

## When Family Members Conflict

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Genesis: Family Mess Series

Genesis 30:25 – 31:55

How many of you are familiar with the name Samuel Horvitz? Samuel was a very successful businessman up in Cleveland and died in 1956 leaving his various companies among his three sons. The three brothers ran and expanded the different enterprises for a couple of decades. They ran a highly successful road paving company in Ohio. They had real estate holdings in Florida. They ran media operations including radio and television stations.

In 1977 their mother died. At that point all of the conflicts that had been kept under a lid suddenly exploded into public view. Law suits and even fist-fights broke out among the brothers. They fought over everything including a driveway easement between two of their houses which neighbored on another in Shaker Heights. There were 17 court battles between these three brothers that dragged on and on for a decade.

Finally, in 1986 more than 30 years after Samuel Horvitz's death, a probate judge ordered the brothers to sell all of the assets of their estate and divide the proceeds among the family members. Even with all the disagreements the estate had grown to \$750 million which the brothers and their children split up. Once it was over all of the family members were estranged. Siblings and cousins hated each other, even though they made out well financially. The emotional wounds, more than a quarter of a century later, still haven't healed.

Maybe you've heard about the brutal divorce proceedings between Jamie and Frank McCourt that is destroying the Los Angeles Dodgers. All of the McCourt's dirty laundry is being aired in the press in Los Angeles.

And then there was the DeBartolo's – a brother and sister who fought over control of the San Francisco 49er's and the rest of Eddie DeBartolo, Sr.'s multi-billion dollar estate.

Family businesses employ about 60% of the workforce. They generate about 40% of our gross domestic product. But experts say that few family businesses are successfully handed down through the generations. Only 1/3 of family businesses make the transition from the founder to the second generation. And only a 1/3 of those make it from the second generation to a third generation. One business professor said the attrition rate among family businesses is like a war. Over a period of time no one survives.

One of the saddest examples of conflict around a person's estate is what's happening with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s children. They've been squabbling for the last 15 years over the King estate. Most recently they were suing one another over a book deal regarding their mother. Because of Dr. King's untimely death, he never had the opportunity to pass down his reconciling spirit.

As you read stories of family business disputes, you often discover that often the issues aren't simply about money, or who will succeed dad as CEO. Instead, as you explore family business fights, you find out that they are rooted in more personal issues, long standing complaints and grievances that go back decades. Sometimes they range from high-school sibling rivalry, to the feeling that the older brother always got the bigger piece of the pie. Still others may involve resentment about who got the nicer bedroom when the family moved, or even who worked in the company in middle school and who didn't.

It's these more personal issues that are at the heart of the family business dispute between Jacob and his father-in-law Laban way back in the Old Testament book of Genesis. I've been doing a series titled Family Mess from the book of Genesis. We've seen that the struggles that took place in the patriarchs' families back 4000 years ago in the book of Genesis, are surprisingly contemporary. Today we're going to read about a business conflict between Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban, a business conflict that was rooted in more personal issues. I've titled today's message: "When Family Members Conflict." Let's pray.

### **Genesis 30: 25 - 29**

25 After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland. 26 Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I've done for you." 27 But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you." 28 He added, "Name your wages, and I will pay them." 29 Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care.

Have you ever worked at a miserable job? Patrick Lencioni, who has written a number of wonderful books on leadership, wrote a great book several years ago titled "Three Signs of a Miserable Job" by Patrick Lencioni

Lencioni's three signs of a miserable job are these:

1. Anonymity
2. Irrelevance
3. Immeasurement

A job is miserable when an employee is anonymous; that is when nobody knows you. Every human being needs to be known, understood and appreciated for their unique qualities by someone in a position of authority. When no one knows or appreciates you, it is really disempowering.

Second, everyone needs to know that their job matters to someone, anyone. Without seeing a connection between your work and the satisfaction of another person, or a group of people, an employee will also feel disempowered. Irrelevance makes a job miserable.

Finally, an employee needs to be able to gauge their progress and their level of contribution for themselves. When an employee's work is entirely immeasurable they don't know if they're doing a good job or a bad job that makes a job miserable.

Laban, Jacob's father-in-law, made Jacob's work life and his personal life miserable.

