



# Ravensworth

## BAPTIST CHURCH

**June 23, 2024 | Ordinary Time**  
**Genesis 37:1-11, *Inside Out: Envy***  
**Rev. Dr. Leah Grundset Davis, preaching**

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In this Inside Out series, I mentioned the feelings wheel, which helps us to navigate feelings and determine where they might be coming from, and how they influence our behaviors. In addition to the feelings and the wheel, you'll notice that they are matched with colors. Often, the colors can be used to describe the feeling and are another tool in the toolbox of counselors, therapists, and those who wish to know more about the feelings wheel.

Each week, we've assigned a color to the feelings we've talked about—some like Pride being rainbow was pretty obvious, joy was yellow, fear was purple, curiosity was light blue, and this week, envy is green.

Envy labeled with green might be the most obvious of all the color choices because it's so closely connected to the color green. You've heard the expression, "Green with envy." That expression comes from Shakespeare. "Before Shakespeare's days, a pale (green) complexion was associated with fear, illness, and poor humor. The origin of the idiom 'green with envy' is believed to come directly from the great William Shakespeare himself. In Othello, Iago warns Othello: "Beware, my lord, of jealousy; it is the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on."<sup>1</sup>

As with all these emotions we've discussed, there's a great deal of research out there on how they impact us, what stifling our emotions does to us, and how certain emotions impact society at large.

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<sup>1</sup> Ginger Grammar Check, [Green with Envy](#)

Envy is often associated with its feelings-cousin, jealousy, but they are actually defined differently. According to the Calm App, which I love,

“Envy:

- At its core, envy is a two-person interaction. You might envy someone because they have something you desire. For example, that might be a personality trait, a skill or ability, a possession, or even a relationship. It's about wanting what someone else has.
- Envy can feel like a mix of admiration and resentment. You might appreciate another person's talents or possessions while wishing you had them for yourself. It's a feeling that can motivate you to strive harder but can also lead to resentment and inadequacy.
- There are plenty of scenarios where you might experience envy. Examples might include seeing a colleague receiving a promotion you wanted, a friend buying a car you desire, or watching someone else achieving more reps or heavier weights than you at the gym.

Jealousy:

- Jealousy, on the other hand, involves a three-person relationship. It revolves around the fear of losing something—or someone—you value to another person. It's not about wanting what someone else has, as in envy. Instead, it's about fearing that what you already have will be taken away by someone else. There's evidence that we can start feeling jealousy as young as a few months old.<sup>2</sup>

I think we use these terms interchangeably a lot and they are most certainly related to one another, but it's helpful to distinguish between them today.

“Both envy and jealousy are fanned by the perception that the “winner” had an unfair advantage. Jealous or envious people find themselves constantly thinking about the situation. They wonder when their “turn” at recognition is going to come.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Chris Mosunic, [Envy vs. Jealousy](#), Calm.

<sup>3</sup> University of Rochester Medical Center, [Keeping Envy and Jealousy Under Control](#).

“An envious person might frequently compare themselves to others, exhibit passive-aggressive behavior, or constantly seek validation. They might also downplay others’ achievements or struggle to genuinely celebrate when others experience success.”<sup>4</sup>

Would you like to meet some envious people in the Bible? Because have I got a story for you! This passage in Genesis could be salacious beach reading. Genesis is chock full of drama.

Genesis is an attempt to tell the story of God’s people from one very, narrow, particular perspective. The stories we have in Genesis were first told as oral history—the stories you tell around the dinner table with your family over and over again. We might even deduce that by the time they were written down—centuries later when the people were in exile in Babylon, that a few details had been embellished here and there, and depending on who was telling it—certain groups of people were exalted.

“In the Western World we became influenced by the enlightened definition of history, which understood history as written facts from an objective viewpoint.”<sup>5</sup> That is not what these stories are. These are stories about humanity, told by humans who most of the time, were doing their best to find God in their midst and answer the burning questions of “what is life all about?”

Jacob, who now goes by Israel, but we’ll keep calling Jacob for clarity’s sake, has moved the family to the valley of Hebron. They are established there with flocks and herds and some kind of family estate. This included his wives, Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah, and then the 11 non-favored sons (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin) were the ones who usually worked out in the fields, taking care of the livestock. And the favorite: Joseph.

