

“You will bow down to me.” We hated him. He was so **arrogant** and **obnoxious**. He thought he was so much better than us. He would slander us to our father, constantly tearing us down—saying we were incompetent and idiotic shepherds. And to be fair, so much of it was because of how our father Jacob treated him. Joseph was the golden child who could do no wrong in our father’s eyes. Our father looked at him with a love we never saw. Joseph was the firstborn from our father’s favorite wife, Rachel. The rest of us barely existed in our father’s eyes. As if things couldn’t be any worse, our father bought Joseph a fancy, multi-colored coat that cost more money than we could even imagine. We had met kings who weren’t dressed as nicely as our brother was dressed by our father. And Joseph loved to wear that coat in front of us, taunting us visually with the constant reminder that he was loved more than us and was better than us. It got to the point that the ten of us other brothers literally could not say a word to Joseph without our anger and hatred bleeding through. We **hated** him with every fiber of our beings.

Then the **dreams** started. Joseph came to us, looking down his nose at us, dressed in his expensive, colorful coat. He said to us, **“You will bow down to me.”** Apparently he had had a dream where his bundle of wheat stood in the center and all our bundles of wheat came and **“bowed down”** before him. Our hate was so strong, all we could do was laugh. But it kept happening, he kept coming to us saying that his dreams were telling him, **“You will bow down to me.”** On one occasion he told our father of a dream where the sun (representing our dad), the moon (representing his mother), and eleven stars (representing us brothers) came and **“bowed down”** before him. We had never heard our father use a strong word against Joseph before that moment. But our dad was clearly concerned that the **arrogance** and **narcissism** of his son had finally gotten out of control. He rebuked Joseph strongly. And thankfully Joseph shut up about his dreams that always had us **“bowing down”** to him.

One day we were out caring for the sheep far away because we wanted nothing to do with Joseph. Our hatred was at a boiling point. But our father **stupidly** sent Joseph to supervise and check on us. Our father knew better. He knew how Joseph treated us and how arrogant and condescending he was with his comments to us regarding our work. And that day, we had finally had enough. We saw Joseph coming and decided to get rid of him. We debated killing him, but finally settled on selling him as a **slave** to a caravan heading to Egypt. We put goat’s blood on his stupid little colorful coat and brought it back to our father, saying we found it in the wilderness. Our father was crushed. It was like he had **died**. He refused to acknowledge any of us, he refused to be comforted. The only thing he really cared about in life was gone—his precious Joseph. We knew our father loved Joseph more than us, but this hurt. We were seeing just how little we actually mattered to our father.

Over twenty years later, a great **famine** hit the land. Our father looked at us like we were stupid and told us to go down to **Egypt** to get food. We had heard of how our great-grandfather Abraham had gone down to Egypt to get food during a famine and it had been a **disaster**. We had heard about our grandfather Isaac going to king Abimelech to get food during a famine and it had been a **disaster**. We were hesitant, but our father insisted, so we went. When we arrived in Egypt we went and stood before the man in charge of the **grain distribution**. He acted very strange toward us and immediately accused us of being **spies** in the land. We were confused and shocked. Then he said he was locking all of us up in prison until our youngest brother, Benjamin, came to Egypt. After three days of sitting in an Egyptian prison, the man came to us and said he would only keep our brother Simeon locked up and the rest of us could go back and bring our youngest brother to him. We headed back with the grain to our father. But part way there, we noticed that all of our money bags were in our grain sacks. We were **confused** and **scared** as we knew we would be accused of stealing the grain without paying. We begged our father to let us take Benjamin with us to get Simeon out of prison. But our father didn’t care about Simeon. Joseph was gone and Benjamin, his other son from Joseph’s mother, was the closest thing he had left. The months dragged on and eventually the grain ran out. And our father relented and finally sent us back to Egypt with Benjamin.

When we got there we were ready to be thrown into prison for being accused of stealing the grain the previous time. So we had double the money ready to offer. The man brought us immediately into his palace. We were **terrified**. But he brought Simeon out to us and called for a great feast. The next morning we were sent back to our father, but before we could get very far, guards apprehended us and accused us of stealing the expensive silver divination cup of the man in charge of the grain. We denied it. But they searched our sacks and again found our money in our sacks and in Benjamin’s sack was the silver cup. We were **horrified** and tore our clothes in frustration and grief. They arrested Benjamin and we all returned to the city. The man in charge of the grain said Benjamin would be his slave, but the rest of us could return to our father. We **“bowed down”** before the man and we begged for him to give us Benjamin, urging the man to have mercy or else our father would die of grief. And just as we were **“bowing down”** to him, the man ordered everyone else out of the room. He then dropped the bomb on us. This most powerful man in Egypt was **Joseph**, our brother we had sold as a slave into Egypt. We were stunned, shocked, confused, hurt, and terrified. He had been manipulating us this whole time, he had been playing mind games with us, he had been gaslighting us. He had been taking revenge on us. He had finally had his childhood dreams come true where he had said to us, **“You will bow down to me.”** Now that we were **“bowing down”** to him, he became nicer, but we didn’t trust him—not one bit. He demanded that we go back home, tell our father he was alive, and move the whole family to **Egypt**. We had no choice. Other than Pharaoh himself, no one was more powerful than Joseph. We were trapped. So we obeyed and went back home. Our father was elated that Joseph was alive. Blinded by his love for Joseph, he said we would all move to Egypt so Joseph could **take care of us**. We were scared. There was a sinking feeling in the pits of our stomachs. It felt like we would regret this decision for the rest of our lives.

“You will bow down to me.” Our world is full of Josephs, full of narcissists—people who think they are the center of the world, people who think everything in life is about them, people who think they are better than everybody around them, people who use others as pawns and objects, people who care nothing for the feelings of others, people who want to be worshiped, people who want others to **“bow down”** before them. These Josephs are all around us in our world and culture, trying to manipulate us and saying to us, **“You will bow down to me.”** But, you and I can also be a Joseph ourselves. As we push back against the Josephs in our world, we can selfishly become just like them, desiring others to **“bow down”** before us and do whatever we want. We can be manipulative, vengeful, and hurtful to others. We can say to others, **“You will bow down to me.”**

We must **not** be a Joseph who wants others to **“bow down”** before us and we must **not “bow down”** before the Josephs in our world. If we do, they will lead us deep into dysfunction and slavery. Instead, we must **“bow down”** before the Creator alone. Jesus refused to **“bow down”** to anyone other than his heavenly Father. And yet while he was **“bowed down”** to his Father, he humbled himself and lived as a **“servant of all.”** Jesus demanded that no one **“bow down”** to him. Instead, he **“bowed down”** to his Father alone and served us in love and self-sacrifice, washing our feet and laying down his life for us. So ignore the Josephs who say to you, **“You will bow down to me.”** And instead, **“bow down”** to the Creator—and while you are down there, serve others in the example of Jesus who is serving you. **Amen.**