

Genesis 37:11 But his father kept what he had said in mind.

OK, who is it? Who is the golden child in your family? You know, the *favorite*. If you're an only child, well, you know the answer already. If you have siblings, well, you might know already, too, especially if it *isn't* you. But just in case you don't know, one website¹ offers a list of statements to help you narrow it down. Among them are:

1. **You were the only kid in your family who knew the nuclear codes:** You *always* got to do the cool and important stuff.
2. **Your parents would wake you up in the middle of the night to eat the real dinner.** Special treats, etc.
3. **Your mom has a tattoo of you.**
4. **Your birth date is your parents' password to unlock the shed** or a plethora of accounts.
5. **Your parents bought you better clothes like, say, a coat of many colors.**

OK, so maybe that last one wasn't on the website's list, but as you quickly recognize, it was a major indicator that Joseph was the golden child of his family. There was no disagreement, no denial. Everybody knew it. Well, except maybe Joseph.

It is difficult to say how Joseph perceived his position as the apple of his daddy's eye. Clearly, he knew that his father loved him and he genuinely loved his father in return. In other words, Joseph wasn't working hard to earn his father's favoritism. It just happened. Clearly, Joseph was a young man of high moral character, exceptional talents, and worthy of great trust. All of this, of course, meant that if his brother's weren't towing the line, he would be sure to inform his father...little snitch. As author John Jeske points out, this would not endear him to his brothers.

Now, all of this would have been bad enough, but father Jacob didn't help matters with his preferential treatment of Joseph. Again, as Jeske points out, Jacob should have known better. After all, he knew from his own father what it was like to NOT be the golden child. He knew firsthand how true favoritism could tear a family apart. It should have come as no surprise to Jacob when the same happened with his own children. Joseph was his father's favorite. And Joseph was not only blamed for it by his brothers, he was hated for it.

And it is in the midst of all this dysfunctionality, this relational chaos, that the Lord sends Joseph some assurances of the divine plans in store for him. ***Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers, so they hated him all the more. ⁶ He said to them, "Please listen to this dream that I have dreamed: ⁷ There we were, binding sheaves in the field, and suddenly my sheaf rose up and stood upright. Then your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf." ⁸ His brothers said to him, "So will you really reign over us? Will you really have dominion over us?" They hated him all the more because of his dreams and what he said.***

Now, that situation would have been bad enough, but that wasn't the end of it. ***Then he had another dream.*** Maybe Joseph was naïve, or maybe he didn't pick up on his brothers' growing hatred for him, or maybe in recognizing these dreams as gifts from God, he felt compelled to share them with his family, including his father. And it didn't go well.

Without getting too psychological we do get some insights into father Jacob at this point. It is curious to note that Jacob didn't seem to have a problem with the growing rift between Joseph and his brothers as long as it didn't impact Jacob's relationship with his favorite child – doting father, dutiful son.

Oh, but now, by bringing up the second dream to his father, Joseph is upsetting his father's perfect little mutual love-fest. By

basically reversing the roles of father and son, Jacob now feels challenged by his son Joseph, to the point that even Jacob is irritated. Jacob [*gasp*] rebuked his favorite son Joseph *and said to him, “What kind of dream is this that you have dreamed? Will I and your mother and your brothers really come and bow down to the ground in front of you?”*

But here’s the thing with father Jacob: as a man to whom the Lord had communicated through dreams before, Jacob may not have liked the dream’s implications, but he couldn’t deny the significance. In fact, we’re told that while Joseph’s *brothers were jealous of him...his father kept what he had said in mind*. In other words, Jacob knew in his heart that this wasn’t the end of it. The Lord had plans for his son Joseph.

And Jacob was right. Even though this is where our appointed portion of Scripture ends for today, it isn’t anywhere close to the end of the story. For Joseph’s brothers, well, they had reached a tipping point. They wanted to give Joseph what was due him, and not just a pounding. They were living examples of what James would later be inspired to write: *When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.* (1:15) Obedient to his father, Joseph went out into the fields to find his brothers one day. All alone, away from their father, they seized their opportunity.

[*video*]

Joseph’s oldest brother, Reuben, kept his brothers from taking Joseph’s life. But they threw him in a cistern – a hole for gathering run-off water – and then sold him into slavery, convincing their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

And life didn’t get any better for Joseph. He became the slave of an Egyptian official. Was falsely accused of trying to seduce the official’s wife. He was imprisoned. He thought he might be set free, only to be disappointed. Life just kept going from bad to worse

Maybe you know a little bit of what that’s like, huh? Over these days and weeks, the situation just seems to be going from bad to worse. And I know, abandonment and imprisonment are beyond what we’re dealing with right now. But that doesn’t mean that we don’t feel alone, that we don’t wonder why all this is happening, that every news story doesn’t undermine our confidence, challenge our faith, or push us to our limits. We live in a sin-filled world and our lives are driven by sin-filled hearts. Bad things will happen out there and in here.

But *do not let your heart be troubled and do not let it be afraid.* (John 14:27) Like Joseph, God’s promise of plans for you, God’s promise of forgiveness for you, God’s promise of life to the full for you, God’s assurance of eternity for you, are all you need to reassure you, to sustain you, and pull you through.

Joseph certainly found that out. He was literally plucked from the prison and made 2nd in command of all Egypt. Warned by God through Pharaoh’s dreams, he prepared the Egyptians for the international catastrophe of widespread famine. And yes, his family, including his father, would bow before the great man that Joseph had become. But Joseph eagerly assured them, *God sent me ahead of you to preserve life.* (Genesis 45:5) Or as Jesus said in our Gospel lesson last Sunday, this has happened *that God’s works might be revealed...* in Joseph’s life, in the blind man’s life last week, and in your life...today, tomorrow, and forever. After all, it is as if you are your heavenly Father’s favorite: dressed in the beautiful righteous robes of your brother Jesus, uniquely blessed in this life, and a special place prepared for you. God’s plans...for you...forever. Amen.

¹ <https://lifestyle.clickhole.com/6-signs-you-were-the-favorite-child-1825121349>