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<sup>4</sup> Musinic.

<sup>5</sup> *Old Testament Lectionary*. [Genesis 37:1-28](#). Anna Grant-Henderson, Uniting Church in Australia.

Due to his favored status, daddy Jacob gave Joseph an amazing Technicolor dreamcoat. OK, that's not what Genesis says, but it's what everyone knows. Whatever this coat was and—it is hotly debated among biblical scholars, it was a sign that Joseph was not someone who worked in the fields. It was a sign of someone who did not work. Joseph's brothers hated him for it. They were envious.

Imagine when Joseph's 11 brothers come home from a long day of working in the fields—sweaty, sore, tired and there is Joseph, lounging in the house in this robe.

The 11 brothers knew that Jacob loved Joseph more than them. Family systems are fascinating and complicated.

And then, there were Joseph's two dreams. The first dream was about him and his brothers out in the field, binding wheat sheaves. All of a sudden his brother sheaves started bowing down to him. Then he had another dream in which the sun, the moon, and 11 stars were bowing down to him.

OK, it's one thing to have these dreams, but then Joseph proceeds to TELL HIS BROTHERS ABOUT IT. Come on Joseph. You already know they hate you. Needless to say, his brothers were enraged and we are told that they hated him even more.

Everything in the way Joseph presented these dreams screamed, "I'm the favorite and you will always be less-loved, less-favored and nothing you do can change that."

Here's where we stopped with our story: After the dreams fiasco, Jacob sent Joseph out to find his brothers who were tending to the flocks. Joseph, Technicolor robe and all set out on the journey.

His brothers were working in Dothan, and as he crested the hill where they were, the 11 saw him—you couldn't miss him in that robe—and conspired to kill him. They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come, let us kill him

and throw him into a pit. We will tell father that a wild animal has eaten him and then we shall see what will become of his dreams.”

Joseph's brothers hated him because they envied him. They were so entrenched in the ways of their family that they didn't have the ability to break out the established pattern.

Once Joseph arrived at the place of his brothers, descending the hill with his flowing robes, they ripped the robes off of him and threw him in the pit. It was an empty pit, with no water. In a strange turn of events, the brothers then sit down and eat lunch.

Brother Judah speaks up, in between bites of lunch when he sees Ishmaelites traveling with a caravan and suggests that they sell Joseph to the travelers and at least make some money off of him. So Joseph is lifted from the pit, sold into slavery and they take him to Egypt.

What we know as diligent biblical scholars is that this is all setting the stage for when the Hebrew people were enslaved in Egypt. These stories, chapters 37-50 of Genesis are known as the Joseph novella, and the main point is to re-orient the focus of being in Canaan, toward being enslaved in Egypt, and the eventual liberation.

Many a commentator notes that God is not mentioned in our passage today. That's not to say that God is not around and present as God always is, but God is not a major player. This is the story of a family. A broken, hurting, dysfunctional family and how they lived out their days in Canaan and beyond.

This is a story about the dreamer, Joseph, who needed to mature a bit. It's a story of how envy and bitterness can quickly overtake us and how family favoritism can eventually disrupt even the fabric of society.

If anything, this family story usually makes me feel better about my family stories! If we allow ourselves to sit with the idea of envy and this dramatic story though, we can begin to see how envy, left unchecked, can run completely out of control. When we want something that someone else has, it

leads to harm in relationships, harm to self, and harm in this world. A pair of shoes, a house, a relationship, a job, a piece of land, a technicolor dreamcoat...you see how it can escalate quickly.

I mentioned that biblical scholars note that God doesn't pop up in these chapters in Genesis too often. I think that tells us more about the people who wrote them down than about God. Perhaps the people didn't know how to include God in the midst of stories about people being envious, killing siblings, stealing land. Perhaps if they had included God, they would have looked at their stories and realized it wasn't the story of God after all.

This week, I invite you to think about envy in your life, even think about jealousy and where you encounter those feelings. And, encounter them. Invite them in, as Rumi says, as guests and see what they have to teach you. Next week, we'll turn Inside Out with gratitude and to do so, I think we have to check out our joy, fear, pride, curiosity, and envy to do so. May it be so. Amen.