

INTRODUCTION

Many families have dreams of having a fairy tale family, and it actually ends up being Nightmare on Elm Street. Mort Crim wrote: “Fairy tales are wonderful because they always have the prince and the princess living happily ever after. But life isn’t a fairy tale. In the real world the prince may run off with the secretary; the princess may walk out on the family to find herself; the royal offspring may do drugs; and a downsizing at the plant may leave the entire family on the brink of bankruptcy. Once we accept the fact that bad things do happen to good people, then we can get on with the business of living life to its fullest: giving, loving, creating, sharing, and walking through every door of opportunity offered by this unpredictable, exciting experience called life.” (*Second Thoughts* p. 17) Families are much like the famous opening line in *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” On one hand, our family members can be the greatest source of happiness in our lives. At the same time, family members can be the greatest source of pain and anguish in our lives.

A few years ago, Cindy and I saw the movie “Hope Floats” starring Sandra Bullock. Much of the film was shot in Smithville, Texas. It’s a movie about a fractured family. Sandra Bullock’s character, Birdee Pruitt, married her high school sweetheart and thought she would live happily ever after. A few years later, while appearing on a talk show, she learns her husband and best friend are having an affair. After a messy divorce, Birdee, and her daughter, Bernice, move back to her small hometown to try to rebuild their lives.

Bernice is upset with her mother and blames her for losing her dad. There is one scene in the movie that absolutely tore out my heart and stomped it flat. If I were handing out Oscars, I would have given one to Mae Whitman who played Bernice. In this particular scene, Bernice’s dad visits Texas and Bernice decides she wants to go live with him instead of her mother. The only problem is, her dad doesn’t really want her. As he drives off, Bernice is left standing there crying with her little suitcase in hand. If that doesn’t break your heart, it’s unbreakable.

When I saw it, I thought, “I know this is only a movie, but that’s exactly what many children and parents actually experience when a marriage fails.” It’s interesting the whole point of the movie is about how hope can be restored even when a family is fractured. The title from the movie comes from a line at the end of the movie as Birdee and Bernice are beginning to think they will survive. Birdee says, “I think my mom’s right. She says that childhood is what you spend the rest of your life trying to overcome. Beginnings are scary. Endings are usually sad, but it’s what’s in the middle that counts. So, when you find yourself at the beginning, just give hope a chance to float up and it will.”

It’s a good line, but hope doesn’t just float up. Hope is more like an anchor, and anchors don’t float. Hope is Having Only Positive Expectations. It’s something solid you can hang onto. The Bible says, “We take hold of the hope offered to us... We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.” (Hebrews 6:18-20) It is hope that gives you stability *through* the storms of life. And some of the worst emotional storms occur in families.

When you start looking in the Bible for a family that had problems, you don’t have to look very

far. You can almost open the Book to any page to find real people in real families who were suffering real pain—just like families today. Ever since Cain killed Abel, we've all been raising Cains—if we're able!

But if you're looking to find hope for your fractured family, I think the best place to start is with the family of Jacob. There are three very important lessons we can learn from Jacob's family.

1. THERE'S NOT MUCH FUN IN A DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY!

You may remember Jacob was the last of the big three of the Old Testament: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. His entire life is like a soap opera, but we'll pick up with a passage that tells us about how his children didn't get along very well. You can read about it in Genesis 37:2-4.

"This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. Now Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. 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."

Joseph is the central character in the last quarter of Genesis. He was born into a really messed up family. Later, Joseph became a rich and powerful man in Egypt. Let's step into his therapist's office in Egypt. Joseph has just reclined on the couch and begins to tell his therapist about his family: "My dad never really got along with his dad. He and my grandmother plotted and lied to granddad in order for dad to steal the most stuff from granddad. Of course, Uncle Esau wasn't happy about that. For many years my dad ran from Uncle Esau who had vowed to kill him. It wasn't until just a few years ago that they declared a tense truce."

