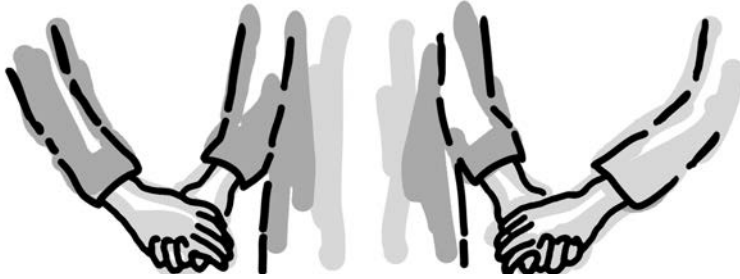


Finding Rest *in* Family Ties



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Genesis 34; Heb. 11:17–22; Deut. 4:29; 1 John 3:1, 2; Genesis 39; Eph. 6:1–13.*

Memory Text: “You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (2 Peter 3:17, 18, NKJV).

The young man carefully scanned the horizon. Then, finally, he saw them. He had been looking for his brothers for days. As he approached, waving and calling to the grim-faced group, he got anything but a warm welcome. *His own brothers actually wanted to kill him.* If it hadn’t been for Reuben, there may have been no story to tell. Reuben convinced the rest just to rough him up a bit and throw him into a dry well. Later, Judah came up with the grand scheme to get rid of him and make a bit of money, too, by selling him to some passing slave traders.

What an example of family dysfunction!

We get to choose many things in life—but not our family. No one is perfect, and none of us have perfect families and perfect family relationships. Some of us are blessed by parents, siblings, and other family members that reflect God’s love, but many have to settle for less than the ideal. Family relationships often are complicated and painful, leaving us restless, hurt, and carrying loads of emotional baggage that we, in turn, off-load on others.

How can we find God’s rest in this area of our lives? This week we turn to the story of Joseph and his family ties in order to watch God at work bringing healing and emotional rest despite dysfunctional family relationships.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 7.

Dysfunction at Home

Joseph knew about dysfunctional families. It had started with his great-grandparents, Abraham and Sarah. When Sarah realized that she was barren, she had convinced Abraham to go in to her servant Hagar. As soon as Hagar was pregnant, the rivalry began. Growing up in this atmosphere, Ishmael and Isaac took the tension into their own families. Isaac made a point of favoring Esau, and Jacob spent his life trying to earn his father's love and respect. Later on, Jacob was tricked into marrying two sisters who did not get along and competed with each other through a childbearing race, even enlisting their maids to bear Jacob's children.

Review the incident detailed in Genesis 34. What kind of emotional and relational impact would this incident have had on the family as a whole and on young Joseph as well?

The rivalry between the mothers obviously spilled over to the children, who grew up ready to pick a fight. As young adults, Joseph's older brothers already had massacred all the males in the town of Shechem. The oldest brother, Reuben, displayed dominance and defiance to his aging father by sleeping with Bilhah, Rachel's maid and the mother of several of Jacob's children (*Gen. 35:22*). Meanwhile, Joseph's brother Judah mistook his widowed daughter-in-law for a prostitute and ended up having twins with her (*Genesis 38*).

Jacob added fuel to the fire of all this family tension by his obvious favoritism toward Joseph in giving him an expensive colorful coat (*Gen. 37:3*). If ever there was a dysfunctional family, the patriarch's family could have competed with it.

Why do you think that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all listed as faith heroes in Hebrews 11:17–22 when you consider their messy family relationships?

God's faith champions often fall short of their own and God's expectations. These men are listed in Hebrews 11 not because of their messy family relationships but in spite of them. They learned—often the hard way—about faith, love, and trust in God as they wrestled with these family issues.

What family dysfunction have you inherited? How can surrendering yourself to the Lord and His ways help break that pattern, at least for the future?

