

Pastor Kyle Mercer  
Dysfunctional Families

August 6, 2023  
Series: Joseph  
Genesis 37

**BIG IDEA – THE WAY GOD WORKS THROUGH DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES**

Today we start a new series. Here's what that means. In our church, we don't think in terms of services or Sundays or Saturdays but in terms of series. Today we're launching a new series. Some of you are new, and if you're new, it's a great time to be new, because we'll all be new together in this new series.

If you are new, let me tell you this. Whether you're a guest or a visitor or you just moved here... I know what happens this time of year. People are getting connected. Let me tell you about the Weekender. I want you to get in a Community Group, because you're not going to get all you could out of this series, or any series, if you just come on Sunday.

The way we work out the implications and applications of everything we're doing here is in group life throughout the week. The only way you can get in a group is to come through our Weekender. We have a Weekender, August 25 and 26. Let me tell you a little bit about our Weekender. Maybe I should tell you what it isn't.

I know some of you have been to churches, and you go, "Aha! I know what this Weekender is. This is a connections class." No, not really, although you can get connected to groups and serving. Other people go, "I don't want to sit through a theology class." Well, it's not a theology class, though we'll tell you a lot of what we believe and how we behave.

Other people go, "Kyle, is it a membership class? I don't want to be a member yet." It's not a membership class. You could pursue membership afterward if you want. The Weekender is the inroad and on-ramp to discipleship in the life of our church. It's how you can go from talking about this church as *that* church to saying, "It's *my*

church." It's how you can move from being a spectator to a participator, how you can connect your family to God's global purposes through our local church.

I just want to give you an opportunity, because we're really excited about what God is doing. We have this last Weekender before the fall, and it's going to be a great way to get connected as we head into the fall. So, let me pray for that for those who need to take their first step and next step, and then we're going to dive into Joseph. Let's pray.

Lord, we take a moment, and I want to pray for people to take their next step and their first step, to move from being unknown to known in our church. I know for many people this is a scary moment. What does it look like to move from a spectator to a participator? I pray people would make that step, that people would connect their lives to a church where people can know them and love them who also know and love God.

Lord, I pray for people even as they're moving to our city, as they're reconnecting to a church, that they would take this next step, because the Weekender is such a joy to our staff. It strengthens our serving teams. It invigorates the ministries in our church, Lord, so I pray many people would take this next step. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

All right. We are in a new series today that we're calling *Joseph*. It's in the book of Genesis. I'll meet you there in five to seven minutes. You can turn to Genesis 37. You may ask the question, which would be a fair question, "Why are we doing this series?" By the way, I think about this 12 to 18 months in advance. I don't just randomly kind of flip pages in my Bible and go, "This is what we're doing next." This is thoughtful. This is planned.

Why did I choose Joseph? Why did we choose these last 14 chapters of Genesis? Well, there are a couple of reasons I want to tell you. First, this is one of the most beloved stories in all of Scripture. And no wonder. It takes up 25 percent of the book of Genesis. I mean, that's a lot. The creation of the world and the fall into sin only take up three chapters. Joseph gets more time than Abraham, than Isaac, than Jacob, than Noah. So, he seems to be a really important person.

The second reason we're talking about this is he is the clearest type of Christ we have in the Old Testament. Now, what does that mean? Well, there's this discipline. I don't expect you to know this. There's this discipline called *typology*. It's kind of like this. Have you ever met someone before, and you're talking to them, and you go, "You remind me of somebody"? You think about it, and you're like, "You're just like my dad."

When we say he's a type of Christ, here's what we mean. Joseph is the clearest pointer and picture of Christ that we have in the Old Testament. I'll try to show you throughout. There are at least 50 different ways that Joseph is just like Jesus. So, when we're studying Joseph, we're doing this in part to learn more about Jesus.

There's a third reason we're doing it. Yes, it's big and beloved in Scripture. Yes, it's going to show us Christ. That's going to be great. Thirdly (and this is really important; I'll get to this later at the end of the sermon), this is a book to help you understand how to live with adversity and prosperity. You go, "Well, that's all of life." Exactly. The ups and downs of life.

I don't know why you and I think this. Americans think this. We think life is going to go like *this*. You're going to make more money. You're going to continue to be healthy. You're going to have a lot of kids, and they're all going to love each other and love you. You're going to have a great job, and you're going to be able to retire early. No one is going to die, no one is going to get disabled, and no one is going to get sick.

It's going to be progress, and by *progress* we mean you just keep going forward. That's not how life works. Joseph's story tells us it's three steps forward, two steps back, then three steps forward, and four steps back. Here's the thing about adversity and prosperity. You know this. They can both corrupt your character.

This is so true. People are always looking for an excuse to be bad. There's about 10 percent of them... Every time something bad happens, they go, "Yes! I've been wanting to indulge in some things, and I've been wanting an excuse so if anyone asks me why I did this, I'd have an excuse to be horrible."

