

What to Do When You Don't Know What to Do / Week 1

He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it" (Genesis 37:6-7 NIV).

His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he said (Genesis 37:8 NIV).

Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, Being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross (Philippians 2:3-8 NIV).

Do you ever feel like you are living in two different worlds? There's your life in the actual world—at school, with your friends, in the band, playing sports—and then there's your life at home. And although we probably wouldn't admit it, isn't it true that we're all way weirder and behave differently at home? We ALL act in ways at home that we would never act with our friends or at school or in public.

Think about it: What do you do at home with your parents/siblings that you wouldn't do in public/with your friends? Is there a difference in how you behave with your family, friends, teachers?

Why do we act differently at home and with our family than we do everywhere else? How is this possible? More importantly, why is this? Why do we act in two completely different ways depending on where we are?

There may be a lot of reason for this, but personally I think of my home and family as my world where I want things my way and according to my wants/needs. When I go out of the house, I put on my polite manners hat and find that I am slower to speak and act on my impulses and feelings. I tend to step back and either dismiss the impulse feeling or find a nice way to communicate my thoughts – using a softer touch with my words and actions.

Also, at home we are comfortable. Our family will always be our family – to a degree we can take our parents and siblings for granted because they are in our lives every day. However, as much as we want our friendships to last forever, there is always a possibility that they will not be our friend anymore if we behave poorly – so, we are gentler on these relationships. Even when we do get an attitude or upset with the people outside of our homes, it never really gets to the same level of attitude or frustration we get at home.

What I don't think a lot of us realize as we think about our lives at home is how much our response to the question, "How does this affect me?" changes the vibe in our house. As we respond to how things are affecting us, the people in our house are responding to how we are affecting them. Then we respond to *that*, and most of us don't realize we're playing a key role in the general feeling our house. Is this always true? No. But for some of us, we know we're at least a *part* of the cycle of tension and attitude where we live.

The question is, what do you do about it? What do you do when things are tough at home, when the mood is off, when you *know* you're a part of the reason things are tense, but you have no idea what to do about it?

You don't need me to tell you that family is hard, but the good news in all of this is that the difficulty you face with your family isn't unique to you and it's been going on for thousands of years. In fact, one of the things I love most about the real events in the Bible is how it gives us a real look at real people who lived real lives with real problems. And over the next couple of weeks we are going to spend some time looking at the life of Joseph. Joseph was one of the most famous people in the first half of history found in the Bible. He is a guy who—just like us—found himself in all kinds of situations where he didn't know what to do.

Joseph's story is wild. It's like the most dramatic Netflix show you have ever seen—there are murder plots, he's sold into slavery, he's unfairly put in jail, the story twists and turns everywhere, and the drama doesn't stop. We will get to that in the next few weeks, but it all starts with the drama with his family.

In Genesis 37, we read about how Jacob made a special robe for Joseph, a physical reminder of how much more his dad loved him than the other brothers, and the brothers despised him for it. At that time, robes were like the newest Jordan's. A big deal. That wasn't the only issue, Joseph then had a series of dreams.

He [Joseph] said to them [his brothers], "Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it (Genesis 37:6-7 NIV).

Now, this wasn't your typical dream, and the brothers knew it. This dream wasn't about grain. It was about power. And Joseph was sending a message by sharing the dream. He was saying "Hey guys, listen to this! I think—uh, actually, I *know* that I'm going to be more powerful than you one day—and when that day comes you all will worship *me*." For a younger brother to say this to older brothers was not going to fly. The passage goes on:

His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he said (Genesis 37:8 NIV).

The vibe was harsh. Joseph's brothers were over his robes and dreams, and then Joseph had *another* dream involving the sun, moon and stars bowing down to him. It was the same message, but this time it included his parents bowing down as well. He tells his dad, Jacob, and his brothers—who now hate him even more.

Can you imagine the tension in this family? One dad, four moms, a dozen boys—and now the favorite son who goes around *telling* people he's having visions of everyone bowing down to him. *Why* would he do that?

But Joseph wasn't acting in a way that considered any of that.

Joseph was behaving like all of us do in our families sometimes: **Hyper aware of how we are being treated, and not really aware of how it affects anybody else.**

And Joseph's *family* was the same way. All Joseph's brothers could see was how the whole situation affected them: the unfairness and the injustice. I mean, Joseph receiving the robe he did as a gift was like being given a brand-new car when he turned sixteen while all the other brothers had to share mom's ancient minivan. It wasn't right, and they saw it.

