

FAMILY MATTERS, MATTER
 Two Bad Parents & Two Bad Brothers: Part 4
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Concerning history of the Sistine Chapel, Kevin Miller states,

The Sistine Chapel is one of the true jewels of world art. After spending four years painting it, Michelangelo finished his masterpiece in 1512, and the chapel went into daily use. In those days the only light source came from candles. As candles burned year after year, the soot began to rise to the ceiling, obscuring the paintings. After over 400 years of soot, grime, and dust collecting on the ceiling, the original art had to be restored. So a team of restorative artists worked on the Sistine Chapel from 1984-1999 until the monochrome colors were restored to their original beauty.¹

Isn't it amazing what small candles, fire, and smoke do to an artistic masterpiece over the years?

Relationally, there is something to learn from this story of restoration. Are not sinful, sometimes overt or covert hateful actions by family members just like the collective power of soot, grime, and dust? Though frequently small in nature, they build up over time, resulting in once beautiful relationships being completely covered up and obscured.

How do you clean the ceiling as it were? Do you go to the family member who wronged you and offer to apologize for things you really didn't do in order to give peace a chance. No. Believe me, that won't work. Never apologize when you have not done anything. You will only solidify the perps prideful position they are innocent and guiltless. Should you continue to attempt to build a bridge to someone who, for all intents and purposes, continues to only show contempt for you, or who continues to act and speak in a mean, nasty fashion regarding you? No. Yes, you should do small things, here and there, to show them you still care about them, like sending them a birthday

¹ <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2013/october/5100713.html>.

card, wedding anniversary card, etc.; however, if they are a stone wall to you, you don't have to continue hitting the stone wall seeking a time of reconciliation. Wait for God to work on their heart. Wait for there to be some positive movement on their part, and then climb over the wall.

What else should you do? Follow the model of Jacob. Talk about a perp. Talk about a brother who had totally taken advantage of his older twin brother. Talk about a sibling who lived in a world of selfishness, narcissism, and deception, wedded to the blind and powerful favoritism of his dotting mother. Twenty years after God chiseled much of this out of his character, God commanded him to go back home and, among many things, rebuild his relationship with the brother who wanted to physically take him out for all the atrocities he created over the years.

To switch metaphors from soot, grime, and dust to a fracture, we can readily see how to go about either restoring our relationship to its original beauty, and/or repairing, with God's help, the fissure of our own making. Our journey to health all commences with a question:

What Does Forgiveness Look Like In A Fractured Family? (Genesis 32-33)

Let's review, briefly. What did Jacob do after God worked overtime in tough circumstances to show him areas where he needed to grow up, areas where he had major flaws in his character as a brother? From Genesis 31, verses 1 through 5, we can isolate three pragmatic concepts:

- *Take The First Step* (Genesis 32:1a). Question? Did you take the step this week? How did it go?
- *Trust In God's Presence* (Genesis 32:1b-2). Did you thank God for the fact that when you took that step His angelic presence went with you because He knew it would be difficult?
- *Send A Peace Team* (Genesis 32:3-5). Did you send a person or persons of trusted character who served as a buffer to your desire to meet the offended family member? If you haven't done this yet, it is not a bad idea. Cushion can be a great thing. Ask for divine wisdom regarding what it might look like in your complex situation.

To these three we shall add several more as we move expositionally through the rest of this chapter and the opening verses of chapter 33. Here's a fourth concept worthy of being showcased on every marquee around the country:

Think Positive Not Negative (Genesis 32:6-8)

This is a tough concept for skeptical, the glass-is-half-empty people, and gun-shy people. Just understand that going into this potential fray may not be what you anticipated at all. In fact, you just might be pleasantly surprised at the outcome. Yet, please be aware of how we are typically wired. If the facts look bad, our guts have a siren which goes off warning us of impending doom. Once that emotional equation is made it is hard to be

positive and hopeful. Jacob learned this all too quickly when the servants returned from seeing his brother:

⁶ The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.”

Gulp.