I get concerned when people suffer because I'm afraid it's going to corrupt their character, because it's very likely to happen. But for Joseph, it makes him better, not bitter. Then on the other end of things, Joseph becomes unbelievably successful, and that doesn't corrupt his character, and that's really hard.

You know this. Success, by definition, separates you from others. It's like, "I'm different, and I have more money" or "I have more time" or "I have more opportunity" or "I have more authority." It's very, very hard to use that well and not let...what do they say?...too much time in the spotlight make you go blind.

Then the main theme (and this has been a timely theme for our church right now) is providence. I know that's a big, scary word. God works two ways. God works in miracle and in providence. That's an oversimplification, probably, but that's how God works.

Here's how a miracle works. A *miracle* is when God intervenes... I don't know what we want to say. He bends the rules and laws of physics, or whatever, and does something supernatural in time, space, and history. There are only 42 miracles in the New Testament. It doesn't happen that often. That's why we call it *miracle*, not *Monday*. It doesn't happen very often.

The number-one way God likes to work is through providence. *Providence* is the invisible hand of God. It is how God supernaturally works through the natural things in your life. See, God loves to play chess. "I'll move *this* pawn, *this* bishop, *this* rook, and it's going to take a long time, because chess takes a long time, and I'm going to slowly move every piece into checkmate."

The theme we're going to look at today is the theme of dysfunctional families, because that's how it starts. Do you know anyone who has a dysfunctional family? If not, you might be the one with a dysfunctional family. This is helpful to know. There's a difference between broken families and dysfunctional families. Broken families are not your fault. Dysfunctional families are your fault.

Broken families happen where something happened to your family. Disability. The family is broken. Dad or Mom dies. They got divorced. You were betrayed. Illness and injury. Sickness and suffering. It comes upon you, and then you wake up one day and go, "This family is broken."

A dysfunctional family is a family that looks like... "Look. There's Mom and Dad and three beautiful kids." It's like, dude, that family is completely dysfunctional. What is *dysfunctional*? It's not operating according to God's Word. Usually, what happens is nobody is talking and nobody is trusting.

You've heard the saying, "We move at the speed of trust." Have you ever met the family...? It's like, "Why can't they decide where the kids go to school? Why can't they plan their vacations? Why can't they sync their schedules? Why can't they figure out their retirement?" There's no trust.

I've walked into homes before, and I don't know if it's supernatural or psychological or what it is. I walk in, and I'm like, "There is an elephant in the corner. There is a skeleton in the closet. There is a snake under the rug." Why do we have so many illustrations for that stuff? I think because it happens all the time.

Here's the encouragement: Joseph comes from a broken and dysfunctional home, and God can still use him. Broken. His mom dies when he's 6, giving birth to his younger brother. Dysfunctional. There's favoritism. His dad idolizes him. There's sibling rivalry. There are a bunch of horrible things, and God uses it. So, this to encourage you: if you come from a broken, dysfunctional home, God could still do great things

through your life. Also, if you came from a great home, we think God can still use you as well. That's our hope.

I want us to start with Jacob. Let's go to chapter 37, verse 1. Before we get to Joseph, we have to get to Jacob. The Bible thinks generationally; we think instantaneously. Look at verse 1. "**Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings...**" That's Isaac. "**...in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Jacob.**"

What you need to understand is the word *generation* shows up 10 times in Genesis, always to introduce us into a new section. This book is primarily about, well, God, and then Joseph, but if there's a third character in this book, it's Jacob. In fact, the story is introduced with, "Hey, this is a story of Jacob's sons."

Then, as the story goes on, who's lied to at the end of this chapter? Jacob. If you know the story (and I don't expect that we all do), who needs to get to Egypt? Joseph is like, "This guy has to get to Egypt." This is where everything is going. Jacob. Then who's grieving at the end? Whose funeral are we grieving at the very end? Jacob. So, this is a story, in large part, about Jacob.

Now, he came from a dysfunctional, broken family. Remember that? He was the younger of two twins. His older brother Esau... They didn't really get along. It was mostly Jacob's fault because Jacob was a liar, which is interesting, because there seems to be generational sin. Jacob lied, and now his kids are lying. He was the person who lied. Now he's the person being lied to. There's all that deep stuff going on.

He comes from a family that didn't really get along, and then he goes out, and remember, he marries four wives. How many people go, "That's probably not a good idea"? He marries two sisters. What's the only good thing about marrying two sisters? You just get one mother-in-law. (I love my mother-in-law. I'm just kidding.)

This is actually an important part of the story. He marries two sisters, Leah and Rachel. This is what the Bible says. Leah wasn't as good-looking. He didn't like her as much. Laban tricks him into marrying Leah, but Leah can get pregnant really easily, so they have all of these babies. Then, later, he gets to marry Rachel who he really loves, and she can't get pregnant for a long time. Eventually, she gets pregnant.

