

Christian Perspectives: life and its detours

Our mid week small group at Bethel has just finished a study called 'Detour-finding purpose when life doesn't make sense.' In this study of Joseph's life, we explored the many ways that God diverted Joseph's life, tested his resolve, delayed his desires, and tried his beliefs through hardship, adversity, suffering, and the death of Joseph's dream.

In the first session, which dealt with Joseph and his family, it becomes quite evident that Joseph's generational heritage and immediate family were both highly dysfunctional. Much of his father Jacob's life was characterized by deception. He also expressed his favouritism by making Joseph a richly ornamental robe. This resulted in his brothers being filled with hatred and jealousy. They then plotted how to kill Joseph, but two of the brothers intervened to save Joseph's life, and he was then sold to merchants heading to Egypt.

What can we learn from Joseph's family? The painful reality is that there are no perfect families. Every home is broken as a result of the fall and the curse. But it is comforting to know that this cycle of dysfunction is not inevitable. It can be broken by the choices we make in response to God's grace. We get to write the script going forward.

The discussion questions from the study are worth noting and are as follows.

What was your family like while you were growing up? Was there any dysfunction? If so, how has that dysfunction negatively impacted you?

How have your parents and siblings hurt you? Will you forgive them? What do you think would happen 1) in your heart and 2) in these relationships if you did?

How have you hurt your parents, siblings, or children? Will you ask them to forgive you? What do you think would happen 1) in your heart and 2) in these relationships if you did?

In what ways do you see your personal character flaws manifested in your children? What can you do to help them break the cycle in their lives?

A main lesson we can take away from Joseph's life was that he refused to be defined by the dysfunction of his family. Joseph

- 1) rejected deception and chose integrity
- 2) rejected revenge and chose forgiveness
- 3) rejected passivity and chose initiative
- 4) rejected favouritism and chose contentment
- 5) rejected jealousy and chose contentment
- 6) rejected betrayal and chose loyalty

What characteristic do you need to reject? In what area of your life do you need to work on most? What can you do this week to make this change?

The rest of the study of Joseph goes on to deal with other aspects of Joseph's life. This includes his work, his choices, his nation, his heart, and his legacy. Throughout his life Joseph had many circumstances that could have made him turn his back on God. But that never happened. He left a legacy of loyalty, trust and is remembered as a man of forgiveness.

One of the key points brought out in this study is this. God cares more about the development of the dreamer than He cares about the fulfillment of the dream.

In Joseph's story, we see a beautiful model of the kind of forgiveness and healing that are possible. Those who are able to follow that model will find restoration in ways that only God can provide.

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