Can't you just see in your mind's eye how this scene played out? The servants came back (alive, which was a good sign) and told Jacob, “Yeah, we met your big, hairy, muscular brother, and he's coming to see you with four hundred of his buddies.”

At this juncture, you just have to stop and ask your logical mind, would this reaction of your offended brother sound positive or negative? If your brother said, “Yeah, I'll meet you and I'm bringing all my Marine battalion from Quantico with me on horseback.” Or how about, “Yeah, I'm coming to link up with you and I'm bringing ten attorneys with me.” Wake up, man. This scenario doesn't sound peaceful but *dreadful*. It smacks of you're about to have your last day on earth as the little brother.

How did Jacob read and respond to the report? Like most of us would have:

⁷ Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies; ⁸ for he said, “If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape.”

Funny how quickly faith can vaporize like dew before the hot rays of an impending conflict. Jacob, the non-military, non-fighting man, became so terrified of the 401 men bearing down upon his position, he divided his massive family into two separate camps. His strategy? If Esau wiped out one camp, then, at least, the other one might be able to



escape and live. Sounded wise, but it smacked of fear, not faith. God had promised to protect him, the angels verified the promise, but in the heat of a potential conflict all factually based faith just flew out the window. Ever done that with God's revelation and promises to you? Ever completely misread a situation? Ever

headed into confrontation thinking the worst was going to happen? Been there. Done that.

Along these lines, take a look at this jungle picture? What do you see? Are you looking hard, or just taking a gradual glance? Look a little harder and you'll see all kinds of wonderful animals: some tigers, a baboon, a sloth, and an elephant, right? Let this picture be a point of personal enlightenment where your relationships are concerned. As you head into what seems to be a frightful, fearsome, foreboding jungle, realize there may be wonderful things present you would miss if you weren't paying attention. Translated, don't misread the situation. Don't read anything into why they agreed to (finally) meet. Don't look at body language and make swift, negative conclusions. Don't look at the jungle you may have created over the years and think there is no potential for life here. Don't parse, in your mind, the meaning and inflection of each and every word. Do show grace. Do show compassion. Do ask God for strength to think the best of the person in question. Do humble yourself before God and before the person you've wronged, and why not offer up this short prayer: "Lord, could you help me to read the situation correctly." Or better yet, "Lord, help me to think the best of my brother or sister, and not the worst."

At this juncture, Jacob, a man of flesh and bone as each one of us, is a negative example to us as he groped to secure forgiveness for his past infractions. Take his example and make it a positive one where your family situation is concerned.

Next, or fifth . . .

Pray In Light Of God's Promises (Genesis 32:9-12)

Admit it. God has a way of using tough, trying times, times where we lose complete control of a developing situation, times where our best ideas fall to the ground to drive us to our knees before Him, seeking His divine help and assistance. How interesting. When the control-freak, Jacob, lost control of the situation, when he realized he couldn't protect himself from the dangerous situation he had created, he fled to the feet of God's throne, knowing He would be his source of strength and help (Psalm 46).

⁹ Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,' ¹⁰ I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff *only* I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies. ¹¹ Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me *and* the mothers with the children. ¹² "For You said, 'I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.' "

Note well how he prayed. First, he extolled the character of God by focusing on His various names. "God" is from "Elohim," which is the name of God as the great, powerful Creator (Genesis 1:1). If anyone could help create peace in the midst of this potential chaos, it is Him. "LORD" describes God as the covenant keeping God. If anyone would stand next to him in at a tough time, it would be this God. Makes you want to ask yourself, "When I fall before God's throne in my dicey situation, what names will I use to address Him and why will I use these?" Second, he reminded God that returning home was His idea, and that He had promised to provide for him there. God who is true to His

word loves to know that you know what He has promised you, too. Here are some which just might apply to you:

¹⁴ and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land (2 Chronicles 7).

³⁴ Though He scoffs at the scoffers, yet He gives grace to the afflicted (Proverbs 3:34).

⁷ Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? ¹¹ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! (Matthew 7).

The Lord has promised his children, like you, much. Believe it, therefore, do not be afraid to weave His lofty, eternal promises into your prayers when you are in a tough spot. When you do this, He will rise from His throne and act in light of His word for He cannot act contrary.

