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No Ordinary Joe, Part 16

Holding Back Benjamin

Text: Genesis 42:3-4

EVERY, and I do mean EVERY, family has an element of dysfunction in it. EVERY family!

* The seemingly perfect family with a loving husband and wife and 2 children and a dog and a house and an SUV in which the children are driven to private school and enriching activities after school, has dysfunction.
* The same sex couple that has adopted three children from China whom they homeschool has dysfunction.
* The single person who lives alone and who interacts every week with a large extended family, has dysfunction.

Whatever shape or form a family takes, it has, as part of its DNA, dysfunction.

Jacob’s family is no exception. Jacob, later named Israel, was the father of twelve sons (35:23-26) and one daughter (Dinah) by four women (two wives and two concubines): Leah, Rachel, Bilhah (Rachel’s maidservant) and Zilpah (Leah’s maidservant). The two sons Jacob had with Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin (his mother named him Ben-Oni,*‘son of my sorrow’* [35:18], were his favorites. Genesis 37:3 says that Jacob (Israel) “loved Joseph more than all his children”. Joseph was given a tunic of many colors made by his father. Jacob gave Benjamin a new name, calling him ‘*son of the right hand,* (35:18). Benjamin was so loved that when Jacob sent his sons to go secure food in Egypt, he decided that Benjamin, his *other* favorite son, should not go. Jacob assumes Joseph is dead and he won’t risk losing another of his “special” sons. Perhaps Jacob questions the fate of Joseph. He’s been *told* Joseph is dead, but maybe Jacob doubts his sons’ story. Derek Kidner says,

*About the brothers’ guilt little doubt remained. Under a father’s watchful eye their actual crimes might be covered up, but not their character* (Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary)

42:36 suggests that Jacob (Israel) doesn't fully trust his sons.

44:29 suggests that Jacob is emotionally raw.

For these reasons (mistrust of his sons and emotional vulnerability) Jacob withholds

Benjamin.

Q: What makes one hold back a son?

A: FEAR. Jacob probably did not hold Benjamin back because he was afraid Benjamin couldn't fend for himself. It was prophesied that Ben would be a ravenous wolf (49:27). This son was no wimp. No, Benjamin was held back because Jacob couldn't bear the thought of another loss.

Q: What makes one hold back a son?

A: FAVORITISM. Jacob wanted to shield his son, not wanting him to have the negative experiences that his brothers had. Jacob was one of the first overly protective, helicopter parents. He hovered over Benjamin until Ben could hardly breathe.

From [*faithgateway.com*](http://faithgateway.com). Article titled *Blessing and Releasing Your Adult Child* by Jodie Berndt. Berndt writes,

*One mom told me how sad she was that her thirty-four-year-old daughter was still single. “I want her to enjoy the gift of marriage,” she said, “and I know she wants that too. So I am asking God to provide a husband for her, but I am also thanking Him for the good things He has already poured into her life: her leadership skills, her honesty, her compassion, and even the fact that she is as comfortable working in a soup kitchen as she is attending a fund-raising gala in an evening gown!”*  Listen to that mother encouraging, affirming and blessing her child. We are not seeing this in Jacob. Rather than affirming Benjamin, Jacob is holding him back, sheltering him. Smothering him?

I am rejoicing that in the family of God, our father does not hold us back. Rather, God sends us out into the world as influencers and world changers. God bids us go into a world that seems, at times, overwhelmed by darkness. We address that world as children of light. We go where there is familial dysfunction and we present Christ, the One who brings order to chaos.

**Illus.**

When our only child went off to a summer pre-college program, we moved him into his residence hall, made sure he was settled, drove home, stood in our kitchen and wept. The son around whom we had built our schedules and so much of our lives for eighteen years, was gone. However, we dared not hold him back.

Beloved, our God sends us forth. What an opportunity...and privilege!

Amen