After Leah has had all of these other babies, she gets pregnant with her first kid. What's his name? Joseph. Then they have a second kid, and his name is Benjamin, but remember, Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin. Jacob's idol in his life, the love of his life, the sun and the solar system of his life, was Rachel. She dies. You can't not worship anything, so he transitions his worship to Joseph.

## 01 WHO IS JOSEPH?

To understand the story, you have to understand that Joseph is the favorite son of his favorite wife. That's who we're introduced to. Look at verse 2. ***"These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives."*** Those are the other two wives. ***"And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father."***

There are a couple of themes that are in the Old Testament, and one of the themes is you often meet people God is greatly going to use, but you meet them when they're young. You meet Daniel as he's chained and heading to Babylon. You meet David as he's a teenager fighting Goliath. You meet the Lord Jesus Christ as an infant. Now here we go. We meet young Joseph. He's 17 years old.

This is interesting. If you think about Christianity... Every youth pastor says this, and every youth pastor probably *should* say this: Jesus was the first youth pastor. He kind of was. If you look at the disciples, they were teenagers. We're pushing it to say they were early 20s. Most likely, they were mid- to late-teenagers. So, Jesus is leading the first youth ministry.

Today, when the average American thinks about church, they think about a bunch of old people sitting in an old building getting ready to die. That is what Christianity is to the modern American. Christianity started as a youth movement of Jesus leading these 12 young men.

Here's what I want you to know. People tend to think they're either too young for God to use them or too old for God to use them. I don't know what the perfect day is. People go, "I'm too young. I'm too young. I'm too young. I'm too old." When was the perfect day?

So, God is going to use him. This is always hard, and I don't like saying this out loud because I don't know what this means for you or me. Before God is going to use someone greatly, he usually needs to break them deeply. That's what we're going to see in the story of Joseph.

Joseph is not a great guy right now. Later he's a great guy. In fact, after chapter 37, there's not one negative thing said about him, which is very interesting. The Bible is very honest about people, so it's almost impossible to find anybody in Scripture, outside of the Lord Jesus, who nothing negative is said about. Joseph would be at the top of that list except he's a tattletale.

We don't like tattletales. This is why we say, "Snitches get stitches." We don't like them when we're a kid. We don't like it when people tell on each other. I thought about that for a long time. Why don't we like tattletales? I think there are a couple of reasons. Normally, they're hypocritical. Normally, they're trying to find something wrong with you while they're struggling with their own things, and they're going to show that instead.

I think the bigger principle here is... We're sticking with the theme of dysfunctional families. What makes a family dysfunctional? A family is dysfunctional when one or everybody in it is always looking for what the other people are doing wrong. By the way, whatever I say about the family is also true about the church or your business or your neighborhood or the state.

What is a sign that the state is failing? When they encourage people to spy on each other. You know, China and the surveillance state. That's the classic example of this. I think they said one out of three people who lived in Germany during the Nazis was a spy. Could you imagine living in that kind of environment where one out of every three people was a government spy?

No one can live in some environment where I'm watching you all the time to figure out what you're doing wrong so I can expose it to other people. What's the number one reason people rat on other people, that people are tattletales, that people spy, that people report people? Because it's the easiest way to elevate their status unjustly.

Say you're at work. It's very hard to be a good worker. It's very hard to stand out. It's very hard to be noticed. It's very hard to excel. So, the best thing I could do is put someone else down, and immediately I look better. This isn't good. This is not a good beginning for Joseph. We're going to see in just a minute why his brothers hate him so much.

## 02 FAVORITISM & THE COAT

It gets worse. He's a tattletale, but then look at verse 3. "***Now Israel...***" Israel and Jacob are the same person. *Israel* just means he who wrestles with God. "***Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons...***" That's favoritism. We'll talk about that. "***...because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors.***" There's that famous coat we all talk about.

***"But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him."*** I don't want to talk about

this for a long time, but I want you to notice that the hinge on which this horrible story begins, with all of the terrible things that are going to happen in the next few chapters... It all starts with favoritism.

I know people think favoritism isn't that big of a deal. Obviously it is. It's one of the themes underneath the book of Genesis. I'm not going to re-preach a parenting sermon. I did that two weeks ago. But I think one thing parents need to realize is they can have favorites. The parent who goes, "I would never have a favorite..." It's like, "Well, you're probably going to have a favorite." The quickest way to get to "I will definitely do something" is to think "I could never do it."

Obviously, the Bible warns us of these things because it's possible. Now, why do parents have favorites? Sometimes they have favorites because one of the children just excels, and it's hard not to give them so much attention and be so excited about that exceptional child. Next week, in two chapters, we find out Joseph is one of only four men in the Bible that we're told is good-looking. It's like, "Okay. So, he's very good-looking."

