

Good Morning,

Today we are going to begin our message with a “Who Am I” type quiz. See if we can figure out who this person is? ***I was a shepherd; I was taken into Egypt to avoid being killed I began my ministry at the age of 30; I gave bread to the hungry; I resisted difficult temptations; I was falsely accused; They wanted to kill me; I was taken into captivity; I was alone; I was bound; I was assaulted; I was condemned between two prisoners; Many were saved because of me; Who am I?*** If you guessed Jesus you would be sort of right but He is not the correct answer for this quiz. Here’s another clue, my mother was Rachel and my father was Jacob. Any other answers come to mind? Well if you guessed Joseph, you would be correct. Are some of you surprised to learn that Joseph shared so many of the same experiences that Jesus did? You see both Jesus’ and Josephs’ experiences in the bible are wonderful examples of hope that show us our ability to overcome our hardships and struggles and never having to compromise our love towards God in doing so. The story of Joseph is not a story that we are able to adequately cover in the span of today’s message, so we will continue our study of Joseph’s Story over the next couple of Sundays in a sermon series that I have labeled, ***“Coming to Know God’s Purpose for Our Lives”*** As we begin our study of Joseph’s life we find that his life was kind of dived into three stages and from each stage there are lessons for us to learn that are unique to each stage. The three stages of Joseph’s life are; his growing up years, his career building years and his take care of the family years. And for today’s message, will begin with Joseph’s growing up years. The most significant thing about Joseph’s growing up years is that he grew up within an imperfect dysfunctional family system, at least by today’s standards and terminology. In my opinion I would consider that Joseph’s family could use a few counseling sessions but I will let you be the judge and see what you think; He had three stepmothers, ten step-brothers, one brother, and a step sister--all living in the home at the same time. His father, Jacob, though generally godly, embraced the polygamy that was common in the day, which opened the door to jealousy, insecurity and almost constant conflict among his wives. Jacob was also a passive parent, whose lack of involvement and leadership brought incredible pain and confusion to his family. Joseph’s brothers took turns being brutal, conniving, and openly immoral. So as we continue let’s take a closer at the beginning stage of Joseph’s life. Joseph’s biblical debut begins when he was 17 years old but his family history of dysfunction goes all the way back to Abraham, who was Josephs’ Great Grandfather. It appears our history of family imperfection may have started with

Abraham's wife Sarah, who allowed Abraham to bear a Son, Ishmael, with Hagar, the servant girl. This happened because Sarah was too old to have children; however she did give birth to Issac, who was Joseph's grandfather. But jealousy entered the family and Sarah had Abraham cast Hagar and her son Ishmael out of the family. Now, our family dysfunction did not stop there as it continued on into another generation with Isaac and Rebekah's twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau was Joseph's uncle and Jacob was his father. You see Esau was the rightful heir but Jacob swindles Esau out of his birthright by selling him a bowl of soup and then Jacob's mother Rebekah helps him to fool Abraham into giving Jacob the family blessing instead of Esau. Now that's what I call a family built on trust. Next we have Jacob meeting Rachel, but Jacob was deceived into marrying Leah first and she became the mother of Joseph's ten brothers and a sister. Wow, how confusing is this all becoming. Jacob did however add another two wives to the family, one being Rachel who was Joseph's mother. Rachel and Jacob did have one more son, Benjamin, before she passed away while giving birth to him. So now, as we begin Joseph's story we have a better understanding of where he came from. One would think that with such a dysfunctional family how could things get worse? Then there was the rape of Joseph's sister, where the brothers ruthlessly avenged her, by killing all the men in the town, and then there was Abraham telling the brothers that his favorite son was young Joseph and even made Joseph an expensive robe for him to wear and set Joseph apart and above his brothers. Then Joseph made matters worse by telling the family of a dream where all the brothers bowed down to him. This infuriated the brothers and they plotted to kill him. One day, when Joseph came upon the brother while they were tending the sheep, the brothers started to put their plan into action but one brother stood up to the others and talked them out of killing him if another idea would come to them. So until they could think of something else they threw Joseph down a cavern and he screamed for help until a slave merchant came by and then the brothers sold him into slavery. Now, those are the kind of brothers you would love to have watching your back. So now, let's go back to a statement that I made earlier, the one where I said Joseph came from an imperfect, dysfunctional family. Ok, now that we understand where Joseph came from what are we to learn from his experience? We are going to discover two lessons actually today, one is about a young man who never gave up on God no matter how bad things became and our other lesson is that a dysfunctional family does not have to continue in its dysfunction from generation to generation. So when we say that Joseph never gave up on God no matter how bad things became