My dad was always scheming. When he first saw my mom, Rachel, he really wanted to marry her. So my other granddad, Laban, made dad work for him seven years to marry my mother. Then on the wedding night, the schemer got snookered, because granddad Laban smuggled aunt Leah into dad's bed. Dad woke up expecting to see my mom, and instead there was Aunt Leah. So dad worked seven more years to get my mom.

So, my dad had two wives, and they didn't get along very well. Dad loved my mom, but he didn't like Aunt Leah. But God really has a sense of humor. Dad really wanted to have some sons, and since God knew dad didn't really love aunt Leah, SHE was the one God blessed with children. She had four sons in a row, my oldest brothers, Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah.

Mom became so angry she ordered dad to stop sleeping with Leah. Then she devised a clever plot. Since she couldn't have children, she told dad to have sex with her maid, Bilhah. Dad knew better than to go against what mom said, so he said, 'If you insist, dear.' So dad took Bilhah as his wife, and she gave him two more sons, Dan and Naphtali.

By now, the feud between mom and Aunt Leah had really heated up. Aunt Leah decided if mom could do it, she could do it, too. So, Aunt Leah gave HER maid to dad. Before long, there were two more sons, Gad and Asher.

By now Aunt Leah loved to torment mom, because she didn't have any children. She made a bargain with mom and bribed her way back into dad's bed. Before long, my other brothers, Issachar and Zebulun were born.

Finally, God heard the prayers of my mom and she got pregnant. That's where I came along. My mom and dad were getting older by the time I came along, but mom wanted to give dad one more child. She got pregnant again, but as she was giving birth to my little brother Benjamin, there were some complications, and she died. We buried her in a little town called Bethlehem. My dad was never the same after that. He took the love he had for mom and directed it to me and Ben. That just made the other brothers mad.

I told you this was a messed up family. I don't even have time to tell you about when one of my stepsisters got raped. Or when one of my brothers slept with one of dad's wives, or how another brother slept with his own daughter-in-law.

The main problem was that all my older brothers hated me. One day, I went out to check on them, and they beat me up and threw me into a pit. They were going to kill me, but at the last minute, they sold me as a slave. That's how I ended up here in Egypt. Oh, I'm out of time already? Thanks, doc. Same time next week? See you at the Pyramid."

Most of us know the story of Joseph, and his coat of many colors. But sometimes we overlook what a sad dysfunctional family he had. I introduced him to you, because if you have a messed up family, don't think you are alone. And you need to see that if God could heal *that* family, He can heal your fractured family. That leads to the next lesson:

2. WHEN YOU'RE DOWN TO NOTHING, REMEMBER THAT GOD IS UP TO SOMETHING!

Even though Joseph grew up in a messed up family, he didn't blame his upbringing on his problems. He endured being falsely accused of adultery, and served jail time for a crime he never committed. Yet he became one of the most powerful men in Egypt. When it looked like he was down to nothing, God was up to something. If you're struggling with a lot of pain in your family life, you may be wondering where God is and what He's doing. You may not realize it, but God is up to something!

Let's fast-forward about 30 years after the teenage Joseph was sold into slavery. A global famine had occurred. But because of the wisdom and foresight of Joseph, Egypt stockpiled food during the good years. So by now, Jacob's family has moved to live with Joseph in Egypt. For his dad's sake, Joseph, treated them with kindness. But some of the brothers must have thought when Jacob died, they would be put to death as well. We'll pick up the story in Genesis 50:15-21:

"When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, 'What if Joseph holds

a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?' So they sent word to Joseph saying, 'Your father left these instructions before he died: 'this is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.' When their message came to him, Joseph wept. His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. 'We are your slaves,' they said. But Joseph said to them, 'Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.' And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them."

The entire time Joseph was suffering, God was at work. Joseph recognized this and was able to look beyond his painful past and trust that God had a future full of hope for him. He believed God was orchestrating the circumstances of his life to bring about a positive conclusion. That's what HOPE is—Having Only Positive Expectations.

