

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

THIS CRAZY THING CALLED FAMILY

Genesis 37, 39, 45

November 4, 2018

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The title of my sermon today is “This Crazy Thing Called Family” and I’ll be speaking from Genesis about the family of Jacob, also known as Israel.

Here are the points of my message today:

- Values pass through the family
- Family is where character is built
- Family should be a safe place for failure
- An imperfect family is a normal family

INTRODUCTION: A man named Roger Fields put together a list called Top Ten Dysfunctional Families in the Bible.

1. **FIRST FAM:** Eve tricked her husband into disobeying God. Then things got really bad when one of their boys (Cain) killed the other one (Abel).
2. **NOAH’S FAM:** Noah saved his family from the flood and then got wasted. Evidently, sailing around on a flooded earth in a barge full of animals was a bit stressful. His son mocked him and Noah cursed his son.
3. **ABRAHAM’S FAM:** God promised a child to an elderly couple (Abram and Sarah). Abram was not ready to wait on Sarah so he had a child by their maid, Hagar.
4. **LOT’S FAM:** That family was such a mess it would take a whole sermon to unpack the story.
5. **ISAAC’S FAM:** Jacob (one of Isaac’s twin boys) swindled Esau (the other twin) out of his birthright by lying to his dad with the help of his mother Rebecca.

6. **JACOB'S FAM:** Jacob had 12 boys and decided to buy the youngest one, Joseph, a designer coat.

7. **KING SAUL:** Israel's first king (Saul) was jealous of the popularity of a shepherd boy (David) and became obsessed with killing him.

8. **KING DAVID'S FAM:** King David had a fling with his next-door neighbor, had a child by her, and killed her husband to cover it up.

9. **SOLOMON'S FAM:** The "smartest" guy in the world had a palace full of women. No further discussion needed!

10. **JESUS' FAM:** Jesus' parents (Mary and Joseph) left their son (Jesus) behind on a road trip to Jerusalem. They somehow missed the fact that the Son of God was no longer with them on the way home.

At the end of his article, Roger Fields says, "So the next time you are tempted to feel like a failure, read this over."

EXPLANATION: I tell you all this to confirm what you may already know: No family is perfect. And if you didn't know it, you probably had a sneaking suspicion that all families have their issues. Without compromising any family situation – which I would never do – I can tell you firsthand that many people who have shared their family problems with me tend to think no other family is going through what they are going through. This past week I spent two and a half hours with one person hashing through her family's issues.

God gave us the family, didn't he? And there are different types of families, no doubt. Even if you are single, never been married, and never had kids, you are probably connected with your greater family. I realize there are exceptions. But this institution called the family, why did God choose it as his plan for growing the population, rearing children, and so forth? He could have instituted something else altogether but he didn't.

Let's look at Jacob's family this morning. Jacob has six sons by Leah, two sons by Leah's servant named Zilpah. He had two sons by Rachel and two sons by Rachel's servant Bilhah. So, from the get-go, we see an odd situation, at least by today's standards. Jacob was also named Israel and his twelve sons became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel.

VALUES PASS THROUGH THE FAMILY

One of the sons was Joseph and he was clearly his dad's favorite. Joseph's eleven brothers became jealous and wanted him gone. So right here we have a terribly dysfunctional situation.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 37:2-4

This is the account of Jacob's family line.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. ⁴ When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

EXPLANATION: Jacob created the whole jealousy mess, but if you remember the story of Jacob and his brother Esau, you'll note that Jacob had a character flaw. He got his older brother Esau to give up his birthright over a bowl of stew. And later Jacob tricked his father into believing that Esau was dead. Even though Jacob had many good qualities, the Bible is keen to point out his character flaws.

Jacob passes along his character flaws to his sons. They came up with a scheme to get rid of their brother and told their father he was torn to pieces by some ferocious animal. Jacob tricked his father and years later, Jacob's sons tricked him. We've heard the saying, "Like father, like son."

APPLICATION: Values, bad or good, are passed through the family. Think about the values you were taught, identify them, and if you want my advice, pass along the good values. Identify the not-so-good values and with God's help, break a generational curse.

Not only are values passed through the family, but...

FAMILY IS WHERE CHARACTER IS BUILT

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 39:1-10 Look in chapter 39, beginning with verse 1. *Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.*

² The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, ⁴ Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. ⁵ From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. ⁶ So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph’s care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, ⁷ and after a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, “Come to bed with me!”

⁸ But he refused. “With me in charge,” he told her, “my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹ No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” ¹⁰ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

EXPLANATION: Where did Joseph gain such strong character? Even though Jacob had flaws, he taught his children about God. He also taught his sons to work hard – as we know from early scriptures, Joseph tended to the livestock. When Joseph went to Egypt he was already a responsible person and a young man of character.

How did he resist Potiphar’s wife? That’s an interesting question. I believe it was because he’d been reared to know to keep his hands off anything that wasn’t his and because he saw how messy it was having brothers from different mothers.

APPLICATION: As parents, or significant parent-like grandparents or relatives, you should have open talks about character. Tell your kids you want them to have strong, Godly character in order to help them make good decisions in life.

So, values pass through family and family is where character is built. Next...

FAMILY SHOULD BE THE SAFE PLACE FOR FAILURE

EXPLANATION: As this incredible story progresses, a lot of time passes and Jacob's family suffers because of a famine. Jacob sends his sons to Egypt because they have grain. In Egypt, Joseph was the man they had to see. He recognizes his brothers as they make their request but they do not recognize him. He could have put them in jail, he could have killed them, but he did not. He sent them back with some grain and kept one of their brothers. Time passes and they return. Because of some things that happened in the story, they were very afraid. They believed God was getting them back for what they had done to Joseph years earlier. They were complete failures, full of remorse.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 45:1-7

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

ILLUSTRATION: I said the family should be the safe place for failure, it should also be the safe place for repentance and restoration. A woman I know spent many years trashed out on drugs and alcohol. Today, she is doing well. She looks back on her restoration and says, "My grandmother was my safe place to land."

APPLICATION: In healthy families, home should be the safe place where kids come home and are loved after losing a competition, or not doing well on a test. Family should be the place where the broken pieces are picked up. And when we've done something wrong, family should be the place where we say I am sorry and are forgiven.

Let's review -

- Values pass through the family
- Family is where character is built
- Family should be the safe place for failure

And last -

AN IMPERFECT FAMILY IS A NORMAL FAMILY

APPLICATION: If you look at another family thinking they are a perfect family, it's only because you don't know them well. While preparing for this message, I started thinking of all the families with less than perfect situations and guess what I learned with that exercise? Every family I thought of had issues – families with financial problems, parents who've made bad choices, kids who've made bad choices, extended family members who have problems, and the list of possible problems go on.

So what is an imperfect family to do? If you care about your family, here is what I suggest:

- Focus on the positive and enjoy the good times.
- Focus on the things that bring your family together.
- Pray for your family and put effort into it. It's so easy to take your family for granted and spend all your prayer time on other things.
- Ask God how you can be an agent of healing in your family.
- Encourage other people who have family concerns. Some people are so private that they are going through personal pain without telling anyone. *Everyone* needs someone to talk to, someone trustworthy who won't tell their business.

CONCLUSION: This crazy thing called family. Don't we all yearn for a family where there are no problems? I believe the imperfection of the family makes us yearn for something more. I believe the Bible is clear that in heaven there will be no

imperfection. We will experience the family of God in its perfection. And when times are good with our early families, we gain a glimpse of what heaven will be like.

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