I've seen families have favoritism because one child excels in athletics, in academics, and all that kind of stuff, and they get extra attention. Then I've seen the exact opposite happen. I've seen the child who's suffering or has a disability or is awkward or has no skill sets get extra attention. That's fine to get extra attention, but I've seen them become the favorite.

Here's what you have to tell your kids, the same thing I tell my kids: "I love God the most, Mom the second most, and you're all tied for third." That's what I tell them. Then all of my kids are like, "Oh, no! I want to be third." Also, what kids will do is *they'll* start to have favorites based on who their parents' favorites are, a lot of times.

This is why the Bible says, "Obey your parents," not "Obey your parent." Kids, even from a young age, will try to divide and conquer the **parents (16:45)**. You're like, "You're 4 years old. How are you doing this? You're so smart, so crafty."

So, favoritism is a big deal, and it's warned of here. Parents need to understand that the oldest story... We actually all need to understand this, because a lot of us have siblings. We need to understand that the oldest story in the Bible, outside of Adam and Eve, is a story of sibling rivalry. I don't know what that means.

I don't know why the most ancient story we have about the family is about a brother killing another brother. That's the first story. Are we that horrible that that has to be the first story we're told? I want to say that the role of a parent, while the kids are in the home, is to make sure the kids get along.



I pick on homeschoolers all the time, but I will tell you, one of the great things about homeschooling is you give your kids an opportunity to be very good friends, because they're not going *here*, and she's not going *here*, and they're not going over *here*. It's like, "All of you together, and you're going to learn how to get along, and you're going to be with each other all the time."

Whether you homeschool or not, one of the things you want to teach your kids is "Guys, look. You could have the best relationship in the world with each other if you choose to." Don't you hate it...? How many of your families...? This is part of the story in my extended family. You show up somewhere. You're like, "Why don't the aunts get along? Why does Uncle Bob come late and leave early? Why haven't those two brothers talked to each other in 12 years? What's going on?"

Here's what my dad said. This is completely unbiblical, but my dad... He still says this to my brother and me. He says, "Guys, if I die and you are not super close, I will haunt you." I've feared that my whole life. But you want to be very close with your siblings. This whole story is going to go downhill because of that.

Then there's that goofy coat he gives him. That coat was a symbol of status, of luxury, of ease. Most of us probably don't, but if you know anything about... The brothers were nomads. They walked with sheep. They slept under the stars. I mean, they had, what we would consider, a low-level... I mean, dignity, and everything, but a low-level, blue-collar job. So, why is the brother showing up in this nice, beautiful coat? Because he wasn't working.

The coat meant a couple of things. First of all, the coat meant he was the chosen son, not Reuben. Reuben was the firstborn, but really, even though Joseph wasn't the firstborn, the coat was the sign that he was going to be the heir and the father had chosen him.

My son, who's now 9, said to me a year or two ago, "Dad, I wish we lived in biblical times." I said, "Why is that?" He said, "Because then when you and Mom die, I get everything." That's what he said to me. Well, that's how it was back then. So, they're like, "Wait a second. It should go to Reuben, but it's going to go to Joseph."

The coat represents ease. It represents status. He shows up with a clipboard. He's going to have to learn (we'll see this next week) how to do hard work, but he doesn't really know how to do any hard work yet. He goes and watches his brothers, doesn't work (you can imagine how upset they are), takes notes on how they're doing, and then goes back. This is not good.

One of the hard things about being a parent is to figure out how much deprivation our children need so they will grow up. Joseph had been overly pampered and had a life

of ease. I consider myself fairly average, normal middle class, but it's hard even for Margy and me. Within reason, most things our kids want we could give them. So should we? Some of you have a lot of money. Should you buy your daughter a brand-new car on her 16th birthday? I know all of the young girls are like, "Yes! Yes!"

I think every person sees the 16-year-old boy or girl pulling up in a brand-new Porsche to their high school and goes, "Not right." Maybe you can't articulate it. "Not right. Not good for her. I don't think working at Chick-fil-A pays for that Porsche. I don't think she's working. I don't think that's going to be good for how boys look at her. I don't think that's going to be good for how girls look at her. I don't think that's going to be good for the expectations for her life."

That's an extreme example, but we all have to... Part of the problem with Joseph is he has never had to work. He's going to learn. We'll get there next week. Our estimate, as we put it together, is it takes him 10 or 11 years to become the head of Potiphar's house. Guys, he's going to have to learn Egyptian.

### 03 THE DREAM (REVELATION)

Let's continue the story. So, he has this coat, and then he has a dream. ***"Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more."*** This is the second time we're told they hate him. ***"He said to them, 'Hear this dream that I have dreamed...'"***

God can speak in many ways...through Christians, through our conscience, through creation, through dreams. The primary way God speaks is the written-down Word of God, but they didn't have the written-down Word of God back then. So, he gets these dreams. We find out later they really are from God. He tries to begin to interpret them. He tells them this.