#### Laban's despicable treatment

Jacob had been living in Paddan Aram with his father-in-law, Laban, for 20 years. For 14 years he worked for Laban for nothing in exchange for Laban's two daughters. Another six years elapsed before Jacob finally broke away. During that time Jacob was not treated as a son-in-law or a family member. Jacob was treated like a slave. Three times Jacob uses the Hebrew word for slave – in Genesis 30: 26 – 27.

#### **Genesis 30: 26 - 27**

26 Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I've done for you." 27 But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you."

And in,

#### **Genesis 30:29**

Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care.

Jacob says three times: I've been slaving for you as a slave. No appreciation, no recognition, no thanks. The job was made more miserable by Laban's deception.

#### Laban's deception

Look at this with me in Genesis 30:27 - 36,

**Genesis 30: 27 - 36**

27 But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you." 28 He added, "Name your wages, and I will pay them." 29 Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. 30 The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?" 31 "What shall I give you?" he asked. "Don't give me anything," Jacob replied. "But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them: 32 Let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat. They will be my wages. 33 And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-colored, will be considered stolen." 34 "Agreed," said Laban. "Let it be as you have said." 35 That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark-colored lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons. 36 Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban's flocks.

Laban had become wealthy at Jacob's expense. And he doesn't want to lose this fantastic employee. So he makes one of these Middle Eastern grand gestures of magnanimity. "Name your wages; I will give you whatever you want. I'm really here for you."

And so Jacob says: "OK, I will continue to manage all of your flocks. You keep all the animals that are one color, all the brown animals, all the gray animals, all the white animals, all the black animals and I will keep all the spotted animals." Now, that's a really good deal for Laban since apparently single colored animals show up about three times more often than spotted or streaked animals do.

So, Laban says, "Great! You've got a deal." But even that highly favorable deal wasn't enough for Laban. He had to go into the herd and remove all of the spotted colored animals and keep all of them for himself. And then he left Jacob with all the single colored animals. Laban knew about genetics 4000 years ago!

Laban was a deceiver, a cheater. That is what Jacob tells his two wives, Leah and Rachel, later on in Genesis 31: 6 - 7,

**Genesis 31: 6 - 7**

6 You know that I've worked for your father with all my strength, 7 yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me.

And that's what Leah and Rachel say back to Jacob in Genesis 31:14-15:

**Genesis 31:14-15**

14 Then Rachel and Leah replied, "Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's estate? 15 Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us.

Apparently, Laban had cheated them; had been a cheapskate regarding money that they should have received as a dowry. The context suggests it was never given to them.

You know, when conflicts arise in a family, or in a church small group, or at work, each of us has a different style of managing that conflict. Laban's style was to use flattery and smooth talk. I want to use an illustration today of a typical kind of conflict that can arise. I will put it in a church setting. I'm borrowing some of this from a man named Norm Shawchuck, who back in the 1990's headed up a conflict management firm.

A woman, let's call her Amy, walks into a meeting of her women's group that meets on Saturday morning. She announces to the group, "I am not going to come back here to this group anymore. I don't need to spend Saturday morning in a nursery changing diapers and holding crying babies. I could do that at home with my own baby. The reason why I come here is to get a break. By the way, I am not the only one who feels this way. I have talked with several other women and they said that if they are put in the nursery to watch the babies during Bible study time, that they are not coming back to this group either."

Immediately five other women in the group respond to Amy's attack. One of the women, Betty, tries to solve the problem right away. She says, "Well, the reason why we are not hiring baby sitters is because some of the women in the group can't really afford to pay anymore money for this group. But how about this: How about if one week we hire baby sitters and the next week some of the women rotate through?" She tries to split the difference.

Amy is not satisfied. She says, "Forget it. There won't be any splitting the difference here. Either we are put off the nursery team, or I am walking."

A third woman, Carmela, raises her voice and says, "I really don't think that we should be disagreeing here." She looks down at the floor and nervously around the room. "I think that perhaps it would be better for us to focus our attention on the women's breakfast that is coming up." After several more minutes of the

women still arguing with each other, this third woman finally says, “I need to leave. My son has to be taken to an appointment.” And she scurries out of the room

A fourth woman, Denise, sitting there says nothing. She smiles pleasantly at everyone in the group. She says nothing through the discussion and disagreement. When she leaves the meeting, however, she immediately shares her thoughts about how the group is being led, some of the problems going on in the group, with a friend of hers who is not part of the group. Also, she identifies names and specifically talks about Amy and how she made this big pitch and how upset she was with what Amy was doing in the group. She just spreads it around.