Choosing a New Direction

Joseph takes pain, complicated relationships, and anxiety with him as he travels to Egypt, where he is to be sold as a slave. This was not a restful trip as he fought back the tears.

“Meanwhile, Joseph with his captors was on the way to Egypt. As the caravan journeyed southward toward the borders of Canaan, the boy could discern in the distance the hills among which lay his father’s tents. Bitterly he wept at the thought of that loving father in his loneliness and affliction. Again the scene at Dothan came up before him. He saw his angry brothers and felt their fierce glances bent upon him. The stinging, insulting words that had met his agonized entreaties were ringing in his ears. With a trembling heart he looked forward to the future. What a change in situation—from the tenderly cherished son to the despised and helpless slave! Alone and friendless, what would be his lot in the strange land to which he was going? For a time Joseph gave himself up to uncontrolled grief and terror. . . .

“Then his thoughts turned to his father’s God. In his childhood he had been taught to love and fear Him. Often in his father’s tent he had listened to the story of the vision that Jacob saw as he fled from his home an exile and a fugitive. . . . Now all these precious lessons came vividly before him. Joseph believed that the God of his fathers would be his God. *He then and there gave himself fully to the Lord, and he prayed that the Keeper of Israel would be with him in the land of his exile.*”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 213, 214; italics supplied.

Some cultures emphasize the role of the community over the individual while other cultures are inclined to emphasize the role of the individual over the community. While we find a balance between these two in Scripture, there is clearly a call to personal as well as corporate commitment to God. Joseph begins to find rest in his relationships by making a personal decision to follow God.

What do the following verses teach us about personal commitment? (See *Deut. 4:29, Josh. 24:15, 1 Chron. 16:11, Ps. 14:2, Prov. 8:10, Isa. 55:6.*)

To find rest, we each must make a personal decision to follow God. Even if our ancestors were spiritual giants, this faith and spirituality aren’t transmitted genetically. Remember, God has only children, no grandchildren.

Why is it important every day, even every moment of every day, to choose to commit yourself to God? What happens when you don’t?

Finding True Self-Worth

If Joseph had entertained any hopes of escaping and finding his way back home, they were dashed on reaching Egypt, where Joseph was resold into a prominent household. Genesis 39:1 tells us that “Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites” (*NKJV*). Suddenly the young man was thrust into a strange, new language and culture.

Our families and close relationships are pivotal in the development of our self-esteem. Joseph had grown up believing that he was something special—the oldest son of the most beloved wife (*Gen. 29:18*). He was definitely his father’s favorite—and the only one with a beautiful coat of many colors (*Gen. 37:3, 4*).

But who was he now? A slave, someone who could be bought or sold at will. Look at how quickly his whole situation changed. Look at how quickly life seemed to have turned on him.

Indeed, Joseph learns the lesson that we all have to learn. If we are dependent on others to tell us what we are worth, then we will be in for a rough ride and be horribly confused, because not everyone is going to appreciate who we are or what we are like. Instead, we need to find our self-worth in what God thinks of us—how God sees us—and not in the roles that we currently have.

How does God see each of us? (See *Isa. 43:1; Mal. 3:17; John 1:12; John 15:15; Rom. 8:14; 1 John 3:1, 2*.)

God looks at each of us with glasses tinted with grace. He sees a potential, beauty, and talent that we can’t even imagine. Ultimately, He was prepared to die for us so that we could have the opportunity to become all we were created to be. Though showing us our sinfulness and the great price it cost to redeem us from it, the Cross also shows us our great worth and value to God. Regardless of what others think of us or even what we think about ourselves, God loves us and seeks to redeem us from not only the power of sins now but also from the eternal death that they bring.

The key question, then, is always the same: How do we respond to the reality of God’s love, as revealed in Jesus Christ?

There are many groups and individuals telling us to love ourselves as we are and accept ourselves uncritically. Why is this really self-deception? Why is it important that our worth come from outside of ourselves, from the One who made us and knows our true potential?

