



# abclinks

connecting personal and small group studies with this week's sermon

For the sermon on February 21-22, 2009

## this week's coreverse

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Genesis 37.3-4

## usingabclinks

### Personal Bible Studies (inside pages)

- Personal studies that explore Scripture passages related to this week's sermon. They are broken down into three or four days. Some days you will simply read, meditate or think about a passage of scripture. Other days you will be asked to dig into a passage through reading, studying, answering questions.

### Small Group Discussion (back page)

- Small group questions that connect with the sermon and your personal Bible study. This series of questions act as a funnel to help your group discussion flow in a purposeful point.
- If you are not in a small group, contact one of our small group staff members to get more information on ABC Small Groups or go to [adable.org>smallgroups](http://adable.org>smallgroups).

See [adable.org>message](http://adable.org>message) recaps & Links for ABCLinks archives.

## Real World Faith

### Part One of a Four Part Sermon Series

### "Tale of Two Tents"

So... who do you envy? It's kind of tough to think about because we rarely admit our envy out loud. We do, however, mutter envious words under our breath or in our minds. You could call it inner complaining or ingratitude but at the root level, it's envy. This is how it plays out: "I'm not happy with what I have. Somebody has something I wish I had and I'm not sure I like that person because they have what I don't." Check out my short list of envious conversations. (What I may mutter under my breath is in italics.)

That's really great you lost 40 pounds in 3 months.

*Treadmill. Slim Fast. No sweets. No chips. I gained 10.*

You're going on another cruise over spring break?

*Maybe we could go to .... ah... Toledo?*

Congratulations on the college scholarship.

*My kid worked harder.*

You must have gotten a screamin' deal on that new car.

*I just spent \$1,000 to fix my 10 year old junk heap.*

That's really cool that your Steelers won their sixth Super Bowl.

*Stinks to be a Lions fan.*

Wow, you still have all your hair!

*Mine's been gone since the mid 80s.*

Sorry to hear your builder is two months behind on your house.

*You can't afford it anyway.*

Great job on running your third marathon.

*Wish I could climb a set of stairs without wheezing.*

Bertrand Russell (18th century British philosopher) said envy was one of the most potent causes of unhappiness. Not only is the envious person rendered unhappy by his envy, but he also wishes to inflict misfortune on others. Envy may be defined as an emotion that occurs when a person lacks another's superior quality, achievement, or possession and either desires it or wishes that the other lacked it. (*Wikipedia*)

This week, we begin a new series about a character in the Old Testament named Joseph. Joseph has a beautiful story of character, endurance and leadership. But, his story begins in a volatile environment of envy. Joseph is hated by his 10 brothers; he has something they don't - their father's heart and loving eye. Joseph is the obvious favorite son and that spells an envious and murderous plot in this family.



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# personal bible studies

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Dysfunctional could be the best way to describe Joseph's family. Joseph was the eleventh son of 12 born to his father Jacob, who's name was changed to Israel. Jacob could be one of the most intriguing characters in the Bible. His story is nothing less than wild. As a young man, Jacob fell in love with Rachel and agreed to work for her father, Laban, for seven years to earn the right to marry her. After seven years, Laban tricked Jacob into sleeping with his older daughter Leah, rather than Rachel, on his wedding night. Laban reasoned that it was customary for the oldest daughter to be given in marriage first. He then offered Rachel for seven more years of work. Jacob took the deal.

Now with two wives, one he loved and the other he didn't, Jacob's family began to grow. Leah was able to have children, Rachel was not. Four sons came to Leah - Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah. Rachel still barren, offered her maid servant to Jacob thinking she would bare children for her. Bilhah gave birth to two sons, Dan and Naphtili. Leah retorted by offering her servant, Zilpah, to Jacob. Zilpah gave birth to two more sons, Gad and Asher. Later, Leah gave birth to Issachar and Zebullan. Ten sons of Jacob but none from his true love.

The writer of Genesis tells us that God remembered Rachel and opened her womb. She gave birth to two sons - Joseph and later Benjamin. Jacob's response to Joseph's birth was as though Joseph was his first and only son. He loved Joseph dearly to the point that his preferential love for Joseph over the others caused a deep rift in the family as the boys grew to adulthood.

What is most amazing about this unusual family formation, is that these twelve boys became leaders of God's chosen nation. They would be the Twelve Tribes of Israel, the Children of Israel.