The leader of the group is an older woman named Emma. She is sweet, mild, and cuddly. She immediately takes the whole problem on herself and says, “Amy, this is all my fault. I should have planned last year for raising money for baby-sitting this year. I really haven’t been a good leader. I think I should pay for the baby-sitting for the year for the group.” Even though the leader is on a fixed income and is a widow, she is going to take the whole burden of paying for everyone’s children on herself.

Finally, Felicia, who is a seasoned veteran of church conflict stands up and says, “No, I don’t think it would be appropriate for you to pay for everyone else’s children. But I do think we need to talk here. Amy, what exactly are you upset about? Let’s hear you.”

Typical conflict in a group. This kind of thing that happens in workplaces, in churches, in families. What I would like to do is to describe this group. By the way, so that you don’t think there is any sexism here, this could have been a men’s group and we could have changed the issue from childcare to the golf outing or the men’s retreat. But I would like to describe the behavior of this group in terms of the animal kingdom, because very often I think that when you walk into the midst of a group of folks in the church, it is almost like, “Welcome to the Zoo.”

Think about how these women related to each other. Amy comes in with her ultimatum. Essentially it is “my way or the highway.” She is a lion or shark. If you don’t do what I say, I am going to bite your head off. I have to win at all cost. Even if everyone else has to lose, I get to win. My position has to win the day. I am not interested in discussion. Amy is the conflict instigator.

Then there is the fox that tries to finagle a deal. Betty says, “Well, maybe we can split the difference here.” It is not always wrong to split the difference. If you are deciding on snacks after a woman’s conference and someone proposes cookies and another woman says, “A lot of us are trying to lose weight and if all we serve is cookies then some of us won’t be able to eat.” It is okay to say, “Why don’t we

have two trays: the junk-food tray and the health-food tray, and then everyone will be happy.” Sometimes it is right to split the difference. Sometimes, of course, that is just a way for us to not hear people’s real problems, when we leap to a solution right off the bat. Betty is the conflict compromiser.

Then, of course, there is Carmela, the turtle. Carmela just wants to end the conflict. “We shouldn’t be talking this way. Let’s focus on another issue.” The turtle who avoids disagreement and pulls her head in and looks to the ground, getting nervous around any kind of conflict. Often, turtles, people who withdraw, come from abused backgrounds. They learned how to keep their head down, because if you pulled your head out in their homes growing up, or maybe in their marriage, you got it smacked. You were screamed at. So they have learned to pull it in and withdraw. Carmela is the conflict avoider.

The fourth woman, Denise, who I found the most distasteful, is the snake. She is the woman who sits and smiles, says nothing, and lets everyone believe that she is on his or her side. She then goes out and with poisonous intention attacks the other women in the group to anyone who will hear. Doing it in, perhaps, a spiritual way. She is concerned. She is hurt by some of the behavior of these women. She is the conflict spreader.

Emma, the Bible study leader, wants to pay for everything, why she is just a cuddly teddy bear who wants to hug and mother everyone. Of course, if you want to mother everyone and care for everything, you can prevent people from growing up in the Lord. You can stop spiritual maturity. If you are the type of person who must go to the rescue and must solve everyone’s problems, you never teach them to solve their own problems. A wise and good leader tries to get people to grow up and act like Christians. But Emma is a conflict absorber.

Finally, there is Felicia, who speaks up. Felicia is the woman who said in a gentle, but confrontational way, “Amy, let’s talk here. Before you bolt and run from the group, we need to hear your concerns because you are obviously upset about something.” Felicia is not afraid of conflict. She doesn’t think that the sky will fall if we have a disagreement. She understands that often conflict is the result of God wanting to do something in a group. She also understands that conflict is sometimes inevitable because people come from different places and have different perspectives and different gift mixes. She knows that there is a godly way to resolve conflicts. Felicia is the wise owl.

Guess what they discover. They discover that Amy is exhausted when they hear her. She is up half the night with her baby who is colicky. She can barely drag herself through life. She really does need a break from spending a third of her time in a nursery. This is a needed time for her.