Doing Relationships God's Way

Initially Joseph's story in Egypt takes a positive turn. Joseph has entrusted himself to God, and God blesses Joseph, who rises to heights he would not have imagined in Potiphar's household.

In what practical ways could God's blessings be seen in Joseph's life? What are Joseph's interpersonal relationships like? Read Genesis 39:1–6.

Although Joseph seems to be getting along very well with Potiphar, and his relationships with the staff in the house and the field seem to be smooth—trouble is brewing. Someone at home is restless.

What relationship problem is Joseph facing? How does he choose to manage it? Read Genesis 39:7–10.

Joseph has a problem with Potiphar's wife. Perhaps we should reformulate that: *Potiphar's wife has a problem*. She looks at others as “things” that can be manipulated and used. She wants to “use” Joseph. Joseph is described as “handsome in form and appearance” (*Gen. 39:6, NKJV*). The Bible seldom mentions people's physical traits, because God “ ‘does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart’ ” (*1 Sam. 16:7, NKJV*). In this case, Joseph's good looks seem to be more of a hindrance than a help in his pursuit of purity and faithfulness to God's principles.

Despite this wicked woman's insistence, Joseph did something seemingly counterproductive. He applied biblical principles to all relationships—in this case Potiphar's wife. Biblical principles for relationships are not old-fashioned, as anyone (which is everyone) who has suffered the consequences of sin can attest.

The biblical narrative points out that this was not a one-off temptation. Potiphar's wife pursued him again and again (*Gen. 39:10*). Joseph tried explaining his motivation for his decision (*Gen. 39:8, 9*), but this did not seem to work.

Joseph realized that he could not control the choices of others. He decided, however, to live, love, and treat those around him in a way that would honor God. Joseph had learned to live in God's presence. This knowledge helped him resist temptation.

Have you tried to apply biblical principles to all your relationships, even those where the other person is not “playing fair”? How did it work out? Read Matthew 5:43–48. Why is it important to live like this?

The Great Controversy, Up Close and Personal

As we know from reading the story (*Gen. 39:11–20*), Joseph suffered because of his principled decision. Joseph was thrown into prison. As Potiphar's property, Joseph could have been killed on the spot, no questions asked. Potiphar obviously didn't believe his wife but had to guard his reputation by taking action. And yet, despite the horrific circumstances, Scripture says, "The LORD was with Joseph" (*Gen. 39:21*).

Life on planet Earth isn't fair. Good is not always rewarded, and evil is not always immediately punished. There is some good news, though: Joseph could find rest, even in prison, because God was with him. In prison he could have meditated on the unfairness of his situation, withdrawn, and even given up on God.

What did Joseph do while in prison? How did he relate to those around him? Read *Genesis 39:21–40:22*.

In prison, Joseph worked with the real, not the ideal. He networked; he helped others, even though relationships in prison were far from the ideal that he must have wished for. And Joseph was not above asking for help and making himself vulnerable. He asked for help from the cupbearer when he interpreted his dream.

What is the big-picture perspective on relationships that Paul presents in *Ephesians 6:1–13*?

Our relationships are miniature reflections of the great controversy between God and Satan that is raging through the ages. This means, then, that *there are no perfect relationships*. Every relationship must have growth dynamics, and Satan has a vested interest in using all our relationships—especially those closest to us—to his advantage in order to hurt and frustrate God's will for our lives. We can be thankful that we are not left to fight these battles on our own. God's Word sets out principles for our relationships. His promise to give us wisdom (*James 1:5*) also extends to our relationships. And as He was with Joseph, He promises to be with us when our relationships prove complex.

Think about God's promise in James 1:5, and take a moment to pray for wisdom in your relationships. How can you seek to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as you relate to these people?