Third, in verse 10 Jacob simply confessed his unworthiness in light of his track record for sinful activity in relation to his brother. He came clean of his selfishness, deception, and power plays, seeking God's forgiveness . . . and I'm sure He obtained it because God is a forgiving God to those who seeks His forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Do you have anything you need to confess right now? Why do you need to confess? Because He is absolutely holy (Isaiah 6:1ff). Sin will cause Him to not listen to you. As the Psalmist warns: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). That's one of those verses you should probably memorize. You confess and He will forgive, resulting in His willingness to listen to your plight.

Fourth, after confession typically we find petition. This is exactly how Jacob prays,

¹¹ Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me *and* the mothers with the children.

The Hebrew Hiphil imperative command "Deliver me," is built on the verbal root נָצַל (nāṣal), which speaks of rescuing and/or delivering someone from a terrible situation.²

² R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 594: The Qal stem of this verb does not occur in biblical Hebrew, but an Arabic cognate confirms the judgment that its basic physical sense is one of drawing out or pulling out. While the Niphil is invariably used with the force of "be delivered, saved" or "to escape" (i.e. "deliver oneself"; literally, "tear oneself away"), the Piel may express "strip off" (a garment), as in 2Chr 20:25 (where the context indicates this sense) and in Exo 3:22, where the Hebrew women are ordered to spoil the

It's tantamount to saying, "Save me!" (Psalm 31:3, 16; 34:5; 39:9; 51:16; 54:9; 59:2, 3; 69:15; 109:21). Ever cried out like this to God? Ever said, "Lord, I need you. I'm not going to make it in this complex situation. Please, will you help me? Will you help me get through this mess?" I don't know what your petition needs to be, but I'm sure you do. And as Jacob's was specific, I'm sure yours will be all . . . and it should be.

Fifth, with verse 12, Jacob went right back to God's divine promise, desiring to remind God of what He has formerly said so that such knowledge would serve as motivation. Do you think God had forgotten what He had promised? No. But He waited on His glorious throne for Jacob to remember so that when He fulfilled that promise, Jacob would be encouraged and highly thankful. I have no doubt the same God still feels the same way today about you and your prayer. Why not make your prayer for your fearful situation focus on what God has, in fact, promised to you? Weak prayer simply waltzes into His presence and demands things from Him. Powerful prayer focuses on His promises like a laser beam. Please, don't forget this as you head to prayer about what/who you are facing.

Sixth, and don't laugh . . .

Send Another Peace Offering (Genesis 32:13-20)

Don't tell me the Bible is boring, or that it is not amusing, at times. Jacob had already sent messengers of peace to Esau with clear directions to announce his soon arrival.

Egyptians by "borrowing" really "asking for" jewelry and raiment. The Piel also signals "deliver" in Ezek 14:14, "Noah, Daniel, and Job... should deliver but their own souls."

The predominant occurrence of this verb is in the various aspects and moods of the Hiphil (causative: "make separate") and that generally with the sense of deliver or rescue. Nevertheless, here too a physical snatching away or separating can be involved, as in the obvious instance of two sons fighting with "none to part them" (2Sam 14:6). An interesting idiom occurs in 2Sam 20:6, where "escape us" is, literally, "cause to remove our eye (from him)." And stripping or snatching away overlaps the meaning "recover" or "deliver" in 1Sam 30:22, since the reference is to spoil taken from the enemy, some of which was likely their own property originally.

Quite often, however, a literal personal salvation or deliverance (often physical but not without spiritual overtones or application) is involved. The Hiphil imperative, not surprisingly, yields numerous prayer petitions such as, "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother." (Cf. Jud 10:15; 1Sam 12:10; 1Chr 16:35.) In Psa 7:1 [H 2] *haššilēni* > "deliver me," is in direct parallel with *hōshi'ēni* "save me." Spiritual salvation through forgiveness of sins is certainly intended in Psa 39:8 [H 9], "Deliver me from all my transgressions" (cf. "... from blood guiltiness," Psa 51:14 [H 16], "... and purge away our sins," Psa 79:9) and figuratively implied by "deliver me out of the mire" in Psa 69:14 [H 15].

