

## Working Dynamics

Genesis 29:15-28

07/27/2014 SOH

Theme: Finding God in dysfunctional situations

Thanksgiving is all about getting your entire dysfunctional family under the same roof and hoping the police don't get called.

I looked up my family tree and found out I was the sap. –Rodney Dangerfield

Here are some great truths about family:

- Raising teenagers is like nailing Jell-O to a tree.
- There's always something to be thankful for. For example, I'm thinking how nice it is that wrinkles don't hurt.
- Families are like fudge....mostly sweet with a few nuts.
- As a parent, if you can remain calm, you just don't have all the facts yet.
- Middle age is when you choose your cereal for the fiber, not the toy.
- Just the time you start "feeling like you have the goofiest, craziest, most dysfunctional family in the world, all you have to do is go to a state fair. Because five minutes at the fair, you'll be going, 'you know, we're alright. We are dang near royalty.'" –Jeff Foxworthy

No matter where I talk to people about their family, it usually starts with, "Oh, I have a great family." But as we get to know each other a little, I start hearing about crazy Uncle Bill or Aunt Betsy who has 47 cats – and she calls them by name. I come from a perfect family right out of the fifty's; Mom & Dad were married 50 years, I have an older brother and sister and we grew up in small town America.

The 'rest of the story' is a bit more involved. Mom babied all of us, my sister married a nut then after three kids left him and the kids, and he turned out to be a pretty decent fellow. After returning from Viet Nam, my brother found comfort - southern style – Southern Comfort Whiskey does give a bit of comfort, but she's a poor companion wanting more and more of your time and attention. My sister has reconciled and returned to faith. My brother is sober but still suffers from depression.

I married a wonderful lass, with long brown hair and long, long legs who came with her own set of baggage from her single parent family and convinced she was the dumbest of three and wouldn't amount to much. Me? I brought my own form of dependency and baggage as the baby of the family and spoiled in a little different way. My family has its share of goofiness.

After two years, I've come to know many of you and I've heard some of your stories. I know some of the details of your families and some of the struggles you've endured. Don't worry, those are private discussions. But, thank you

for your willingness to share your stories. Knowing your struggles helps me grow as your pastor and helps me understand how important our life together really is. After serving in three churches and living in the world for sixty years, I've come to the conclusion there is no such thing as a "normal family." Every family has some dynamic that creates friction, frustration, and fun. Oh, within the confines of the dysfunction, we have to make some room to laugh at ourselves or we'll surely go bananas trying to cope with people we were born to live with – people we didn't choose to live with.

Today's text is about a family, and a patriarch of the Jewish faith. It's a family that we can identify with because the situation is real, the dynamics are real, and it's just messed up enough to make a real good reality TV show.

Jacob's story begins as the second-born son of Isaac and Rebekah. Esau, the first born, is the rugged – successful hunter, and all hairy –all male - a big man and the first-born set to inherit all of Isaac's property.

Jacob, well, Jacob is a mama's boy and evidently not much of a hunter. He'd rather cook, thank you. He's jealous of Esau and as daddy gets older, loses his sight, and has evidently become just a bit senile, it's the perfect time for Rebekah and Jacob to move on their plan to get control of the family.

Esau returns from a hunting trip hungry and smells the wonderful aroma of Jacobs "red stuff" stew. But Jacob has

a high price; "Trade me your inheritance for some stew" he says to Esau, who must have been really hungry, or simply thought Jacob was kidding. He agrees and the first part of the plan is complete.

Phase two involves a fur tied onto his arm, and spurred on by mamma, he approaches Isaac to get the father's blessing. This blessing conferred at or near death is a way for a father to continue the leadership of the clan and call upon God to bless the new head of the household. It was rightfully Esau's blessing. Jacob lowers his voice and stands as tall as he can, succeeding in tricking his dad into giving him the blessing.

Esau may have been a bit slow, but he figures out Jacob wasn't kidding, he really wants to control the inheritance and he's pulled a political fast one that is still admired by congress and senators alike. It's time for Jacob to high tail it out'a town before Esau catches up to him. Maybe it's a good thing Esau is slow.

Momma sends him to see Laban, her brother, and to hide out a while until she can calm Esau down and secures Isaac's blessing to go find a bride among Laban's family. Marrying first cousins was not a taboo at that time. She understands that Esau is the first born, but bless him, if it doesn't involve hunting, he just doesn't get it.

Jacob arrives at Laban's place, a safe distance away from older brother, and discovers his first cousins have grown up. The eldest sister, Leah, is okay, she's described

as having lovely eyes. (Trust me, you'll really like my friend on this blind date, she has lovely eyes.) Rachel, now Rachel, "had a lovely figure and was beautiful." After asking, Laban agrees to give him Rachael in marriage – after working for him for seven years.

There was a wedding feast (wine, food, wine, dancing, wine, wine, wine) and in the morning, Jacob discovers he has been deceived, what trickery is this! Laban has substituted Leah for Rachael. Not to worry, Laban consoles Jacob, after all the eldest is customarily married first. Just work for me another seven years and you can have Rachel. She must have been mighty purty. So Jacob marries his first cousins.

The years that followed were, well, productive years. His sheep increased in number. With the help of the servant girls, Jacob winds up with some twelve sons and at least one daughter, Dinah. Unfortunately, child-bearing had become a contest instead of a joy, Rachel and Leah have their own conspiracies in their competition for Jacob's affections.

Jacob is far from a stellar character full of integrity. In fact, out of the whole family, only Esau seems to be a man of integrity for when Jacob finally returns, all is forgiven and he welcomes him home. Despite all his deceit and trickery, God uses Jacob in the process of creating the twelve tribes of the Israelites. God showed up while Jacob was on the run from Esau and promised to be with him until

God's plan was complete. Jacob named the place Bethel – "House of God."

You think your family has interesting dynamics! Here's the deal, I want to suggest that we look at our situations a little differently. Dysfunction implies we're not working the way we ought. There's truth in that because we can all improve the way we interact with each other in the family. We can all use a pinch more grace, a dollop of patience, and a smidgeon of tolerance.

God knows the imperfections and the challenges of family, no matter what form or shape that family takes. What he wants is for us to make those dynamics work for us. It may not be the best situation (indeed some situations call for an exit), but God is using that situation to work in and through you. The question to ask is not, "Why did you do this to me God?" but rather, "What am I to learn about you through this God?"

Let's face it; Jacob was a weasel of a brother and son. He was not a strong leader and he took advantage of other people – even his own family. God still used him and blessed him. Human weakness and sin doesn't keep God at bay – he's a bit bigger than that and he has a bigger plan for you.

Families are systems not static models and so they are dynamic sometimes changing daily. Full of strengths and weaknesses, they become the place to practice grace, use love, and to discover that love is greater than our

differences, stronger than anger, and overcomes our own dysfunction.

To paraphrase the *Duck Dynasty* guys, "Nobody drives us crazy like our own family. They're odd, they push our buttons, they're the source of our biggest frustrations, but also our greatest joy. It's not always going to run smoothly and we're not always going to agree, but, in the end, if real love is present, our family is the place to be."

In the family, we learn to love those we didn't choose. In the family we learn to forgive because we're family and we love one another. In the family we learn to give grace to that weird Uncle Bill and crazy Aunt Betsy – because they're family too. In the process of all those crazy dynamics of family we discover – "Hey, it works for us." It works because we've discovered God is present in the middle of it all.

Next time you're sitting around the family table with everyone wondering how it all works, just remember, "families are like fudge...mostly sweet with a few nuts" and God is present in the middle of our goofiness.