of the old life. But as Jacob's faith matured, his latter days are greater than his former and we see a man who is fulfilling the new nature of his new name, Israel.

Beloved, may we learn to "consider [ourselves] to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11). After all, there is much work to be done for the Kingdom. Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Luke 10:2). Until He comes, may we be found faithful.