

Families eh?

Years ago I was sitting in a pub with my girlfriend (now my wife) Linda when she suddenly got the giggles. I asked her what was wrong and she pointed to a notice pinned to the wall of the pub which read, "God gave us our families, thank God we can choose our friends!". Now, it so happens that I was fortunate enough to be brought up in a happy family and family life for me since then has been pretty good all in all. I know I have a lot to be thankful for, I also know that many people have had a very different experience from mine. Within all families though - happy ones and less happy ones - it has to be said, life can get complicated, challenging and even messy, from time to time.

There is a fascinating portrayal of family life in the later chapters of Genesis. The family concerned is that of Jacob and the story centres around his youngest-but-one son Joseph. Because Joseph came along when Jacob was quite an old man he became his favourite son. So proud was Jacob of his son that he presented him with an ornate robe – a coat of many colours. Understandably Joseph's brothers became very jealous of him and they were unable to speak a kind word to him.

Things got worse for Joseph when his pride and immaturity got the better of him. He had two dreams that suggested that one day he would rule over each member of his family. Rather than keeping this to himself he couldn't wait to tell his brothers and father about the dreams. The result of all this of course was that Joseph's brothers hated him all the more.

Jacob and his family were sheep farmers and one day, Joseph was sent out to see how his brothers were getting on tending the flocks. The brothers saw Joseph coming in the distance and decided they should kill their hated sibling. *Yes, this story is much more extreme than most of our own experiences.*

However, the compassion of one brother and the entrepreneurial sense of another meant that instead of having his throat cut Joseph ended up being sold as a slave in Egypt and the rest is history. Joseph, favoured by God, ended up being given charge of the whole of Egypt by Pharaoh. He showed brilliant leadership in dealing with a 7 year long, countrywide famine, and ended up meeting his hate-filled brothers again when they came to Egypt to buy food. Joseph forgave his brothers everything and they were reconciled.

So what is the moral of the story? Humility is always better than arrogance – and it is generally much safer too! And forgiveness and reconciliation always win the day over resentment, hatred and even murderous intent.

God's presence is not always obvious in the story of Joseph and his brothers. But he is always there and he transforms a very bad situation into a very good one.

James