They also discover that women in the group really can’t afford to pay more. The wise owl proposes a solution. “Let’s put together a fund raiser for this group. We



will hold a garage sale together at my home. Let's bring over all of our stuff and we will be able to afford to pay the child care for everyone."

The garage sale is held. They raise \$600.00. The childcare is provided. There is peace in the animal kingdom.

Let me ask you a question: what is your basic conflict management style? Are you a conflict instigator like Amy? You stir up conflict? It's your way or the highway.

Are you a conflict compromiser like Betty? Hey, we can split the difference here.

Are you a conflict avoider like Carmela, and withdraw from conflict?

Or are you a conflict spreader like Denise? You smile and say nothing and then you go around talking about the other people.

Are you a conflict absorber like Emma? I will just take care of it all. I will pay for everyone.

Or are you a conflict healer? What's your style?

Laban is a snake. He is like Denise. He is a deceiver. He says one thing, shows one face to Jacob, and then goes out and does something entirely other. And even though Laban is a snake, a deceiver, we see in this text Laban's discernment.

#### Laban's discernment

He realizes that he is being blessed because of Jacob:

#### **Genesis 30:27**

But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you."

Jacob says the same thing in Genesis 30: 29 – 30

#### **Genesis 30:29-30**

29 Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. 30 The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?"

We see the blessing that the Lord places on Jacob's flocks in Genesis 30:43:

#### **Genesis 30:43**



In this way the man [Jacob] grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

Do you know that every Christian carries with them into the workplace, into their families, into their classrooms, into the church a God-given capacity to bless? Some people call that an anointing. You might call it a spiritual gifting. When a Christian is working in their anointing, the watching world can see something special going on.

Laban, who gave no thought to God, was able to discern that he was prospering because of Jacob's work. And if you are a follower of Christ there is a unique anointing on your life that you bring with you everywhere you go. In many cases your anointing has a natural root; it is the way you were made; it is the way you were raised; it has to do with your temperament, your environment, and your parents.

But there is a supernatural root of your anointing. The Holy Spirit adds to your natural gifting a supernatural impact. And when your anointing flows, it is almost impossible for you to figure out how much of this is you and how much of it is God. In fact, if you're really working in your anointing you may be utterly unaware that it is an anointing. It seems to be just who you are. You may be shocked to find out that God is at work at all. If you've ever been around a person who has an anointing to encourage, just being with them builds you up, fills you with hope, and makes you feel so good about yourself and so good about the possibilities for your life. If you've ever been around someone who has an anointing to encourage and you said that to them. You said, "You have supernatural ability given from God to encourage, they may be surprised by that. They may say: "Well, I don't know about that; I know I try to be encouraging."

Some people have an anointing to teach. There is just a supernatural impact on their teaching. Or an anointing to lead; or an anointing to give financially, or an anointing to heal.

Even the Labans of the world can experience something of God and God's blessing through the distinctive anointings that are on his people's lives.

Are you aware, friend, if you are a follower of Christ, of the anointing that's on your life? Do you know the particular impact that you have in this world? Have you ever asked God to increase your anointing? Have you ever asked anyone close to you to help you to identify your anointing so that you could pray about it?

Well, here is Jacob being abused by his father-in-law for 20 years, working, slaving for him, getting his wages changed all the time, being repeatedly cheated and manipulated and stolen from and deceived. It's a classic family mess.

And is there anyone in your family that you've had great difficulty with, great tension with? Not just for the last week, or for the last month, but for years, perhaps for decades? Is there anyone in your family that you would say, "You know, I've had conflicts for this person for as long as I can remember?" You've prayed about those conflicts.

Many of you would say: Absolutely, Rich. I absolutely have prayed. I've asked God to change me. I've asked God to change this other person. I've asked God to save them, to bring Christ into their life.

Many of us, like Jacob, would say: I don't see God at work. There he is. Jacob is cheated. If you ask Jacob: Is God doing anything; Jacob might say, "I don't think so."

Look with me at Genesis 31: 1 – 3:

**Genesis 31:1-3**

1 Jacob heard that Laban's sons were saying, "Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father." 2 And Jacob noticed that Laban's attitude toward him was not what it had been. 3 Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."

It has been 20 years since Jacob clearly heard the voice of God. 20 years of mistreatment. And then the Lord says: Now it is time for you to be released. I'm letting you out of this prison. I'm giving you permission to go.

Where is God in our mess? There is something you need to learn about God.

