

## SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS

### GENESIS 37:1-36

*The following are resource questions that you can use with your Care Group for discussion. They are based on the sermon preached on Sunday, August 22 2010, by Rev (Dr) Arnold Wong at the Grace Baptist Church, Singapore. The sermon is available online at <http://www.gracebap.org.sg/worship/series.html>.*

**AUGUST 22, 2010**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

By the time Joseph reached the age of seventeen, he had seen more of the ugly side of family life than many people experience in a lifetime.

Given all the events that had unfolded in his life, Joseph was quite a remarkable seventeen year old. His family was prosperous, was large and it was apparent that he was living with an increasing sense that somehow, in some way, God had something special planned for him.

Here in the early verses of Genesis 37, in the beginning of God's dealings with Joseph, we have the first inklings of God's providential care. We begin to see the unfolding of a classic Old Testament illustration of Romans 8:28, namely, that "*in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.*"

Three aspects of Joseph's life set the tempo for all that followed. We discover that Joseph is the object of his father's (Jacob) special love (favouritism), his brothers' jealous hatred and God's providential care subsequently brought to bear.

#### **JACOB'S POOR PARENTING**

##### **1. Favouritism**

Jacob's other ten sons were much older than Joseph and had established lives of their own by that time. Here was Jacob, wondering who he would spend time with, when he was given this gift of another boy. So everywhere the old man went, his young son went also. They became constant companions.

Jacob's favouritism might not have been so bad if it had stopped there. But he gave Joseph an expensive gift, "*a richly ornamented robe*" (v. 3) that became a visible reminder to the brothers of Joseph's favoured status.

Why would a coat engender such hostility? Parents should be able to take one of their children shopping and buy something for that child without expecting the purchase to produce such hatred response in the hearts of the other siblings. But the coat put Joseph in a class apart—there was something about Joseph's wearing of the coat that spoke of leadership. In giving Joseph this lovely coat, his father set him apart.

##### **2. Folly**

Jacob's painful memories of the folly of favouritism by his father Isaac towards his brother Esau and the counter-favouritism by his mother Rebekah nearly plunged the family into chaos decades ago and now history was repeating itself.

#### **JOSEPH'S POOR JUDGMENT**

##### **1. Whistle-blower**

The brother's hatred of Joseph was initially provoked by the "*bad report about them*" that Joseph brought to his father Jacob (v. 2). The closeness Joseph enjoyed with his father would encourage this kind of "tale-bearing."

##### **2. "Youthful" Pride**

Everyone dreams. Some people remember their dreams and some don't. At the breakfast table most dreams are good for a laugh. Joseph's brother could have done that...provided the contents of the dream had no message of subduing another person.

Should Joseph have shared his dreams? Probably not. It may have been an error of his judgment to tell his brothers these things. Later, Joseph told his father the second dream but was rebuked for it (v. 10).

**DISCUSSION:**

Beware the folly of favouritism. All of our children are unique gifts from God. We need to cherish each child with obvious love and affection, recognizing each child's unique personality, individual capabilities and special needs. By singling out Joseph for special favours, Jacob did nothing but cast dark, destructive shadows over his son Joseph's life.

How would your child/children describe your parenting? Maybe it is about time you re-engage in active communication with your children and honestly share some of the difficulties you face as parents in our modern, affluent, treadmill lifestyle?

What are some of the subtle ways or practices today in our lives that would indicate favouritism to our children?

What about the church? Do we practice favouritism and partiality? How can we overcome this?

Youthful Pride—Imagine being seventeen and knowing that no one really likes you. Do you remember when you were seventeen and how important approval was to you? It was everything. The last thing in the world you wanted was to be isolated, walking the corridors of school alone and with no one to hang out with, no point of identification beyond yourself.

In your efforts to gain acceptance or prove your worth, do you inadvertently cross the line of intruding into another (especially more senior) person that would antagonize the older person?

What are some of the problem areas you encounter—at home, at school and at your neighbourhood?

What are some of the useful ways that you could “be yourself”(authentic) without being “full of yourself”(arrogant)?

**PRAYER:**

Make us mindful, gracious God, of our roles in generating conflict in our families, communities and in church. Forgive us for our insensitivity to the feelings and perspectives of others in our midst. Amen.