If you're a part of a fractured family, there's a good chance somebody has hurt you. You may bear the wounds of divorce, abandonment, abuse, or some other kind of pain. You've got to believe because there is a God in heaven, there is hope for you and your family.

Genesis 50:20 is the Romans 8:28 of the Old Testament. God can give you the grace and strength to look at your painful past and say like Joseph, "You intended to harm, but God intended it for good." Those two words, "BUT GOD" can make all the difference in your life.

Dr. H.C.G. Moule wrote: "There is no situation so chaotic that God cannot from that situation, create something that is surpassingly good. He did it at the creation. He did it at the cross. He is doing it today." In other words, if God could make something beautiful out of the messed up life of Joseph, He can handle whatever mess you're facing.

Jacob's family was so messed up it would make a great television show today. It has all the elements of a primetime soap opera. I can even suggest a theme song for the show: Here's the story of a man named Jacob; Who was bringing up twelve very messed up guys; All of them had jealousy, like their father; the youngest was his prize. Here's a story of boy named Joseph; Who was hated by his brothers so severe; they sold him into slavery out of hatred; then went and lied to Jacob's ear. Till the one day when all the brothers gathered; And they learned that Joseph wasn't such a dope; With forgiveness, they started showing kindness; if they can do it, it should give us hope! It should give us hope; Give us hope; It should give all of us some living hope!!!!

That leads to the last lesson we can learn from Jacob's family.

3. GOD CAN HEAL YOUR FRACTURED FAMILY

One of the main lessons we can learn from Jacob's bunch is God can restore broken hearts and broken homes. If you have suffered a broken, messed up family, God can heal you. It doesn't necessarily mean God will just snap His fingers, and "Pow!" your family is magically restored to what it was before that messy divorce, or that ugly incident.

Every choice has consequences, and while God lovingly forgives sin, and heals the broken-hearted, He doesn't reverse the consequences, which we set in motion by our poor choices. In other words, He can heal the wounds you've suffered from past family experiences.

If you want God to heal your wounds, there are three things you need to do:

(1) Refuse to hold a grudge

If anybody deserved to nurse a grudge it was Joseph. He had been beaten up and sold to slave-traders. He had been falsely accused and imprisoned. It would have been easy for him to become bitter, but he refused. If you've gone through family pain, it's easy to want to hang onto your hard feelings. But bitterness is an acid that destroys its container.

I knew a man back in Alabama who was alienated from his brother. They had been in business together, and his brother basically cheated him out of his part of the company. My friend had not spoken to his brother for over ten years. As he spoke to me about his brother, his words were filled with bitterness and resentment. His anger was eating away at him like a cancer.

I asked him if he believed the Bible was the Word of God, and he assured me he did. I showed Him Ephesians 4:31 and I could tell he didn't like it. God's Word says, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." (Ephesians 4:31)

Maybe you've gone through a messy divorce. Or perhaps you're harboring anger and resentment toward some family member who has hurt you. Your bitterness will only destroy you. God is saying to you today, "I want to heal your wounds, but your bitterness is keeping those wounds opening and festering. Let go of your bitterness."

(2) Forgive those who have hurt you

Joseph was willing to forgive his brothers for the terrible crime they committed against him. The word "forgive" literally means "to release." Have you forgiven the family members who have hurt you?

When my friend in Alabama told me he was willing to do what God told him to do in regard to his cheating, low-life brother, I told him God wanted him to forgive his brother. He told me, "But I'll never be able to forget what he's done to me." I told him that forgiving wasn't forgetting. Forgiveness simply involved releasing his brother from any desire to hurt him. I showed him the next verse in Ephesians 4, which said, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:32)

He said, "Okay, I'll try." A few days later, he told me. "I tried to forgive my brother. I called him up and told him I needed to talk to him, but he refused to take my call. So, I don't guess I can forgive him." I said, "Why do you think you need to talk to him to forgive him?" He said, "Well, I wanted to tell him that if he asked me to, I'd be willing to forgive him." I told my friend he didn't need his brother's confession or permission to forgive him. He only needed the command

of God to do it.

