

I escaped it at first hand, but I knew all about it at second hand, and I'm still learning about it today. But most of you will already know about it yourselves.

No, I'm not talking about the auditions for Joseph, though that's true.

Rather, I'm talking about the tensions between brothers and sisters. As for me, I'm an only child, and that brings its own excitements, but today I want to look at the beginning of the story of Joseph. But it starts further back than his own generation: there has been a tension right through his family tree. Esau and Jacob were brothers, and there was obviously a lot of tension between them. Jacob tricked his father into giving him the blessing after he had talked his brother into selling his birthright for a single meal, and after that he had to run away from his brother, so I'd guess that there was some tension in that family.

And then Jacob fell in love with the beautiful Rachel, and worked seven years to win her hand in marriage, and was then tricked by her father, who gave him her big sister Leah and required him to work another seven years for Rachel.

So, as we might say today, both of them had "issues". And then the situation was further complicated by Rachel and Leah both having servant girls, both of whom had children with Jacob.

So right through the story, there is intrigue, distrust, envy, jealousy. And so we have a situation set up for bad things to happen.

The star of the story should be Jacob, but it seems that Joseph upstages him. Listen to how the story is introduced in verse 2:

"This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers..."

I think I would probably fire my biographer if he produced

something like

“This is the account of Ian. David, a young man of eighteen, was...”

Obviously there were a lot of tensions and dislikes between Joseph and the brothers. He was tending the flocks with his brothers and he brought their father a bad report about them. This is where it could be tricky. On the one hand, perhaps they really deserved a bad report, but on the other hand, it might well have just been Joseph “telling tales” about his brothers. Without a doubt, there is a place for telling plainly what has been going on when it is not good, but my reading of this passage suggests that Joseph is simply talking up a storm in a teacup.

But we can also see that Jacob has more problems with his sons, and maybe he'd brought it on himself. You really can't play favourites with your own children, but that's what he was doing. We're told in verse 3 that he loved Joseph more than his other sons, because he had been born to him his old age. The **reason** isn't important. The **fact** is important. He got this magnificent garment for him. I can't tell you for sure what was so good about it. Some say it had sleeves when most robes didn't; others say it was of many colours; one unreliable Biblical scholar called it a Technicolor dreamcoat while the NIV translators call it richly ornamented.

And when his brothers saw that he was the favourite, they hated him even more!

But Joseph didn't do anything to help himself: instead, he told them about his dream, such was his arrogance. It's almost unbelievable to read this story. “Your sheaves of corn gathered round mine and bowed down to it.”

And his brothers got to hate him even more because of the dream and what he had said.

And by the time he got to the next dream, even his father had had enough: in verse 10 we read that his father rebuked him: “will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down before you?” The brothers were jealous, and his father kept the matter in mind. But let's not be too hard on Joseph: he was a young man: he spoke his mind: he called it the way he saw it, and I think that this is quite typical of people of his age. The inexperience of youth. I am not thinking so much of the people of my sons' age as I say this, but rather thinking back to some of the blunt and arrogant things I said and did when I was about the same age. “the remembrance of them is grievous; the burden of them is intolerable”. But if we look at Jacob's response, we see that he wasn't above a bit of arrogance himself: he recognises the eleven stars as the brothers and then sees his wife and himself as the sun and moon in the dream. I can't be sure that this is the right way to interpret the dream.

So, what are we to learn from this extraordinary collection of dreams and real-life events?

I think there at least two lessons, and they are probably related.

The first is that it is not right to have favourites in your family. How can I say which of my sons I love the most? Without a doubt, I love them all, and I strive to treat them fairly. That doesn't mean that I treat them the same, but that I offer each of them the opportunities to grow into the adults that God wants them to be. I don't always succeed, and I am sure that the three of them will be the first, second and third to say so, but I do try to do this, and with God's help it does become easier. And the things that we have learnt in bringing up each one of them are of only very limited help in bringing up the others. And the words of our Lord in Matthew's gospel are guides for each one of

us: Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish will give him a snake?

Our heavenly Father is just the same: he doesn't have favourites. Christ continues: If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

The second thing is to know when to keep quiet about things. It's not always a lie to be quiet about something. While not the popular brother, I think Joseph's life would have run more smoothly if he hadn't felt the need to share his dreams.

But he was a dreamer of big dreams, and he went on to do great things. It is the role of each of us to encourage people to reach their God-given potential, and not to hold them back. From an arrogant young man, someone very special emerged. Again and again, both in scripture and elsewhere, we read of people who apparently were not going to amount to anything, but who went on to be great in our world. Peter was one such. On the day of Pentecost, he stepped forward and quoted from the prophet Joel: Your sons and daughters will prophesy: your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.

So, let's not be envious of their gifts, but encourage them and us to do all that we are able to do, by the gifts and the grace that God has given us.