A comparison of the distinctives of other Hebrew synonyms of the concepts "deliver, save, preserve, escape" will better delineate the semantic range of our root *nšl*. (The one Ugaritic occurrence cited in UT 19: no. 1688, means "to get gifts from [someone].") Very close in basic concept are the three verbs (q.v.): *gā'al* "redeem, release, set free," *hālaš*; "break away, withdraw; deliver, set free," and *pādā* "redeem, deliver, rescue, ransom." Two closely related roots are *mālaṭ* "be smooth, slip away," and *pālaṭ* "slip out, drop, escape, set free." Also used with the sense of "rescue" are *yāsha'*, Hiphil, "save"; *shūb* "return"; *hāyā* Piel and Hiphil: "make alive, revive," and *yātar*, Hiphil, "cause to surpass, survive."

Realizing he may need to do more to demonstrate to his brother he really did seek peace, Jacob ramped up the peace concept by supply multiple and massive peace offerings:

¹³ So he spent the night there. Then he selected from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau: ¹⁴ two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, ¹⁵ thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. ¹⁶ He delivered *them* into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass on before me, and put a space between droves.” ¹⁷ He commanded the one in front, saying, “When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, saying, ‘To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and to whom do these *animals* in front of you belong?’ ¹⁸ then you shall say, ‘*These* belong to your servant Jacob; it is a present sent to my lord Esau. And behold, he also is behind us.’ ” ¹⁹ Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the droves, saying, “After this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; ²⁰ and you shall say, ‘Behold, your servant Jacob also is behind us.’ ” For he said, “I will appease him with the present that goes before me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me.”

Can you imagine this? Esau would see one large drove of animals approaching him, replete with servants ready to tell him that Jacob wasn't far behind. Then, another drove would pull up with the same message, and then another. Finally, Jacob would be at the rear. Why would he be here? Jacob pulled up the rear for safety purposes, and also to let the peace offerings possibly soften the hardened soil in his brother's heart.

Should he have done this, especially after the type of prayer he just prayed? Probably not. The fact he resorted to this type of costly activity demonstrated he was probably still seeking to control his life. Have you ever had a weak moment after a stellar, moving time with God? Who hasn't? Did God use his plan? God had already worked for years in Esau's heart to prepare him for this day. Jacob didn't know this information, so from this perspective we can say his actions are somewhat instructive, although they are not the most optimal.

Ostensibly, how might this type of action play-out in your situation? If there have been years of absolute quiet between you and a brother, a couple of peace offerings, be what they may, might just be the way to chip away at the anger or bitterness which has divided you. Not that this would be my first course of action, but showing them you are thinking about them enough to send them a gift, of sorts, isn't necessarily a bad idea. In fact, it can be a softening agent for your eventual arrival for a real heart to heart conversation.

Seventh, is a principle from one of the stranger stories in all of the Bible.

Anticipate Further Chiseling of God (Genesis 32:21-32)

Just when you thought adversity had accomplished God's purposes in your life, God, who sees the true condition of your inner man better than you ever could, has a penchant for turning up the proverbial heat in your life to get you to go to a whole new spiritual

level. This is what occurs in Jacob's life the evening he spent alone on one side of Jabbok River with his family on the other. Read on and you will see what I mean.

²¹ So the present passed on before him, while he himself spent that night in the camp. ²² Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ He took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had. ²⁴ Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.

In the dim darkness of the desert, Jacob thought he heard something. All of a sudden, to his surprise, he encountered an intruder. Was it Esau? Was it a robber? Not knowing the identity of the person in his small camp, he rose to defend himself as his adrenaline kicked in. What had been a quiet, lazy evening erupted in an explosion of power as two men collided in a wrestling match to beat all wrestling matches. Having wrestled in High School, I can tell you, being out on the mat for three minutes seems like a lifetime. After six minutes your calves start cramping, your grip starts getting fatigued, and you realize you have a limited amount of energy. From what we can tell from the text, these two men went at it for several hours. Pushing, shoving, gripping, and grappling. Who was Jacob's opponent? The next verse gives us a clue:

²⁵ When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him.