The truth is, even though these few verses are about more than some strange dreams and a coat. It is about how the tension in the family was never dealt with—the tension was left to grow. And we are still reading this story today for a reason.

Why?

- To **show us** family has always been complicated.
- To **teach us** to pay attention to how *our* actions and even our situations affect the people we live with.
- To **remind us** that tension left unresolved will never just go away. It will always escalate to something bigger. (Next week, we'll see how Joseph's escalated to a biblical dumpster fire kind of situation.)

But until then, what could everyone in the family have done differently?

1. Joseph could have started to see himself as part of the problem—as one person in a large family, and not the center of it.
2. The dad could have recognized how his favoritism was impacting everybody.
3. The brothers could have chilled out a little bit on the grudges and gossip about Joseph.
4. Everybody could have ignored Joseph's dreams and not allowed their insecurity to control them.

The point is this: Joseph's family drama isn't all that different than our own. Whether you're the favorite one, the angry one, the first-born, the last-born, the quiet one or the one with a gold-medal in door-slamming, the truth is the same: there is a role you play in your family. Pay attention to how your words and your actions contribute to the tone and temperature of the house. Are you improving it? Or are you making it more tense? Then, decide what you want your role to be from here on out. In other words,...

PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU AFFECT YOUR FAMILY.

Just think about how freeing that is. Because while everything around you is subject to change, and it makes you feel out of control, you can walk with the One who is actually *in* control. Jesus is a Friend who never changes. He was good thousands of years ago, and He's still good today.

Your circumstances will change, but His character never will.

Change is going to happen. Sometimes it will be good and sometimes it won't. But even though life is unpredictable, we can always trust in the One who is predictable. Life changes. God doesn't. He's the same loving God that He's always been.

Think of some areas in your life where you can begin to lean on this reality. Maybe it's at home, at school, or in a relationship. Because you can't avoid change, but you can make it through change. Because even though life changes, Jesus doesn't.

And then choose how you'll treat them. If you aren't sure where to begin, take a look at this passage in the letter Paul wrote to the church at Philippi. In some ways, these people worked a lot like family and were trying to figure out how to live together. So, in a letter, Paul writes,

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross (Philippians 2:3-8 NIV)!

Paul says, “Look, Jesus sets the example here. He gave up the privileges that came with being God. He deserved to be treated like God, but didn’t require that of people. He chose to serve and have compassions on humans, even when they didn’t deserve it at all. And Paul is reminding the Philippian church and us to be *that* kind of person with those around us

So, million-dollar question: How do we do that when we don’t know *what* to do at *our* house?

We start by paying attention to how we see ourselves.

Do think or act like we’re better than people in our house or in our family? Maybe. Is that accurate? Probably not. So, what would it look like to treat our siblings, our step-siblings, our cousins, or the adults in our house as equal or maybe even *more* important than ourselves?

And finally, and maybe hardest of all, we need to **invite someone else to speak into how we treat our family**. Honestly, it’s nearly impossible to see clearly the role we play in our family, but others around us *can* see it. And by asking them, they can help us see ourselves and our families with 20/20 vision. In fact, **asking someone older/wiser is one of the best things to do when you don’t know what to do**.

Imagine for a second if everybody in your family did this. **What if everyone paid attention to how they affect everyone else? What would it do for your relationship with the people who live at your house? What would it do for the general level of tension or peace at your house? What if it started with you? It could.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What’s something you do at home that you wouldn’t do at school or vice versa? (Example: You throw your food away in the cafeteria, but you don’t take your food in from the table at home.)
2. If you were one of Joseph’s brothers, how would you describe Joseph? If you were Joseph, how would you describe your siblings?
3. What you have said to help Joseph approach this situation differently with his brothers?
4. How could understanding the brothers’ point of view change Joseph’s actions towards them? How has not seeing a situation from others’ perspective caused conflict in your family?
5. Think about a time where you were in the middle of a family conflict. How could seeing things from someone else’s perspective have caused that situation to go differently?
6. Read Philippians 2:3-8. How is choosing to see someone else’s perspective over your own valuing others above yourself?
7. What are some reasons why this passage could be more difficult to live out with our families than with others?
8. What are some situations where being unselfish with your family would be difficult? (Example: who controls the remote, who does the dishes etc.) What could you do differently?
9. When a conflict happens with your family this week, what are some ways you can consider someone else’s perspective before acting out of your own interests?