

Healthy Relationships in Hurting Times – Part 2

Genesis 30:1-2

1. Control what you can.

- Matthew 19:1; Genesis 25:23, 32:9-12

2. Acknowledge, Admit, Ask, Affirm.

3. Pray first.

4. Take time.

5. Measure the cost.

- Isaiah 41:8-10

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Genesis 30:1-2

My name is Casey, Children's Pastor, and I'm excited about this time of year. Last night I got to take my daughter to the daddy daughter dance. She's young enough she still wants to be around me, and we had a good time making her feel special. Some people think it's a made-up holiday to get people to spend more money on somebody else. I like the holiday, so I have been planning a little, and I have some surprises for my wife. Some years we go out, but the last few years I'll make a special dinner for my family. Some of you might make plans a month ahead of time, but others might just decide last minute. You ladies might not believe it, but I bet most of your husbands have made plans too. Whatever plans you have, I hope you enjoy SuperBowl Sunday.

Whichever holiday you are thinking about, we are talking about relationships this month, I thought it would be good idea to talk about something we all need help with, especially this weekend. It's something you might use in relationships with your parents, kids, spouse, neighbor, or even friends online. You might use it with strangers, or it could also include people you watch the football game with. You may also use it tomorrow if you forgot it was Valentine's Day.

Whose idea was it to put the SuperBowl the day before Valentine's Day? All around the country, men are being set up to fail this year. Some of you don't stand a chance. Well, maybe next year. To help us prepare for today's game, tomorrow's plans, and any other relationships we have, our theme is – conflict resolution.

Today we'll look at what we can learn to help us in our relationships from someone in the Bible who dealt with a lot of conflict in their life: parents, brother, spouses (totally different Valentine's Day topic – stay focused), kids, in-laws, neighbors, and lots of other nations. Some of the conflict, he brought on himself, others it wasn't entirely his fault. I'm talking about a man named Jacob.

Let's start with spouse conflict since tomorrow is Valentine's Day after all.

In Genesis 29, Jacob travels to his Uncle Laban's house to find a wife. While visiting, he falls in love with his own cousin Rachel. So yes, they will have conflict. But it gets better. He agrees to work for Laban for seven years in order to marry her. Seven years. Genesis 29:20 says:

“But they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.”

Awe young love. Sounds like a greeting card, right? So Jacob works seven years and then Laban tricks him and gives him Leah his oldest daughter instead. Don't get me started in how he was "tricked" to marry the wrong girl. Laban then gets Jacob to agree to work for another seven years in exchange for Rachel as his wife too. Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, he gets Rachel and her sister. Conflict is growing...it gets worse though. At first, Rachel wasn't able to have kids and she despised her sister (who had seven children). So she despised her sister, and blamed Jacob for not giving her children.

A couple things to learn from this conflict: Men, it's our fault. Just kidding, it's our fault a lot but, but to give Jacob a little credit, he knew having children wasn't just up to him. Genesis 30:1-2, Rachel confronts Jacob:

"Give me children, or I'll die!" Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?"

Jacob knew he wasn't God, and he knew he could only control what he could control. When it comes to conflict resolution, you are not God...

1. Control what you can.

Control what YOU can. We can't control everything. We can't make someone do something, or make them stop doing something. We can't control what someone says about us behind our back or online. We can control, what we can control. You can control your attitude, your tongue, how you see someone else. Control what you can.

Another lesson we can learn from Jacob's marriage, is don't have more than one wife. Some of you might be feeling pretty good about yourself now. Polygamy can make a mess, and add lots of conflict in a family relationship. Jesus knew that, he addressed it in Matthew 19:5 It says:

'For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and will live with his wife. The two will become one.'

Jesus knew our hearts are wired for one. Same with God, our hearts are wired for one God. One Savior, one leader of our lives. When our love for God is sharing space in our heart with a love for money, respect, security, jobs, or stuff, or even people, it creates conflict.

Spouse conflict for Valentine's Day and brother conflict for the SuperBowl. Jacob and his twin brother Esau began their conflict in Rebecca's womb. Genesis 25:23:

And the Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples will be separated from within you. One people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

Esau would end up being the oldest by a little bit, but God said that Esau would serve his younger brother Jacob. If my younger brother or sister told me they were the boss growing up, that is a recipe for conflict. Their father, Isaac loved Esau more and wanted to bless him, even though he knew God said the older would serve the younger. Jacob and his mom tricked Isaac and get the blessing meant for Esau. Jacob then leaves and goes and gets married and starts a family with Rachel like we just talked about. But before he leaves, Esau's last words about Jacob - Genesis 27:41

"I will kill my brother Jacob."

