

By Lance Woodbury

# The faith-driven business model

## Bible story applicable to farm families today

■ Most farms, and many of the enterprises that support them, are first and foremost family businesses. This marriage of “family” and “business” brings with it a host of complexities: Ownership transitions, business growth strategies, management succession, family relationships and rivalries, wealth, differing personalities, and in-laws, just to name a few.

All of these fluctuating dynamics come together in the daily activities and long-term plans that propel the business from one generation to the next, from stages of survival to success and back again.

To navigate this complexity, family business owners often look for help. They ask for assistance from accountants and attorneys; they read magazine columns and books; they go to seminars; and they bounce ideas off of their friends and peers.

## The Bible as resource

For many business owners, their Christian faith also serves as a resource, but often it isn't clear how to draw upon this wellspring of wisdom. We all confess that the Bible provides much in the way of guidance through life's challenges, but can the Bible help us deal specifically with the unique challenges confronted by families in business together? I believe it can.

For example, the biblical story of Joseph and his family in the book of Genesis provide a lens through which we can glean lessons for a family-owned enterprise.

Take the famous coat of many colors, the present given to Joseph by his father, Jacob. When viewed from the perspective of Joseph's brothers, it could symbolize the perception of inequality that so often permeates the interaction between parents who own a farm and their children who

will inherit it. Who gets which pieces of farmland? Did the son who returned to the business get more “help” from the parents than those who stayed away from the farm? How do you navigate “fair” vs. “equal” when children lead different lives with different perspectives, values and talents?

Or take Joseph's history earlier in the book of Genesis: His father Jacob had more than a little conflict with his brother, Esau. They were of different personalities, and were even the recipients of different parental loves (Isaac loved Esau; Rebekah loved Jacob). What lessons might this teach our children? Is family conflict set up by the parents? Is it in the genes? Are we bound to repeat family dysfunction each generation? And what does all this mean for the continuation of the family business?

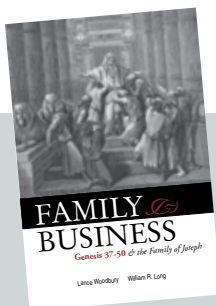
In short, how do we make sure to not pass the conflict right along with the land and the money?

Joseph's story ultimately teaches

us reconciliation. After seeing his brothers in Egypt, and after no shortage of toying with them (remember the silver cup placed in Benjamin's bag?), Joseph initiates the process of reconciliation and commits to a renewed life with his family. We learn, through Joseph's interaction with his brothers, the deep emotional struggle and vulnerability that comes with mending relationships with those causing pain.

Like a huge spotlight illuminating a dark corner of our lives, the Joseph story probes with skill the range of emotions and actions that family members feel and take toward each other in both the good and stressful times. When we consider just how much family interaction occurs in the business, and we take the opportunity to study the Bible and reflect on its lessons, we are provided with a unique opportunity to integrate our faith with our family and our business. **ff**

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## New book probes connections between faith and business

Lance Woodbury and Bill Long's new book, *Genesis 37-50 and the Family of Joseph*, is a unique look at the connections between family business and the Christian faith. The authors draw upon the story of Joseph and his family to provide counsel for modern entrepreneurs, especially those running multi-generation farm operations. Some themes may seem eerily familiar; sibling rivalries, parental favoritism and reconciliation are all discussed with the modern farm family in mind.

Each chapter is divided in three parts: the Joseph story that illustrates dynamics of families in business; a “modern” reading of the passage, with special focus on the way it helps frame issues faced in real-life family businesses; and a few questions to help use the biblical story (and the modern reading of it) in your own family business.

Woodbury's 2012 book, *The Enduring Legacy: Essential Family Business Values*, touches on succession planning and legacy themes. Both books are at [www.amazon.com/Lance-D-Woodbury/e/B009GAV6ZS](http://www.amazon.com/Lance-D-Woodbury/e/B009GAV6ZS). Or go to Woodbury's website at [www.lancewoodbury.com](http://www.lancewoodbury.com).