God never rushes

God is never in a hurry. We live in an incredibly impatient society. If your computer takes more than a few seconds to warm up, or to move you to a website, you think: What is wrong here.

I read about a highway project recently in Salt Lake City. It cost \$2 billion to reconstruct I-15 around Salt Lake City. The result of this highway project was that drivers would be able to drive approximately 1 mile per hour faster.

We are so impatient.

Richard Mouw, who is the President of Fuller Seminary, said most people in America believe in an impatient God, a God who works in very abrupt, very decisive, very clear ways. Most of us miss the activity of God. We think God is not answering our prayers for a family member, or a family situation because God's typical pace is slow – at least according to how we measure speed.

Back in the 1960's there was a book written by JB Phillips. It was titled "Your God is Too Small."

Other people picked up on this theme of "Your God is Too..." One man wrote a book titled "Your God is Too White". Another person wrote a book titled "Your God is Too Safe". I think a great book for Americans would be "Your God is Too Fast".

Sometimes God works really fast. We see God instantaneously convert people from darkness to light. They're radically born again and they know it. Sometimes God works fast. He instantly heals a physical condition, or an emotional problem. You pray and bam! the person is instantly healed, a relationship is instantly restored; people are totally reconciled.

But what most Christians don't know is that God's normal pace is not fast. All you have to do is read the Bible. Abraham is kept waiting 25 years between the time God promised him a son and the time Sarah actually gave birth to a son. Jacob is in Paddan Aram slaving for Laban for 20 years. Moses is kept on the backside of the desert for 40 years tending sheep for his father-in-law, Jethro.

We say: God is not answering our prayers for our marriages, for our children, or our parents, or our siblings. How do you know that? Because it is not instantaneous? How do you know that God is not at work doing something in them, doing something in you?

The Mennonites have a saying:

We are now living in the time of God's patience.

God is presently showing the human race great patience – giving the unsaved an opportunity to repent, and giving the saved an opportunity for greater obedience.

Where is God in the midst of family mess? God never rushes; and God always remembers.

God always remembers

Jacob is speaking to his two wives, Leah and Rachel, and here is what he says in Genesis 31:10-13:

**Genesis 31:10-13**

10 "In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. 11 The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob.' I answered, 'Here I am.' 12 And he said, 'Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all

that Laban has been doing to you. 13 I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.’ ”

20 years before when Jacob was fleeing his home in the Promised Land and heading for Laban’s house in Paddan Aram God met him and spoke to him at a place called Bethel. It was at that place 20 years before that God made certain promises to Jacob one of which was “I will be with you and I will bring you back to your home.” You are not going to spend your life in Paddan Aram with Laban. I’m going to bring you back to the Promised Land.

Now, 20 years later, after Jacob doesn’t hear God’s voice for 2 decades, God speaks again and he says to Jacob: I am the God of Bethel. Only Jacob and God knew about that divine conversation that took place.

God always remembers.

There is a well-know Christian woman in England. I know of her through an acquaintance in the United Kingdom. This woman was at a summer camp when she was 8 years old. It was a Christian summer camp and on the last night the counselors built a big camp fire. One of the counselors said to the little children, who were gathered around the camp fire, “If you want to make a commitment to Christ tonight, pick up one of those pine cones and throw it in the fire and God will know that you are making a commitment to him.”

Well, a number of children got up and threw the pine cones in to the fire. This little 8 year-old girl sat there and decided that yes, that was what she wanted to do. And so she picked up a pine cone and tossed it into the fire.

Well, many years later she got married; she was a school teacher. She got farther and farther away from God. At age 40 this woman had a total mental breakdown. She was probated and locked up in a mental institution. She was there for four years.

Her parents were attending a Christian meeting and they met a man with a strong prophetic gifting. They asked the man to pray for their daughter. The man felt that not only should he pray at that moment, but that God was telling him to go to that mental institution. So he drove there and met with this woman. He began ministering to her and spoke with her. She said, “All I want to do is to get out of here. I want out of here.”

God spoke through that man. He said to this woman, “God sees a little 8 year old girl picking up a pine cone and throwing it into a fire.”

She began to weep as she remembered her commitment made more than 35 years before. A week later she was released – totally healed, totally sane. She

told her testimony and said, "That was 20 years ago." Since then she's been serving in the church and is happily married.