## ***Joseph's Crooked Family Tree***

***Read Genesis 29-30.24.***

Read the whole story from your own Bible. What other details did you find about this dysfunctional family?

In this story, there are some major cultural differences in how we establish and relate to our families. Make a list of some of the strange differences from this passage.

What trouble do you see brewing in this family of twelve brothers, four mothers and one father?

Think about the family dynamic that you grew up in. How would you describe it?

On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being "dysfunctional as Jacob's" and 5 being "wonderfully balanced and healthy," rate your upbringing.

How have you seen God redeem or attempt to redeem your imperfect family tree?

## ***The Power of Envy***

Our story picks up some 17 years later. Joseph is a teenager and his ten older brothers are grown adults. They all have responsibilities within Jacob's household and estate. Trouble is brewing for Joseph as resentment builds against him.

### **Read Genesis 37**

Murderous plots don't just happen over night. There's often a progression that leads to such hatred; anger turns to bitterness, bitterness to resentment, resentment to hatred.

How did this progression play out in this story? What role did Jacob play? What role did the brothers play? How about Joseph?

Envy is a strong emotion. What was the source of envy for the brothers?

Envy was demonstrated outwardly in this story with the brothers. However, we often try to hide envy, though it tends to bubble up in our hearts. How do we mask the envy that erodes our heart? What are the things you tend to mumble under your breath that have roots in envy?

Envy resents others' success or blessing. It wishes ill on them because they have something you don't. Is there envy in your spirit right now? Toward whom? What's at the root of your resentment?

One of the best ways to deflect envy is with gratitude. Describe how thankfulness has the power to destroy envy.

Spend a few minutes giving your envious thoughts to God; then spend time listing things you're grateful for. As the old hymn says, "Count your blessings, name them one by one."

## ***Look to the End of the Story***

As we leave this part of Joseph's story, we see a father in mourning, sons who have committed a devastating crime and a young man being carted off to a foreign country as a slave. Joseph's life seems bleak and without hope. His brothers are left to comfort their father with their lies. Jacob is vowing to go to his grave in mourning. What a mess this family has become. But, if we fast forward the tape, we learn that Jacob's family become the rulers of God's chosen nation. This family is redeemed; God makes something good out of what was intended for evil.

Are you in a hopeless situation? Are you discouraged today? Have you been on the wrong side of envy, resentment and anger? Have you been damaged by someone's spiteful actions? Have you caused some harm because of resentment?

God is still good even when we are not. He loves to make something good out of something broken. Spend a few minutes today expressing your trust in God's goodness in a broken world. Ask Him to strengthen your faith. Like Joseph, your story is not over.



# small group discussion

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## leanin

What was the quirkiest thing about your family growing up? What's the quirkiest thing about your family today?

## lookdown

Have someone retell Jacob's story of establishing his family. What is strange about this story?

Have someone tell the story of Joseph and his jealous brothers. What was at the root of their relational breakdown?

## lookout

Define envy. What causes it? What are some common venues or situations for envy to grow?

How can envy be deflected? What godly character traits are natural enemies of envy?

## lookin

When has envy gotten the best of you? Be honest. Envy can be subtle, you may have to look deep into your heart. Who in your life has received a "coat of many colors" and that, for some reason, bothers you?

In what situations do you struggle to not resent someone for what they have or who they are?

Discuss the power of gratitude and contentment. How have you seen the impact of these character traits when it comes to knocking down bitterness, resentment, anger and envy?

Jacob's family has become a mess and he is mourning deeply. The ten oldest sons are living with their sin and Joseph is being shipped to Egypt as a slave. Nothing seems good about this situation, however, the story has not ended. God will redeem this family. He's up to something good in the midst of their evil circumstances.

Is there anyone in the group who feels they are either in a hopeless situation or teetering on the edge of discouragement? Share a bit of what you're going through. Close the group by praying for the situations that have been shared. Here is a possible prayer:

*God we know these situations are not what you intended. This is a mess. This is broken. Today we claim your goodness and we trust that you are a good God and you are redeeming this situation for your glory. God we trust you and know that you love us. Help us to find peace, joy and thankfulness in the midst of our struggle. We look forward to seeing how you are working this messy situation for a good purpose. Amen.*