So Jacob leaves and raises a family. Then God tells Jacob he needs to return to Esau, and 20 years later, brothers are reunited (Genesis 33:1-4). Jacob spent lots of time worrying about what would happen. He felt bad for all he had done and knew he owed Esau big time. Jacob sends a message to Esau hoping to reconcile. And Esau gets the message his brother is near and orders 400 men to join him to go meet Jacob with him. 400 men was not just a group of his buddies, it was the standard amount for a militia. Jacob was afraid of this. He knew he deserved to be punished for how he tricked his brother, and feared Esau was coming for revenge. He had hoped to resolve this conflict with his brother, but feared the worst-case scenario, so he made a few plans. Animals travel first as gifts, then he would be next, and his family would be last. So if he was attacked, hopefully his family would be able to escape and survive. He didn't know what else to do or where to turn, so he prayed. Genesis 32:9-12 niv:

Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, Lord, you who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'"

This prayer is a model for all believers, and one we can use in conflict resolution too. Jacob acknowledged his relationship with God and God's past goodness. He admitted his unworthiness. Then he asked for deliverance, and finally, he affirmed God's promises. Let me say it again because not only is it a good prayer, it's helpful in approaching conflict with others...

2. Acknowledge, Admit, Ask, Affirm.

So from this conflict with his brother we can learn a few important things to help us in our conflict with others...

3. Pray First.

Start with God. Praying for someone we have conflict with, helps us to see that person the way God sees them. God can help us process our thoughts. Pray for the right words and actions to resolve the conflict. Praying for conflict resolution is not just praying for the other person to change and see it our way. Whoever's fault it is, we need to also pray for ourselves, and examine our own hearts, and how we can help bring resolution. Prayer will also help us to say what needs to be said, but say it in a loving and respectful way, got to pray first...

4. Take Time.

Another lesson is to TAKE TIME. Time gives us a chance to look at how we have acted, what we have said, and it gives us a chance to get godly advice or feedback. Jacob dealt with the conflict with his brother 20 years later. 20 years may be too much time, but the point remains, take time. Conflict resolution requires doing some homework, we need some time to gather the facts or to take our blinders off or examine our own motives. Or maybe time to cool off and think. The more passionate you are about an issue, the less likely you are to make a good choice in the moment, so take time, time can help...

5. Measure the Cost.

Jacob gave lots of animals to help smooth things out and resolve the conflict. Esau had become wealthy and it's not like he needed more, but it was a good gift. It may not be costing you animals to right a strained relationship. But conflict resolution has a cost. Everything worthwhile has a cost. It may cost you money – on counseling or rehab. It may cost time (20 years of worry or resentment, or bitterness), it may cost you energy trying to make something work. Or the energy you spent grieving a broken relationship because of the conflict. Jacob also measured the cost of what bad could happen as they tried to resolve the conflict. Esau was coming with 400 men, so Jacob kept his family last to protect them. Jacob knew that the cost of his conflict, could result in his entire family losing their lives. He protected his family by having them be in the back. This would give the family a chance to escape if the 400 men ended up attacking Jacob. Jacob protected his family from the conflict with his brother. Measuring the cost means protecting our family from our conflicts too.

So remember in conflict to pray, take time, and measure the cost. If you read through the life of Jacob, you'll see many other conflicts he experienced. Even though Jacob dealt with conflict, let's not forget that God picked Jacob to become the nation of Israel. Isaiah 41:8-10

“But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you.

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

It's important for us to remember that although Jacob and his entire family and nation had conflict, God promises to be with them. The entire Old Testament is a love story about how God helped his people through their conflict. God promises to be with us in our conflict too.

Jacob wasn't to blame for all the conflict, but a lot of it, he brought on himself and his family. We are not to blame for all our problems either, but we have to control what we can control. Sometimes, we make our conflict worse by not examining our heart or thinking before we speak. Sometimes it's not our fault and there is nothing we could have done better to avoid the situation.

Conflict isn't fun. Some people enjoy debating and arguing, I don't. In fact, I don't even like watching a Seahawks game with someone who is rooting for the other team. Hopefully as you've been sitting here you've been thinking about some conflict you've had in your life recently. Jacob dealt with conflict with his parents, brother, spouses, kids, in-laws, neighbors, and other nations. Let's remember God's word to Jacob in Isaiah. God's word to us too. Isaiah 41:10

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

In all his imperfections, and conflict, God chose Jacob. It's clear that God never promised him a carefree life. But God blessed him even during his conflict. God wants us to go about the conflict we face the right way, sometimes we won't want to, sometimes it will be hard to find resolution and make it work with someone you have a hard time being around. Sometimes the resolution may be to go separate ways, like Jacob and Esau did for 20 years. Conflict Resolution is a two-way street. You can seek forgiveness, but you can't make someone forgive you. You can seek peace, but you can't make someone else be peaceful. We can only control what we can right? God helped Jacob to not be afraid, and God strengthened him. God wants to do that for us too. Which is why it's so important to keep our eyes on him through it all. When we keep our eyes on God, not only does he help us with our conflict, but he helps us understand our problems, and frustrations, and everything else that might keep us up at night.

One bad conversation or one bad news article or post online can ruin our day, if we let it. Good thing we know to control what you can. I know we are talking about conflict, but the truth is, we have so much to be thankful for. We have a God who loves us, a creator of the whole universe, who wants to spend time with us. God never left Jacob, and he will never leave us either. Through our conflict, through our challenges, through it all, we can know that because of God, it is well.

Prayer