Verse 7: ***"Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.' His brothers said to him, 'Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?' So they hated him even more..."*** The third time we're told they hate him. ***"...for his dreams and for his words."***

A couple of things here. First of all, there's, again, that theme or motif that the person God chooses is often first rejected by those closest to him. That is true of David. His father forgets him. That is true of Jesus. His family doesn't understand him. This is now true of Joseph. His brothers don't understand him.

I think there's also a second thing we see that's bad about Joseph. We don't know why he shares his dream. We can't get his motives. The first bad thing we're told about him is he's a tattletale. The second thing is he's either naïve, which is usually connected to favoritism... This is well documented. The more you experience favoritism in your life, which is, basically, people think you're better than you are, then you tend to be naïve about how life works. So, that makes sense.

We also don't know if he's prideful. I think there's a principle here. You have to be careful who you share good news with. These brothers were not the right people for him to share this news with. It's hard to find the right people in your life to share good news with. There's a verse in Romans that says, ***"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."***

What's interesting about that verse is it's actually easier to weep with someone who's weeping. If someone is sad, then you say, "I will come down to you. I can do that. I'm up here. I'll come down to you, and I'll help you." But if somebody is sad or not doing well and you ask them to rejoice, they have to leave where they are.

I think this is particularly hard on the brothers because he's the younger brother. It's very hard when people who are younger than you are more successful than you. That's very hard on people. They tell you in the corporate world, "Get ready for the first time you have a boss who's younger than you." You're like, "How did you get here with less time than I have? What does this say about me?" It's very hard on people.

They don't like his potential, so they get angry. We'll see what happens next. ***"Then he dreamed another dream..."*** Dreams always come in twos with Joseph. He gets two dreams. Then the baker and butler will get dreams. Then Pharaoh gets two dreams. So, two, two, and two. ***"Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, 'Behold, I have dreamed another dream.'"*** This one is more dramatic.

***"Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.' But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, 'What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?' And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind."***

We think maybe the father kept the saying in mind because, if you know the story of Jacob, he also had a God dream. So, maybe there's a principle here of something like it's very hard to believe something you've never personally experienced. Jacob has had this experience, so he keeps it in mind.

## 04 THE BROTHERS' PLOT & GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Then here's what happens. It gets bad. So, you can see they're jealous, and they're hateful of him, and he's a tattletale on them. Verse 12: ***"Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, 'Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.' And he said to him, 'Here I am.'"***

I want you to see providence, the invisible hand of God, in all this. This meeting with his brothers is going to lead him into slavery down in Egypt, and this never happens if his dad doesn't send him and he says, "Yes." But there's more. ***"So he said to him, 'Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word.' So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem."***

This is very interesting...the providence of people. ***"And a man..."*** We don't get his name. ***"...found him..."*** So, Joseph doesn't find somebody; somebody finds him while he's walking in a field. What a coincidence, we would say. Well, there's no coincidence.

***"And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, 'What are you seeking?' 'I am seeking my brothers,' he said. 'Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.' And the man said, 'They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'"*** That was 12 miles away, which was a long time back then. Obviously, there were no cars or anything.

Here's the point. Joseph would have never found his brothers if this man didn't find him. Think about this. Can the world be constructed in such a way that one meeting with one person can change a person's life? Yes. Somehow. I don't understand how that could be true, but that is how the world is.

If he doesn't meet this man, he doesn't find his brothers. If he doesn't find his brothers, he doesn't end up in the pit. If he doesn't end up in the pit, he never gets in the palace. If he doesn't get in the palace, he doesn't tell the dream. It's like, "Huh? Really?" If he doesn't tell the dream, he doesn't save Egypt. If Egypt isn't saved, Israel can't come. If Israel doesn't come, we don't get Jesus.

Does everything in the world depend on this one meeting with this one man? In some strange way, yes. I don't understand how the world works that way, but that's how the world works, and that's how it works for you. Could every interaction you have be that important? Unfortunately, yes.

Think about this. I think you might find this interesting, because it's not infrequently that people ask me questions like, "How did you get here to Two Cities? How did we

come to Winston?" I thought about that a lot this week. I thought about my own life, and I could think about my marriage or my family, or whatever, but I thought, "What about this church, like, providence of people in this church?"

Do you know that this church exists because of two people, neither of whom you've ever heard of and neither of whom I know well? There was a guy named Rupert Leary. I don't know what he's doing right now. I think he does real estate near Clemson.

He was a guy who was working for a church, and I knew him through another relationship. He said to me, "Have you ever thought of being a college pastor?" I said, "Well, I've thought about it. I'm getting out of college ministry on a college campus." He said, "I know a church. My best friend is the associate pastor, and I'd like to put you in line and connect you." That's how I got the job at FBC Durham.