how is it that we can make this statement from his life so far? Maybe if we looked at his attitude that he had through his early rough times it would help us a bit. One thing that we will learn about Joseph is that no matter what he was suffering he always saw God's helping and guiding hand in all that he experienced. If we were to put ourselves into Joseph shoes for a moment and find out that all our brothers hated us and they were always mean to us, where would we find any inkling of a positive attitude? Unfortunately, I believe in my fallen human condition and this situation was happening to me I would probably be filled with rage hoping to have enough of it to defend myself and if somehow I survived I would want to get even. But that kind of negative thinking and action was not for Joseph as he would look at his situation by saying **"My brothers hate me but the Lord loves me, they wanted to kill me but the God of my father's preserved me, they lowered me into the cavern and the Lord raised me up."** You know the first thing that strikes me when I hear his responses to the negative things that are in his life is that no matter what horrific things are happening Joseph never loses sight of God and he knows that God is always with him. So let me see if Joseph's attitude will work for a few examples of today's situations. **"I was fired from my job today; the Lord will prepare me for another Job. A very close friend of mine died today; the Lord is taking care of both of us and we are not alone. I am very depressed and worry about everything; God will work things out and He understands my pain.** As I was writing these examples and thinking of ways God will help us, my mind kept trying to compare them with negative human reactions like these: **I was fired from my job today; well there goes that career, now what am I supposed to do? A very close friend of mine died today; I guess when we're dead, were dead, and that's it, it's all over now. I am very depressed and I worry about everything; I am never going to get better no matter what I do, how could God do this to me.** Again as I was writing these negative examples I was struck by a common component that negative responses lack. And what they lack is Hope! Could it be that simple, that the difference between a positive attitude and a negative attitude is Hope? Was Joseph's attitude one of hope? Did he believe that the Lord always loves him? Did he believe that God would provide for him? And did he believe that God would deliver him from all his fears and pain? So maybe the first lesson that we have discovered today is that we are to learn that when difficult things happen that we are to look for hope before we look for despair? And maybe the next step is to truly be like Joseph and never, ever look for despair in the first place, but always see God, in all of our experiences. Our next lesson brings to us the message that a dysfunctional family does not have

to continue in its dysfunction from generation to generation. So what exactly is a dysfunctional family system? The easiest way for me to identify a dysfunctional family is to recognize how much the family resembles a television "Soap Opera". I'm sure that many of you remember "General Hospital", Days of Our Lives, or As the World Turns" just to mention a few. So what characteristics are needed to make up a soap opera story? How about, that soap operas are very sentimental with an emphasis on family life, sexual relationships; crises of human emotion, failed marriages, broken friendships, strained family situations, tragedies, illness', neuroses, and mental health hardships. Now that's quite a list, and if any of you have ever been "hooked" on a soap opera or two, I'm pretty sure you may have noticed a few of these characteristics within the series. Another key component that distinguishes a soap opera is a tendency for problems and conflicts to continue on and they never ever seem to get resolved as they just go on and on and on. I have heard it said that being in a dysfunctional family is like living in a "soap opera" but unfortunately the characteristics of a dysfunctional family go way beyond the fictional stories of a "soap opera". You see a dysfunctional family is a family in which conflict, misbehavior and often child neglect or abuse is ongoing and believe it or not the family members generally see these circumstances as normal. Families with addictions and or untreated mental illness will tend to be a dysfunctional family. And the thinking of normalness contributes to the dysfunction passing on from one generation to another. So what does it take to stop, intervene or help a dysfunctional family not continue from generation to generation? The first and most important thing to happen is that someone, parent or child, needs to somehow learn that what is happening is not normal and there is a better way to live. But to break the bonds of a dysfunctional family is near impossible without help from outside of the family. This can be in the form of counseling, treatment, the court system, a close friend or even being fortunate to marry a person who did not come from a dysfunctional family. So what are we to learn from our second lesson from today's story of Joseph? We are to learn to watch how Joseph's life, with God's help, went on to bring his family from the depths of dysfunction into a family of love, caring and nurturing. So as we continue with Joseph's story over the next few Sunday's see if you can see how God worked in Joseph's life to bring such wonderful healing to his family. Amen

Worship Service Reading August 9, 2015

Genesis 37: 1-4

Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. This *is* the history of Jacob. Joseph, *being* seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad *was* with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he *was* the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic 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 peaceably to him.

Please stand and join together as we sing, "Glory Be To The Father" #70

1 Peter 1:3-6

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials...

Please join together as we sing Hymn No. _____