Further Thought: In the context of what happened to Joseph with Potiphar's wife, Ellen White wrote: "Here is an example to all generations who should live upon the earth. . . . God will be a present help, and his Spirit a shield. Although surrounded with the severest temptations, there is a source of strength to which they can apply and resist them. How fierce was the assault upon Joseph's morals. It came from one of influence, the most likely to lead astray. Yet how promptly and firmly was it resisted. . . . He had placed his reputation and interest in the hands of God. And although he was suffered to be afflicted for a time, to prepare him to fill an important position, yet God safely guarded that reputation that was blackened by a wicked accuser, and afterward, in his own good time, caused it to shine. God made even the prison the way to his elevation. Virtue will in time bring its own reward. The shield which covered Joseph's heart, was the fear of God, which caused him to be faithful and just to his master, and true to God. He despised that ingratitude which would lead him to abuse his master's confidence, although his master might never learn the fact."—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 132.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Being nominal Christians or cultural Adventists will not help us to find rest in our relationships. What are the differences between "cultural" Adventists and true believers?
- 2 Sister X has just joined the church. She is married to a non-believer. She loves her husband, but he doesn't love the changes he sees in her. What would be your counsel, based on biblical principles, to your new church member?
- 3 Russian author Leo Tolstoy wrote: "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." All families, to one degree or another, suffer dysfunction, because all are made of sinners, each one bringing their own dysfunction into the family relationship. How can each one of us, by God's grace, seek to follow biblical principles of love, forgiveness, burden bearing, and so forth to bring some healing to our family relationships?
- 4 So many people have had the experience of things going well for them and their family when, suddenly, unexpectedly, tragedy strikes. At times like this, why is clinging to faith, clinging to the promises in the Word of God, so crucial? Especially when times are good, why is it important to be prepared, spiritually, for bad times?

Asking God for 100 Dollars

By ANDREW McCHESENEY

Eighteen-year-old college student Roman Cardwell prayed a simple prayer before leaving home in Salem, a city in the U.S. state of Oregon.

“God, if you give me \$100, I will buy stuff for the homeless,” he prayed.

As a full-time welding student, Roman didn’t have much money of his own. He didn’t tell anyone about his morning prayer.

Later that day, he drove to the supermarket, grabbed an empty shopping cart, and began pushing it down an aisle. Finding a bag of bagels, he placed it in the cart. After that, he picked up a container of cream cheese to go with the bagels.

Then he looked down. His eyes widened in surprise. Lying in the cart was a crisp \$100 bill. He blinked and picked up the money. The word “Benny” was written across it.

“Benny” is somewhat of a celebrity in Salem. For years, somebody named “Benny” has been going into local stores and sneaking \$100 bills into shopping carts and purses or placing the money behind goods on the shelves. The unknown benefactor always writes the name “Benny” on the money, and it is believed that “Benny” has given away \$50,000.

As soon as Roman stepped out of the supermarket, he called his father to tell him about his secret prayer and the unexpected answer.

“What do the homeless need most?” Roman asked. “I want to go shopping for them now.”

His father, Dale Cardwell, couldn’t have been happier. He is the pastor of Inside Out Ministries, a Seventh-day Adventist church in Salem that has more homeless members than members who have homes.

“We see miracles everyday as we minister to the gangs, homeless, and severely broken,” he said in an interview.

He has many questions for God about the remarkable answer to his son’s prayer: Who placed the money in the cart? Why was Roman’s cart chosen? Did God tell “Benny” about the prayer? What if Roman had asked for \$1,000? What if we all made selfless requests to God?

James 4:2, 3 says, “You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures” (NIV).



While Roman and his father assist the marginalized in Salem, part of this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering with help a marginalized group—refugees—across the North American Division. You can be a “Benny” and plan a generous contribution.

Part I: Overview

For many people, the title of this week's lesson may seem a little strange. How can you find rest in family ties if your family is dysfunctional? What if you have an authoritative, overbearing father? Perhaps you have little or no relationship with your mother? Or what if there are intense sibling rivalries? Of course, there are many families with close bonds of affection. The home is a supportive place where love is openly expressed. But this is not always the case.