You say, "Rich, that is so far away." Let me tell you a story of the God who remembers a child's prayers that took place in our own congregation. A woman named Deb wrote me an email. She said when she was 5 ½ years old her parents divorced. Her father didn't have very much time for her or her five siblings after the divorce. There was an emptiness in her life because she missed her father.

About a year and a half after the divorce a Presbyterian church was hosting a Vacation Bible School in the summer. She had never been inside of a church before and she had never heard anyone talk about God or Jesus. But at that VBS they taught this little 7 year old about Jesus. She colored pictures of Jesus holding little children. They talked with her about God who was her heavenly Father, who loved her. As a 7 year old, she met her loving Father in heaven.

Well, her family moved from place to place. This little girl became a teenager. She looked for the love of God in different churches, but she never found it. And so at age 17 she stopped going to church. Here is what Deb writes:

*We don't like to admit that we repeat our parents' mistakes, but I made the same mistake when I didn't share the story of Jesus with my children in a meaningful way. Yes, I shared with them that Jesus died to save us, and that the Christmas celebration is about His birth, but I didn't take them to church. But you know what, God didn't give up on me. When my daughter Heather was in her senior year of high school, God led her, to Vineyard Church Columbus, where she accepted Jesus Christ. This was the first step in God's plan to bring me back.*

*A year later, my mother and siblings were planning a surprise 50th birthday party for me. Without realizing it, they had planned the party date on the weekend that my mother, sisters, and nieces would get together for the weekend. These once-a-month weekends were our bonding and support time.*

*Now the problem became, how do we get Deb out of the house on Sunday.*

*So...Heather was asked to come up with something to get me out of the house for a few hours. Heather came up with the perfect plan; she invited me to attend church with her that Sunday. When we arrived at the Vineyard, I was a little surprised at the size of the church, but when I entered the auditorium and experienced the worship music, it felt like the Holy Spirit welcoming me back. The message that day communicated the loving Jesus from my elementary school days; I knew that I had found home once again. What a wonderful 50th birthday coming home to Jesus!*

*Yes, the surprise birthday party was wonderful too, but the best surprise that day was finding the loving Father again.*

*Within a few short months, I had become a member of Vineyard Church, and I'm glad to say that my daughter Heather and I were baptized together. I invited my husband, son and his girlfriend Laci to witness my baptism. For several months I had been praying that my husband Dan and son Daniel would come to know and accept Jesus in their lives. I knew that they would not say no to my invitation, because they knew how important this baptism was to me. I felt that once they attended church it would be easier for them to come back again and again. Within a couple of months Daniel was attending church regularly with his fiancée, Laci and their one-year-old baby girl Natalie.*

Deb's son, Daniel, was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident and this is how she concluded her email to me:

*If it weren't for my faith in Jesus, I know that I would not be able to bear the loss of my son, Daniel. I take comfort in the loving Father. He loves us all and I never blamed God for Daniel's death. When my sorrow is great, and I do experience it daily, I thank God that I had Daniel for 22 years. Through Daniel, God has blessed us with two wonderful people, his fiancée Laci and daughter Natalie, whom we love dearly. I used to be afraid of death, but I'm not any more. I know that Jesus carries me through each and every day. Without Him I am lost!*

*God remembers all of our prayers. We buried Daniel on Friday and on Saturday, my husband Dan accepted Jesus as his savior! Praise God!*

*I'm a leader in the Early Childhood Ministry because I know first hand that God wants to reach children in a very personal way. I just hope I can make a difference in just one child's life.*

God remembers. He remembered the prayers you prayed as a child. He remembers any of you who ever accepted Christ into your heart. He remembers every prayer that a mother prays for her children and every prayer a father prays for his children. He remembers every prayer children prayed for their parents, every prayer you've prayed for a husband or wife, brother or sister. Friend, God always remembers. He is the God of Bethel.

God regularly restores

God heals family conflicts. He does. Sometimes you think it is impossible, that it can't happen. But God does restore.

How does God restore? How does God heal severely damaged family relations? Look at this with me. Here is the first step.

### **Genesis 31:38-42**

38 “I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks. 39 I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night. 40 This was my situation: The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes. 41 It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wages ten times. 42 If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you.”