Imagine wrestling someone who, at will, could merely touch a certain part of your body and it would immediately shrivel up and stop working. This tells you Jacob's opponent was no mere man. And ironically Jacob wrestled near the Jabbok, which literally means, "the wrestler." Don't tell me God doesn't have a way of tying things together in your life.

Who, exactly, did Jacob wrestle with in the darkness? Hosea tells us:

³ In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his maturity he contended with God. ⁴ Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed; He wept and sought His favor. He found Him at Bethel and there He spoke with us . . . (Hosea 12).

According to the inspired prophet, Jacob had wrestled God, or the pre-incarnate form of Jesus, the Christ. Jesus is pictured in the Old Testament as the Angel of the Lord, who, in turn, possesses divinity (Genesis 16:7-13; 22:15-18).³ Although He doesn't have this title here, Hosea ties the loose ends together with his insightful, intriguing, and revelatory statement.

When Jacob realized this was no ordinary opponent, he went from *resisting* to *clinging*. Interesting, wouldn't you say? During the first part of the match, his actions represented the old Jacob, while in the latter part of the match he became a new

³ John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 44-46.

wrestler, one who truly wanted all that God wanted on God's terms, not his. The ensuing verses tell us this much:

²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

Amazing. Now, more than anything else Jacob wanted the blessing of God straight out . . . without his (carnal) intervention in any way, shape, or form. A transformation had definitely occurred on the bank of the Jabbok that dark, confusing night, and it was all about the change in a man's heart about who really was Lord of his life.

Realizing something unusual had just occurred, Jacob pressed the angel:

²⁷ So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸ He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed."

What happened? Jacob received the coveted divine blessing he sought. The angel, God, changed his name from Jacob, the *Supplanter*, to Israel, the *Fighter of God*. A tired, but new man now stood on the bank of that river as the sun started to rise off in the distance.

As the once-in-a-lifetime event quickly drew to a close, Jacob asked the logical question, one Moses would ask later of the Angel of the Lord who appeared to him (Exodus 3:2).

²⁹ Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there.

The angel let him know he didn't need to ask the question because he knew, full-well who he had wrestled with; namely, the Lord himself.

How did Jacob respond to this breath-taking event?

³⁰ So Jacob named the place Peniel, for *he said*, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved." ³¹ Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh (Genesis 32).

Peniel is Hebrew for the "face of God." Imagine. Jacob hadn't just been in God's presence when he least expected it, he had touched and tussled with Him. What really occurred in this encounter? The old Jacob had become the new man with a new name and new potential.

What has all of this got to do with forgiveness in a fractured relationship? Everything. As with Jacob, God will most likely put you in a situation where you will figuratively wrestle with Him in his quest to move you to a different spiritual level altogether. More precisely, as you head to encounter your Esau, don't be surprised if you have a real spiritual struggle in your faith and with God. When, not if, this occurs realize that God loves you and desperately desires for you to put away the old you and put on the new you, one which will trust Him implicitly. Some might be in that struggle right

now. Take heart. Dawn will come and God will give you a new name. God will also bless you as you head toward Esau because now you will understand the blessing did, in fact, come from His good, loving hand.

What finally happened when Jacob met Esau? It couldn't have gone better.

¹ Then Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. ² He put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. ³ But he himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. ⁴ Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept (Genesis 33).

What did Esau do? How did he respond after all those hurts, coupled with all those silent years? Please, underline the verbs describing his actions toward his brother: Esau ran to Jacob, Esau embraced Jacob, Esau put his big, hairy, muscular arms around his brother's neck, and Esau kissed Jacob, and together these two grown men did something they never did before. They wept. Why were they crying? Desolation had been replaced by restoration, and it had all come about because both men had listened to the promptings and had followed the hard lessons of God.

Your Esau is waiting for your arrival. Don't let him down. Granted, right now the wonderful painting which used to be your relationship is covered by soot, dust, and grime, but if you will seek forgiveness, you will be amazed at the colors which will return for all to see.