Well, then I'm living in Durham, and Rupert is living in Durham. I'm at a coffee shop, and I see Rupert one day, three or four years into being in this role, and we reconnect. "Oh, I've not seen you for years." He said, "How's it going?" I said, "Good. I'm really thinking about planting a church." He said, "I think I have the right connection for you." I'm like, "Are you an angel?" That's what I'm thinking.

He said, "I know a guy at The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham. I think you would be the right connection, and I'd love to connect you there." So, he connects me there. That's how I got to The Summit...one guy. Seriously. Then I'm at The Summit, and I get into the Residency. When you get into the Residency at The Summit...

Sometimes you know where you're going to plant. There are certain guys who come in and are like, "I'm going to Miami. I'm going to Asheville. I'm going to San Francisco." I came in and was like, "I'm glad to be here. I'd like to plant and pastor and preach, and I'm open to options."

I remember I had one conversation in a Waffle House with Mike McDaniel, my boss at the time. He said, "Hey, I think you'd be a good fit to stay in North Carolina because you've lived in North Carolina for 13 years already. I think it would be good for you to stay." He said, "But we only have two cities left that we're interested in planting churches in right now in North Carolina."

I said, "What are they?" He said, "Boone and Winston-Salem." Boone didn't have a Costco, and that was it. I was like, "I can't live there." That was actually, genuinely, some of my thought process. I was in Durham at the time. I thought, "Oh my goodness! I'm in a tobacco/textile city with a private institution and medicine at the center of it, and that's exactly what Winston is. Maybe this could work."

Well, then I had to go tell my boss at the time. To go back before that conversation with Mike, after I talked to Rupert, I went to talk to Andy Davis, my senior pastor at my church. He didn't want me to plant until another year. He said, "Plant in 2017, not 2016," because of some things with college ministry. He was very godly. He said, "I'll leave it up to you."

I prayed and talked to Margy. I decided, "I want to go now, not later," which, by the way, ended up being very strategic for many reasons I can't get into, not least of them, to get here as early as possible because COVID was coming, but we didn't know. I go into his office. He had this big office. It was an old First Baptist Church. It had this fireplace in it and all of these books everywhere. It was a beautiful office.

I sat down with him and said, "I'm going to go this year instead of next year." I promise you the first thing he said to me was, "This is not what I wanted, but this is what providence has given us." It was one of the deepest things someone has ever said to me. That began the journey here.

I could tell more stories. There was one person we met, and that's how we ended up at Goler. There was one person we met, and that's how we ended up here. There was one person we met, and that's how we found that property we're moving to. It's an interesting way to look back...

You can't understand providence through the windshield; you have to look through the rearview mirror. You will be able to see "That's why I had the parents..." You will even see, "That's why that one person was in my life for that short season." Sometimes those are the most providential relationships: one person for a very short season, and then I don't see them again.

Let's continue on. Here's what happens. They're jealous, of course. Verse 18: ***"They saw him from afar..."*** How did they see him from afar? That goofy coat. That's how they did it. ***"...and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, 'Here comes this dreamer.'"*** We nickname those we love and hate.

***"Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams."*** Another motif, or theme, is that God's purposes and plans are always trying to be thwarted. These people want to attack the purpose and plan of God, which is revealed in the dream to be through Joseph. They're going to be unable to do it, but they're planning to do it. Watch what happens here. Verse 21:

***"But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, 'Let us not take his life.' And Reuben said to them, 'Shed no blood; throw him into this pit***

***here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him'—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father.***" So, we see a little bit of good in Reuben.

***"So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe..."*** Remember? They did the same thing to Jesus. ***"...the robe of many colors that he wore. And they took him and threw him into a pit."*** Literally, a cistern. Cisterns back then were 10 to 20 feet deep. They held water. But if they were broken (thank God this one was), they would become trash heaps or prisons. So, they're using this as a prison now.

Here's another circumstantially providential event. ***"The pit was empty; there was no water in it. Then they sat down to eat."*** Now, why is that in the Bible? I don't know. Why would you tell me they did something horrible and then went and ate? That doesn't seem important for the rest of the story. Maybe it's communicating something like, "These people were just like us."

We tend to think there's a certain type of person who does horrible things, and it's not us. That's why the Nuremberg trials and stuff like that... Do you remember? They would talk about people. The first time they saw Adolf Eichmann, they would faint. He was one of the head guys of the concentration camps. They would faint because he looked like their uncle or their dad or their friend. They were expecting a monster to walk in, and there's Adolf Eichmann. He looks like everybody else.

You go, "How could someone who looks like that do such horrible things?" How can someone do something like this? How could the Nazis put kids in gas chambers and then go play with and tickle their kids and put them to bed at night? I don't know what's wrong with us, but that's what we're capable of. We're capable of doing horrible things and then acting like normal people in the next moment. That's what they're doing.