The first step in healing a relationship is

We verbalize the hurt

There comes a time when we stop running, avoiding the elephant in the room, and we communicate to the person who has hurt us: “Here is what you’ve done. Here is how it made me feel.” Jacob never said all of these things before. He needed to say it. And you need to say it. You might write it in a letter. Jacob does it face to face. But we need to verbalize the hurt.

Now, Jacob’s experience with his father-in-law, Laban, is like many of our experiences will be. Laban, his father-in-law, does not in any way accept Jacob’s version of the past. Look at Genesis 31: 43 – 44:

### **Genesis 31:43-44**

43 Laban answered Jacob, “The women are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks. All you see is mine. Yet what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about the children they have borne? 44 Come now, let’s make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us.”

Jacob says: I worked and slaved for you and I built up the business. Laban, the father-in-law says: Everything you have is mine. I’m the one who built the business. I gave you everything. Without me, you would be nothing.

Is that the end of the matter? No. Because they are able to get to step two of God’s restoring work. And that is



We resolve to stop hurting each other

**Genesis 31:44-55**

44 Come now, let's make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us." 45 So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. 46 He said to his relatives, "Gather some stones." So they took stones and piled them in a heap, and they ate there by the heap. 47 Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, and Jacob called it Galeed. 48 Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." That is why it was called Galeed. 49 It was also called Mizpah, because he said, "May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. 50 If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me." 51 Laban also said to Jacob, "Here is this heap, and here is this pillar I have set up between you and me. 52 This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you and that you will not go past this heap and pillar to my side to harm me. 53 May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob took an oath in the name of the Fear of his father Isaac. 54 He offered a sacrifice there in the hill country and invited his relatives to a meal. After they had eaten, they spent the night there. 55 Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then he left and returned home.

Jacob and Laban recognized that they are never going to persuade the other person of their version of the past. But at least they could stop injuring each other. Let's stop the law suits. Let's stop the gossip. Let's stop attacking each other by way of emails or calls. Let's lay down our weapons.

Friend, is there anyone in your family that you need to just stop fighting with? I'm going to drop out of the law suit. I'm going to stop slandering this person to other relatives.

The third step of restoration that Jacob and Laban never get to is

We walk around in each other's shoes

I just finished reading a famous novel by Harper Lee, "To Kill a Mockingbird."

It was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of To Kill a Mockingbird. There is no more wonderful character in American literature than Atticus Finch. He is a man filled with integrity, who had a unique sense of justice and compassion. He told his daughter, Scout,

*You never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them.*

That was the basic idea of the non-fiction book “Black Like Me” by John Howard Griffin back in 1961.

He was a white person who darkened his skin and traveled through the South on buses and hitchhiking through the summer of 1959. He kept a journal of how he was treated. His book exposed race relations in the American South through that dark period.

If you really want to move towards restoration in a relationship, you’ve got to walk around in the other person’s shoes, seeing things from their perspective. It doesn’t mean that you will agree with their perspective. But you’ve got to understand it.

That’s what Jesus did. He was God come down from heaven and who walked in our shoes. He lived in our midst and ate with sinners. He rubbed shoulders with tax collectors and prostitutes. It doesn’t mean he became like that person or adopted their viewpoint. But he understood it.

And you know that you are totally restored when

We receive God’s heart for this other person

God changes our heart. God changes their heart. God works a miracle. We not only intellectually understand their viewpoint, but he does something inside. He changes our hearts.

We have couples in our congregation who have been divorced and then God worked in their hearts, changed them, and bent them back towards each other. They were restored. We have so many relationships here that have been torn by hurt or misunderstanding. And then God worked in the church members’ hearts and instead of running away from the church, or going to another church, each individual received God’s heart for the other.

God is at work cleaning up the family messes that we’ve made, the messes we’ve made of our own lives. That’s what God did at the cross. He pulled our mess into his own body. Let’s pray.

## When Family Members Conflict

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Rich Nathan

October 24, 2010

Genesis: Family Mess Series

Genesis 30:25 – 31:55

### I. Family Mess

- A. Laban's despicable treatment
- B. Laban's deception
- C. Laban's discernment

### II. God's healing

- A. God never rushes
- B. God always remembers
- C. God regularly restores
  - 1. We verbalize the hurt
  - 2. We resolve to stop hurting each other
  - 3. We walk around in each other's shoes
  - 4. We receive God's heart