We can take courage from Joseph's experience. Rejected by his jealous brothers, sold into slavery, separated from his family, unjustly condemned and imprisoned, Joseph still maintained his faith. The trials he experienced did not make him bitter; they led him to trust God more fully. Through these trials, God was shaping his character and preparing him for a position of honor in the Egyptian kingdom. One day, he would sit with the Pharaoh on the throne of Egypt as a trusted advisor and overseer of vast resources.

This week's lesson focuses on two eternal truths. First, though we may go through trials and face difficulties, this does not in any way mean that God has forsaken us or loves us any less. God's love reaches us where we are, no matter what life throws at us. Second, the challenges we face are often preparing us for something far greater than we can imagine. God has a plan through it all and is working to accomplish His ultimate purpose in our lives. The story of Joseph is the story of a young man who was faithful to God amid a dysfunctional family relationship, but God eventually used him to save his family and restore the relationship he had lost.

Part II: Commentary

The groundbreaking study titled *Cradles of Eminence* analyzes the childhood experiences of more than 400 individuals deemed "eminent" by the psychologist authors, Victor and Mildred George Goertzel. *Eminent* is defined as superior or achieving excellence in their field, as opposed to having natural talents. These people are scientists, politicians, movie stars, entrepreneurs, authors, playwrights, and

sports heroes. The question that the Goertzels raised was, What early childhood experiences shaped the future lives of these outstanding individuals?

What they discovered surprised them. Many of these people experienced childhood trauma. Some were sickly. Others were brought up in dysfunctional families, and still others experienced significant childhood injuries. A number of these children who achieved excellence were raised in loving supportive families. The shocking truth of *Cradles of Eminence* is that our fundamental choices and the discovery of our real purpose in life are more important than our environment or genetics in determining the heights that we reach and the contributions to society that we make.

This was certainly true in the story of Joseph. Think about his genetic background for a moment. He came from the sin-stained line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There were liars and thieves in his family tree. His paternal home was punctuated with dysfunction. His father's favoritism angered his brothers. They exhibited jealousy, greed, and bitterness. Their solution: get rid of Joseph. Think of Joseph's journey and remember his genetics and his dysfunctional family environment.

Joseph's Challenges

Joseph was sold into slavery when he was 17 years old (*Gen. 37:2*). In Egypt, after faithfully serving in Potiphar's household, Joseph was unjustly condemned and wrongfully imprisoned. Even after successfully interpreting the dreams of the baker and the butler (as Joseph predicted, the butler was freed and reassumed his position in Pharaoh's service after three days), Joseph was left to languish in prison for two more years. When Pharaoh had his dreams about the seven fat cows and seven lean cows, and the seven full ears of corn and the seven lean ears, the butler remembered Joseph. According to Genesis 41:46, Joseph was now 30 years old. Thirteen difficult years had passed. All during this time Joseph had remained faithful to God. His unwavering faith, sterling integrity, and farseeing wisdom placed him in a position of favor with Pharaoh, and he became the second-in-command in the Egyptian empire.

Joseph's Faithfulness/God's Blessings

The experiences of the past 13 years had prepared Joseph for the present moment. Thirteen years before in Potiphar's house, the Scripture declares, "And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did prosper in his hand" (*Gen. 39:3, NKJV*). Joseph's past did not determine his present. He was faithful to God and received God's favor, even in the most challenging circumstances. When Potiphar's wife made unwanted advances toward Joseph continually, he

fled. His words to her are classic: “ ‘How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?’ ” (*Gen. 39:9, NKJV*). When he was unjustly imprisoned, his leadership ability and unsullied character impressed the jailer. Once again, Joseph rose to a leadership position. God favored him. The narrative states, “But the LORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (*Gen. 39:21, NKJV*). After interpreting the butler’s and baker’s dreams, Joseph did not become overanxious about his imprisonment. He determined to trust God and do his best at the task that lay nearest. When eventually called to interpret the pharaoh’s dream, he took no credit for himself. He simply said, “ ‘It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace’ ” (*Gen. 41:16, NKJV*). When Pharaoh understood the dream and its significance, he chose Joseph to build the storehouses to preserve the grain during the seven years of plenty because the “ ‘Spirit of God’ ” was in him and Joseph was “ ‘discerning’ ” and “ ‘wise’ ” (*Gen. 41:38, 39, NKJV*).

