

On those days when we feel like we’ve been kicked around and taken advantage of by others, it’s good to think about **The Joseph Principle**. If you haven’t heard about **The Joseph Principle**, then you’re in for a treat, maybe a shock. If you have, then please make sure I get it right.

A father in the Old Testament had 12 sons. And while most dads try not to play favorites, this dad made it obvious which son he loved the most. He gave him special privileges. He gave him a special gift, an expensive coat made of many colors. This son’s only responsibility – if you can call it that – was to give regular updates to his dad on how his brothers were taking care of the family’s sheep.

After 17 years of this special treatment, it's not hard to see why the older brothers were fed up. To make matters worse, this teenager had the audacity to tell them about his dream in which they all bowed down to him. Who does he think he is? Some kind of prince or king?

They had enough. They plotted their next move one afternoon. What lesson could they teach Joseph that he’d never forget?

- 1) Toss him in a cistern and leave him there to scare him.
- 2) Make some money by selling him to people on their way to Egypt's slave market. They’d never have to see him again.
- 3) Kill him, throw his body in the cistern and say an animal did it.

What most agreed on was a combination of 2 and 3. They grabbed him, took his coat and sold him to a caravan headed for Egypt. Then they dipped his coat in animal blood and told their father a wild animal did him in. What sons could do that to their father? Their hatred for their brother and father ran deep. All that jealousy and rage were unleashed after all those years.

In Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical, “*Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat*,” he picks up on this, when he writes these words about Jacob’s sons lying to him about Joseph.

*Father we've something to tell you,
a story of our time.*

*A tragic but inspiring tale
of manhood in it's prime.*

*You know you had a dozen sons
but now that's not quite true.*

*But feel no sorrow, do not grieve,
he would not want you to.*

*There's one more angel in heaven,
There's one more star in the sky.*

Joseph, we'll never forget you.

It's tough, but we'll get by.

There's one less place at our table.

There's one more tear in my eye.

*But Joseph the things that you stood for
Like truth and life never die.*

It’s real easy to hate those brothers, isn’t it? And we’re not in this story. Imagine how Joseph felt. The agony they caused him and their dad. If only there was some way Joseph could retaliate. If only he’d get a chance for their paths to cross again. That’s today’s lesson.

Fast forward 20 years or so, and Jacob’s family in Canaan has run out of food. A famine is chocking the world. The only nation that has food is Egypt. Some of Joseph’s brothers make the long trip so they can buy food and bring it back home.

Since they last saw Joseph, plenty has happened in his life. Sold as a slave. Falsely imprisoned. Released from prison. Promoted to the number two position in the mightiest nation on earth. Joseph had been in-charge of food collection during the 7 good years of growing. Now he’s heading-up the food distribution during the 7 bad years of famine. And who should show up? Those lying and conniving brothers.

Did the sight of them cause the nightmares to return? Ripped from his home. Sold and sent to a land that didn’t speak his language. From favored son in his father’s house, to household slave in Potiphar’s house. Unfairly locked up for years for something he never did. Is he re-living those painful memories?

The individuals responsible are now standing in front of him wanting to buy food. Time for Joseph to settle a 20-year-old score ... *or, not!*

Instead of remembering the misery his brothers brought into his life, Joseph sees God's hand in everything that happened in his life. Instead of getting what they deserve, they get **The Joseph Principle**.

Joseph treats his brothers with a kindness they never showed him: **"I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, don't be distressed and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me here. It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ... So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God." ... And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them.**

Today's lesson offers 3 suggestions when it's good to remember **The Joseph Principle**. **FIRST**, when others treat us poorly and we don't know why.

Young People, remember **The Joseph Principle**:

- When your classmates don't include you.
- When someone makes you think you're too short or too tall, your nose is too large or your brain too small.
- When those who love you and you love – still disappoint you.

People Not So Young, remember **The Joseph Principle**:

- When someone else wins the award or gets the job you worked hard for.
- When you've been hurt and no one notices or seems to care.
- When that special someone leaves you for another girl or guy.

God didn't forget you. He has a good plan for you in all this. Don't give up, but hang onto God's dependable promises, like Joseph did.

SECOND, we need to remember **The Joseph Principle** when we find ourselves in the position to get back at others, like Joseph did.

- Maybe it'll happen in setting up a will or a divorce settlement.

- Maybe it's getting even with a spouse or a family member or friend who didn't meet our needs, so we refuse to meet theirs.
- Maybe someone at the church or on the job snubbed us, so we'll get even by doing nothing more than the minimum for them.

When Joseph's brothers stood before him, he forgave them and made peace with them. Many good things happened from then on.

THIRD, we need to remember **The Joseph Principle** when we fail to practice it in situations 1 and 2. It's easy to doubt that any good can come from the bad others have brought into our lives. It's easy for bitterness to grow deep in our soul. We know revenge is wrong, but we're blinded by it and too weak to stop it. That leaves us both miserable and dysfunctional.

Speaking of dysfunctional. How about that home Joseph grew up in? His father, Jacob, had 2 wives, Rachel and Leah, and he slept with 2 other women, their maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah. 12 sons from 4 mothers under one roof. How could there be any dysfunction here?

Dysfunction or not, it's hard to live by **The Joseph Principle**. That's why we need to know someone lived **The Joseph Principle** perfectly for us. He was also Jacob's favorite son. He is also our Savior Jesus. No one ever was sold out by more brothers and sisters. No one ever had more reason to seek revenge on his brothers and sisters.

Instead, Jesus became like us, to walk and talk with us, and win forgiveness for us by his perfect life and sacrifice on the cross. Someday, we'll stand before him. We know what we deserve, but thankfully he lives by **The Joseph Principle**.

That's why we'll hear words much like what Joseph told his brothers: *"I'm your brother, Jesus, the one you sold into death. But don't be distressed and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me, it was to save your life that God allowed all the suffering to happen to me."*