***"And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt."*** One of the questions this book is answering is... The Israelites are going to ask at some point while they're in Egypt, "How did we get here?" and the answer is "Joseph." The answer is "Joseph's brothers selling you into slavery. That's how you got here."

***"Then Judah said to his brothers, 'What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.' And his brothers listened to him. Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit..."***

I'm imagining Joseph coming out of the pit. He doesn't know what's happening. He's 20 feet deep in a pit. He's like, "Oh, thank God. Oh, thank God. I'm never going to do that again. Guys, I'm not going to tell Dad. I'm going to get rid of this coat. I've learned my lesson."

He gets up from the pit and realizes it's actually not his brothers alone. They're going to sell him into slavery. Look at what happens here. **"...and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver."** Jesus was sold for silver. Joseph was sold for silver.

## 05 THE FAMILY SECRET (DECEPTION)

***"They took Joseph to Egypt. When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes and returned to his brothers and said, 'The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?' Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father..."***

We don't know this for sure, but it's possible they did this to Joseph to get at their father. Who knows? Our hearts are deep and dark. Sometimes we want to destroy the things people love to hurt them the most. They're certainly thinking about taking this. Look at what it says.

***"...brought it to their father and said, 'This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not.' And he identified it and said, 'It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.'"***

Here's what's interesting as we begin to close out this first chapter. How does this chapter end, and how does this story begin (because it's going to lead to a lot of horrible things)? A family secret. What makes families dysfunctional? Not talking and telling each other the truth and favoritism and sibling rivalry and tattletaling. But how about a family secret?

It's one of those things where I was like, "Man, I don't even know if I want to talk about this." I don't want a spirit of suspicion in homes, but every once in a while, it's helpful to... Sometimes people are like, "Why aren't things working in my home? I don't get it. What's going on? We're trying." I'm not saying this is often the problem, but it's certainly something to ask. Is there something someone is not telling us?

Secrets are very hard on people. Think about how hard the secret is on the sons who have to keep it for... It's a 22-year secret. Why don't people tell their secrets? This is an interesting thought. It's the same as confession. Why don't people do that?



Nietzsche had an unbelievably... He was so insightful on certain things. Nietzsche said the reason people don't tell you their secrets is it's easier to live with a bad conscience than a bad reputation. Most people have decided a long time ago, "I would rather live with a bad conscience than the potential of a bad reputation."

There are three types of secrets. There are *family secrets*. Family secrets are secrets everybody in the family knows but don't ever talk about, normally because Dad or Mom threatened us. "If anyone ever found out, it would hurt our family." It's like, "No one can know that Dad is a high-functioning alcoholic. We can't talk about that."

"No one can know this is an abusive family." Sometimes it's something more simple. "No one can know how much debt we're in. We have to keep this a secret. This would be so embarrassing if anyone knew that we've been spending way more than we've been making for years, and it's really hurting us."

Sometimes there are *individual secrets*. That's probably the most common secret. "There's something I'm doing. There's something I've done. There's something someone did to me." What's the first step if you have a secret? Here's what you need if you have a secret. You need one friend. In the Bible, the definition of *friendship* is one I can tell a secret to. How do I know that? Because in Genesis 18, God tells Abraham a secret and then calls him his friend.

So, the biblical definition of a friend is someone I can share secrets with. My encouragement to young people is to try to find that when you're young. It's very hard to find that when you're old. Most people who have people in their life who they can tell these kinds of secrets and confessions to... It's people they've known for a long time. It's their college friend. It's their high school girlfriend or buddy who they're able to talk to about these things.

The third type of secret is *shared secrets*. Those are secrets that part of the family has that they don't tell the other family. In this situation, what's happening is you have a shared secret. You have something 11 people know that one guy doesn't know, and they keep it forever.

Here are a couple other things about secrets. I want people to be set free. Obviously, in a room this size people have some secrets in here. I want you to know this. The longer you keep a secret, the harder it will be to share because the more time will have passed. Maybe some of you need to understand...

Sharing secrets and confessing...they're kind of the same thing. It's hard to confess something to somebody, especially... Why do people closest to people find their secrets out last, often? Because you're the hardest people to share it with, because we love you and we don't want to hurt you and we're embarrassed.

Here's what happens. When you share a secret with somebody, the experience they have... So, the experience of the person sharing the secret is "Oh, thank God. I finally had the courage. I've been holding on to this, and I've known all this. It took me forever. I finally had the courage to share this." The experience of the person hearing it is, immediately, "The past is completely different than what I thought."

That's probably the hardest part of hearing a secret that affects you. We tend to think of the past as fixed. "I could tell you what happened in the last couple of years. I mean, how much time do you have? I'll tell you." Until you find out it wasn't the past. Then you look back and go, "What? Every time you traveled for the last seven years you did this?" It's very, very hard on people.

I don't know the answer. It's not healthy to have secrets. We're trying to create an environment where people can tell the right person, get the help they need, and be reconciled and restored, because there is no reconciliation in this story until the secret comes out. It takes a long time. Let me show you how the story ends.

***"Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, 'No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.' Thus his father wept for him. Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar..."*** There's some foreshadowing there. We'll get there next week. ***"...an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard."***

So, the story ends where Joseph goes from experiencing, what I might call, a *pampered providence* his whole life. You get to be born into the patriarch family. You get to be the favorite son of the favorite wife. You get to be called the heir. You get to have all the status. You get the great coat, whatever it is. He has a pampered providence. Now, for the first time in his life, he's about to experience a painful providence.

For the next several years in the story of Joseph's life, he's going through a painful providence in Egypt. Think about it. He goes from favorite son to slave. He goes from being at home to being away in Egypt. He's going to have to learn a whole new language. He goes from being with his family to being all alone and forgotten.

What's interesting about this story and how God is... To use the phrase I've been using, the way I feel like this is very providential for my life and for our church is what happened is, last week, Caleb, one of the other pastors here, preached and ended our series on Ephesians, which was great.

This is probably more information than you want to know, but normally, it's very rare for me to be in town and working on my sermon the week someone else is

preaching. Just the way my schedule has worked, that doesn't happen often. It happened when Caleb was preaching.

Here's what was really neat. I finished my sermon before Caleb preached his. That means when I showed up on Monday of this last week, my sermon was already done. That never happens. So, I started working on the next sermon in the series. I started to write that on Monday. I was like, "This is going great."

This has never happened. I started to write the next part of the sermon on Potiphar and temptation. We'll get there next week. I was in the middle of working on my next sermon for next week when I got the worst phone call I've gotten in my whole life. I've written about this. It's on my Facebook and Instagram and different things.

I got a phone call at around 12:00 on Tuesday, and I ended up finding out that my best friend, Community Group leader, and directional elder had what we think was a heart attack while he was running. Just the most horrible thing you can imagine to get a phone call and then... You know, I drive over to Lewisville. I've never been (and I hope you never have to do this) with a wife the moment she became a widow. It's so horrible to do this.

I did the funeral of my best friend here on Friday, two days ago. We are in a painful providence as a church. My kids are young, but I told my kids, "Guys, it has been seven years in this church. This is the worst thing that has happened and probably *will* happen in the history of our church."

One of my kids said, "Dad, is it worse than COVID?" I said, "Oh, yeah. It's way worse than a global pandemic that shut down the economy...*way* worse." I mean, I'm dead serious. For me, for my family, for the Jumps... I want you to pray. We're a big church. You have no idea how large and important Andy Jump was in our church. He taught our residents. He was one of our elders.

He coached other Community Group leaders. I had a Community Group leader call me, weeping on the phone, crying over Andy and his investment in him. Guys, we need to pray for the Jumps, because here's what it feels like. It feels like Kathryn, Isaac, and Levi (their kids are 13 and 10)... The image in my mind is they are like Joseph. They have been chained, and they're sent to Egypt.

How I'm currently feeling right now is there's no dad in Egypt. There's no husband in Egypt. I'm waiting for them to meet Potiphar, and I'm waiting for them to have the dream that gets them in front of Pharaoh. I'm waiting for the end of the story. See, the reason we can handle this story, if you know it... We can handle this horrible story because we have Genesis, chapter 50.

We have the book of Revelation. Here's what happens at the end of the story. The father gets the son he thought was dead back. That's beautiful. The brothers are reconciled. Our hope is in the resurrection, but right now, we're hurting as a church. I want to take a moment and pray for the Jump family and the painful providence they're experiencing. Let's pray.

Lord, you have us and our church in this moment right now. You knew what was going to happen. This is providential. We want to pray for Kathryn and for Levi and for Isaac. Lord, I pray for our student ministry. I have never believed or felt the importance of our student ministry more than when one of our families loses a dad. You start realizing this is really important.

Lord, help us to be the church. In the church you're supposed to have many fathers and many mothers and many brothers and many sisters. We would never say we could replace Andy, but would we come alongside? Would we be, at best, spiritual aunts and uncles, Lord? Would we have hope for them?

We are eternally optimistic. We know we will see Andy again in the resurrection, but right now, Lord, we are hurting. Kathryn is hurting. Isaac and Levi are hurting. We ask that you would comfort them. Lord, I pray that you would use this series to comfort our church that you are with us in the painful providence. The gospel of Jesus Christ tells us that somehow the world is structured in a way in which when the worst thing happens, the best thing can come out of it.

That doesn't make sense to me except when I look at the cross and see the worst thing happen to the best person in the world, and I see what came out of it was the salvation of sinners in every place. Lord, give us faith. Give us courage. Let us walk together as a church family. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.