I told him reconciliation and forgiveness aren't the same thing. Forgiveness is always a prerequisite of reconciliation, but forgiveness can occur without being reconciled. Reconciliation requires both parties to be in agreement. But forgiveness can be a one-way street. I told him to say out loud, "Right now, I forgive my brother for the rotten things he did to me." It took awhile but finally he said, "I forgive my brother for all the rotten things he did to me."

You can do the same thing. You can forgive someone without getting their permission to forgive you. Release them. Let them go.

You may be thinking, "But they don't *deserve* my forgiveness." Joseph didn't forgive his brothers for their own sakes—he forgave them for the sake of His father, Jacob. God doesn't forgive us for *our* sake; He forgives us for the sake of His Son. The Bible says we must forgive those who have hurt us, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us.

(3) Cling to Jesus as the anchor for every relationship

Finally, God can heal your fractured family if you will cling to Jesus as the anchor for every relationship. The reason Joseph was able to survive all stormy relationships in his life was because he had a solid faith in God. His faith was like an anchor giving him stability. If you have come through a break up in your family, you need that same anchor of hope. There is no hope for you outside Jesus Christ. But *through* Jesus there is all the hope you need.

As I mentioned earlier, Hope doesn't just float up. It's not some lightweight piece of flotsam that just drifts along. HOPE is more substantial than that. It's an anchor. The Bible says, "We take hold of the HOPE offered to us...We have this HOPE as an ANCHOR for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf." (Hebrews 6:18-20)

CONCLUSION

In Bible times, an anchor was usually a rock with a hole in the middle for a rope to pass through. Anchors weren't just used to keep a boat from drifting. Because seafaring was not an exact science as it is today, ships often had trouble entering a small harbor. There was a custom that was practiced to ensure ships could arrive safely in harbor. Sometimes the main ship paused outside the harbor entrance and the anchor was placed in a smaller boat, called a forerunner. A crew used oars to take the anchor into the harbor where it was dropped into a safe place. Then the anchor line, attached to a pulley on the ship was tightened and the anchor would actually pull the ship safely into the harbor.

That's exactly the picture the writer of Hebrews is presenting about hope. In the Temple in Jerusalem, the curtain separated the rest of the world from the Holy of Holies, where God's earthly presence was located. When Jesus was crucified, that curtain was ripped apart to symbolize that every person now has access to God. The Temple on earth no longer exists, but Jesus has entered into the literal presence of God in heaven. He is our anchor.

We are like the ship still in the harbor. But we have this hope as an anchor for the soul. We are attached to Jesus by a lifeline of faith. A lifeline is not that crease in the palm of your hand. A lifeline is not a phone call you make on a television quiz show. A lifeline is our faith connection with Jesus Christ who is already in heaven. Sure, there are waves and storms out here, but there is safety and security in the harbor. Jesus, our anchor has been firmly established there, so it's our job to hang onto hope.

You may wonder how we can have hope in a messed up world—because we are attached to Jesus who has already entered into the presence of the Living God. We can Have Only Positive Expectations when we are attached to our anchor.

I've been saving this verse about the anchor of hope to the end of this series for a reason. It applies to every situation I've addressed over the past five weeks. Even if your heart has been broken, you can have hope because you're attached to Jesus and you have an anchor for your soul. Even if you have messed up, you can have hope, because you are hanging onto your lifeline to Jesus. You can have hope when you are afraid, because Jesus has safely entered the haven of security. You can have hope when you feel like quitting, because Jesus is there, can you feel your attachment to Him? And even if your family has been fractured and split up, you can have hope because there is hope in Jesus Christ.

As the song says, "In times like these, you need a Savior. In times like these, you need an anchor. Be very sure. Be very sure. Your anchor holds and grips the solid rock. That rock is Jesus, yes He's the One. That rock is Jesus, the only One. Be very sure. Be very sure. My anchor holds and grips the solid rock." (Words by Ruth Caye Jones)

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes