

Back together again!

Introduction

When Steve told me what your theme was for this reunion, **“Back Together Again”** I thought, *“Okay, what a sense of expectation!”* It seems to project a sense of hope, a sense of promise, and a sense of joy that you are reunited once again. Because if you were not hopefully anticipating the reunion you would either choose to 1) not come; or 2) come just to see how bad it’s going to be because they didn’t ask for your opinion on anything...! But then, I think you would have chosen a different kind of theme, perhaps one that said, **“On no, here they come again,”** or, **“I can’t wait ‘til it’s over....”**

A family reunion is a busy time that also implies *travel, money, and a whole lot of family*. But we also come with something more: *a sense of anticipation*. That is, we anxiously expect to reconnect with those whom we love—and connect to those who we will meet for the first time and love and accept immediately because they are part of us; that are part of our shared experience—but we love them even though we have never met.

We expect to eat—and eat well. We expect to play—and play hard. We expect to hear stories of our family, and learn of our histories. We expect to take the time to remember those who have come before us. We will excitedly show off our children, or a new husband or wife. We want to be able to show and tell all of the folks that are connected to us that we have made it. That is, that in spite of the economy; in spite of the wars; in spite of all that has come against us, both good and bad, we have survived yet another two years. And because of that alone...we come with great expectation.

I am sure that even as the host of the reunion you are filled with great expectations. Your expectation are perhaps a bit more targeted: will all who come will enjoy the reunion; will there be enough food; will the food meet everyone’s expectations; will the budget be met—and will we be *better off as a family leaving than we were coming in?* There are even expectations met that an event that has consumed your life for weeks on end, is almost over, and in the now immortal words of the BP Amoco CEO, *“You just want your life back!”*

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Point Number 1: You Can't Choose Your Family

Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. Then they said to one another, "Look, this dreamer is coming! Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams!" But Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not kill him." And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him" — that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father. So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of many colors that was on him. Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it. Genesis 37:18-24

What we learn from this passage is that even though Joseph and his brothers were family—there was no love lost. In fact, Joseph's brothers despised him so much that they plotted to get rid of him. Fortunately, we have none of that here today...but what we learn from this passage is that, *you can't choose your family!*

Family is just—*family!* Good or bad. Everyone has an uncle or aunt who's just a little bit different. Or one who is always trying to run the show. Some families have members that everyone a hope doesn't come—but *they show up anyway*. Then there's that side of the family that everyone says, that's not so and so's real child anyway...and believe me, I am not talking ill of the McCall-Turner family...in fact, perhaps an imaginary illustration of a family reunion in the days of Joseph will tell the story better than I can. Here we find Joseph trying to explain the unique family relationships that happen to exist in his family to his wife who is coming to her first family reunion called: **The Sons of Jacob Reunion...**

*Who's that? Oh that's my brother. Now which one was he? Was that the one who tried to kill you? No, he's Reuben; he's the one who helped to spare my life. So then Judah tried to kill you? No Judah was the one who decided to sell me into slavery. But I know that that is your brother Ben over there. Yes, Ben's the youngest—we both have the same mother. Right...right...and your mother's name is Leah, right? No, Leah is my father's first wife. Boy, she sure seems like she is angry. Well that's because my Dad loved my mother—but was tricked by my grandfather Labin into marrying her first. So then she's the mother of... **Reuben and Judah?** Yes, and also the mother of **Simeon, Levi,***

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Issachar, Zebulun; but he also had kids by Leah's maid, Zilphrah; that's **Gad** and **Asher**'s momma. And then there are my brothers from my mother's maid Bilhah, **Dan** and **Naphtali**. *So, all in all there are twelve brothers from four different mothers...right!* Yep, that's about it....*But doesn't your father have a twin brother?* Yes, Uncle Esau and he had five sons...but I honestly don't think he will be here.

So then, tell me again, why did your brothers try to kill you? Well I made the mistake of telling my brothers my dream and they became jealous—and it didn't help that Dad said I was his favorite, and then that coat. In fact, don't wear that dress that I like to the banquet tonight. *Which one is that?* You know the one with the stripes...*Oh, my multi-colored dress?* Yes, that one! *By why not?*—let's just say, that it wouldn't be a good idea.... too many bad memories....

The point of this illustration is that every family has some level of confusion. But what we will find is that even though that exist, we see a great desire for Joseph to be reunited with his brothers and father. It reminds us that we can get past the difficult things in our past if we choose to instead focus on our futures.

Point Number 2: We must “Cultivate our Dreamers?”

Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf." And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me." So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?" And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind. Genesis 37:3-11

Joseph shared his dream with his brothers; were they excited for him? No, in fact, they were livid! Even his father jumped his case! To cultivate a dream we must develop the capability to look past our individual pasts—and look towards the collective future of our children's children.

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A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous. Proverbs 13:22 NKJV

One of the most important things we have learned since we left Peoria is that we have a keen sense of understanding that the only way we can ensure our collective future is by doing something intentionally to affect our future. When we look behind us, we are fully aware of the sacrifices that our ancestors made. They humbled themselves to chains and the whip so that we might live. They realized that they might had to bow and scrape then and live—so that their children’s children could stand proud and have *life more abundantly!* **Their dream was for us to have a better life than they did.**

But it leaves us to ponder—**have we been faithful over the dream?** Is this the life that they had hoped for us? The price they paid to be heard was their very lives—but today, more often than not: *we are a people who don’t even vote!* We are a generation of people possessing *great* freedom, *great* resource, *great* ingenuity, *great* access, *great* opportunity—but when we lay down our heads for the last time...we must leave something more than a monument of used clothes, old furniture and debt. We must decide to do something with great intention. But most of all—**we must cultivate our dreamers.**

I can honestly say that my family has always been supportive of my dreams—even if they wondered whether I was doing the right thing. My dreams to be a scientist; my dream to be an engineer; my dreams to be an athlete; my dreams to do the work of the Lord; my dreams to be an author. What are you doing to cultivate your dreamers?

Point 3: We must speak words that are “full of life!” Why? *Because our children are listening!*

Why would Joseph’s brothers have hated him? If you think it was because his father made him a multi-colored tunic—you would be wrong. They hated him because their father treated Joseph better than he treated them! They knew that Jacob never really wanted to have children with Leah, her maid, or even Rachel’s maid. They knew that Jacob had loved Rachel. And that

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Joseph, the first-born of Rachel and Jacob, from the day of his birth, immediately became his favorite son.

It makes us wonder what the conversations were like in that house-hold. So many different mothers; each loving their children—yet, each vying for the favored position with Jacob, the father of their children. Can you imagine the words each mother spoke to her children regarding their step-brothers? Each word that was likely spoken immediately became truth for each child. Why? Because momma said it!

As a child growing up, we learn early on in life who to love and who to hate; who to look down upon and who to look up to...and we didn't have to leave home to do it! We just had to listen to the conversations of my family. That aunt, we didn't like her...because none of other aunts liked her. Maybe it was that uncle, that everyone knew was a problem from day one, because he couldn't hold a job; fathered a lot of kids; drank too much; was a crack addict...we never needed to form an opinion for ourselves because our opinion was shaped by those who we respected the most in life. So if they said it...it must be true. We just never realized that perhaps we were condemning our own to death.

We sow into one another and hope for the best. The words that we speak, from our heart, can enable dreams or they can grieve and wound the spirits of both who they were intended for the extensive damage that acts as shrapnel as it reverberates throughout the family.

In these gatherings, we must learn that we cannot waste the valuable moments that we have together. We cannot afford to just have idle, bitter chatter because there are generations born unborn that are awaiting the manifestations of dreams; and our actions today either hasten or hinder the promises that God made to those who came before us.

Just think, it might be what a little one today sees in you—or hears from you. What are the things that will cause the **“Old men to dream dreams—and the young men to see visions?”** **When you speak it?** *Who's waiting to catch it?*

There are going to be some folks—*and we are talking about family now*, that just never seem to come at your right; and try as you might, they just are going to seem to be at odds with you. And

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while you may desire to just give them a piece of your mind, (or as we say—cuss them out) I suggest instead that we take a look at Joseph and his family in our final passage:

*Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for **they were dismayed in his presence**. And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. **And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Genesis 45:3-8 NKJV***

When it was time for Joseph to act in the best interest of his family, it was hard for them to receive! Why? Because they knew that they hadn't treated him right! And while Joseph certainly caused them great consternation through his actions—he allowed God to get the glory in the situation by letting his brothers know that the evil that had been done towards him was in fact, not evil at all—it was just God allowing him to suffer, be humbled, jailed until it was time for God to promote him. And now that he was promoted...God was using them to preserve the Promise of God to Abraham—through Isaac and Jacob through the work of Joseph. And truly in Joseph's heart his greatest gladness was that once more, he, his father and brothers were **"Back together again."**

The Lord be praised!