Joseph’s genetics or environment did not determine his future; his choice to trust in God did. His faith transcended his environment. This quote attributed to Aristotle speaks to the value of positive choices no matter what our situation or environment is: “Excellence is never an accident. It is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, and intelligent execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives—choice, not chance, determines your destiny” (“113 Aristotle Quotes That Changed Western History,” KeepInspiring.me, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://www.keepinspiring.me/Aristotle-quotes/>).

Joseph’s Trials Prepared Him for Success.

The most important factor in Joseph’s fidelity to God was his recognition that the circumstances of his life did not determine his relationship to God. God cared for him, loved him, and strengthened him in every circumstance of life. His difficult circumstances were not indicative of God’s concern for him. In fact, the opposite was true. As Ellen G. White so powerfully states: “Trials and obstacles are the Lord’s chosen methods of discipline and His appointed conditions of success. He who reads the hearts of men knows their characters better than they themselves know them. . . .

“The fact that we are called upon to endure trial shows that the Lord Jesus sees in us something precious which He desires to develop. If He saw in us nothing whereby He might glorify His name, He would not spend time in refining us. He does not cast worthless stones into His furnace. It is valuable ore that He refines. The blacksmith puts the iron and steel into the fire that he may know what manner of metal they are. The Lord allows His chosen ones to be placed in the furnace of affliction

to prove what temper they are of and whether they can be fashioned for His work.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 471.

It took 13 very challenging years, but God was preparing Joseph for something much greater. Joseph had no idea what God’s plans were. He could hardly imagine that he would go from the pit to the prison to the palace. In His farseeing wisdom, God was working for Joseph’s best good. Through this one man, God would save a nation. Joseph’s sojourn in Egypt not only preserved Egypt in a time of famine—but it also saved Israel from starvation.

Joseph never forgot that God had an eternal plan for his life. As Isaiah would write centuries later: “But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you’ ” (*Isa. 43:1, 2, NKJV*). God’s eternal promise to Joseph and each of His followers is that we are “‘precious . . . honored . . . loved’ ” (*Isa. 43:4, NKJV*). He will never leave us or forsake us (*Heb. 13:5*). Whatever our background, whatever our environment, whatever our family situation, By His grace, the Lord is there to encourage and support us. He is there to lift our vision from what is to what will be. He is there to inspire us with His larger plans for our lives.

Part III: Life Application

Some of us in our Sabbath School class come from wonderful, supportive, godly homes. Others come from broken homes or homes where the conditions were, or are, less than ideal. No matter what our home life is (or was) like, every one of us will (as did Joseph) go through some difficult experiences in life. This week’s Sabbath School lesson really has one central thought: God has not forsaken us when we face life’s challenges. If, as Joseph, we choose to be faithful to God in the tough times, He will prepare us for something much greater than we can ever imagine.

- Read Psalm 139:17, 18 together in class and ask your class to share what difference this passage makes when you are going through difficult times.
- Ephesians 2:19, 20 describes an accepting family that in Christ we are a part of. Spend a moment in class personally reading this passage and considering what it means to you. Reflect on the idea that, through Christ, you are a member of the “household of God.” What does that mean to you in practical terms?

As you go through this week, remember Joseph's experience. He was faithful to God for 13 long, difficult years. All during this time, God's blessing was upon his life. Faithfulness in the present and trusting God today will prepare you and open the doors for a future beyond your imagination.

Notes