

**“All in the Family”**

**Genesis 29:15-28**

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This morning our attention is drawn to one of the most intriguing characters in the Bible. His name was Jacob, the third patriarch of Israel.

His grandfather father was Abraham, and his father was Isaac. Jacob, in turn, had thirteen children, twelve sons and a daughter.

Some of you might even know the names of all twelve of his sons. They became the namesakes of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, with the exception of Joseph.

In spite of Jacob’s prominence in Israel’s history, at times he was not very well liked. This is because he was often playing tricks on people.

I don’t mean by this he was merely a practical joker who got on people’s nerves. His tricks were far more serious and harmful.

Jacob lived to get one up on those around him. For Jacob, life was a win/lose proposition, and he intended to come out on top.

The ends justified the means for Jacob, and he would stoop to any level to get what he wanted. Perhaps you have known people like this. How well do you like them?

Today’s text tells about a time someone got the best of Jacob. This was rare. As a matter of fact, it may have been the only time this occurred. Let me give you the details.

Jacob was on the run as our story begins. This was because his twin brother, Esau, vowed to kill him.

You recall that Jacob, with the aid of his mother, Rebekah, robbed Esau of Isaac's final blessing. Esau was the older of the twins, which meant he would inherit a double portion of his father's possessions and be the new authority figure in the family. As Isaac lay dying, Rebekah and Jacob deceived him into thinking he was giving Esau this blessing instead of Jacob.

When Esau discovered what his brother had done, he made it known he intended to kill Jacob after their father died. Rebekah knew Esau was serious, so she sent Jacob, who was always her favorite of the two boys, to her brother's house for protection.

When Jacob got close to Laban's house in Haran, he stopped at a well to get a drink of water. It was at this well that Jacob had a chance encounter with one of Laban's daughters, Rachel.

As far as Jacob was concerned, it was love at first sight. Jacob was smitten by Rachel's beauty and quickly decided this was the girl he was going to marry.

Jacob made a deal with Rachel's father, Laban, to work seven years in his fields for the right to marry this beautiful maiden. Laban agreed, and Jacob went to work.

Seven years later, Laban hosted a feast and gave Jacob his daughter's hand in marriage. Evidently, the bride wore a really dark veil, and Jacob had way too much to drink, because the next day he discovered that Laban had tricked him. Instead of marrying Rachel the day before, he married her less attractive sister, Leah.

Jacob was incensed, but there was nothing he could do about it. Laban tricked Jacob because he knew Jacob would stick around another seven years and work his fields for the right to marry Rachel, which is exactly what Jacob did. It appears Laban allowed Jacob to marry Rachel a week after he married Leah, but only if he promised to work seven years for the right to keep her.

**How does this story speak to us today?** It is one piece of a disturbing puzzle which makes up not only Jacob's life, but some of the members of his family. When you assemble all

the pieces and connect them, you see something alarming. Jacob came, for the most part, from a dysfunctional family. There was no shortage of drama, suspense, tension and turmoil. Something was always brewing, and it usually was not good.

**Why was Jacob's family dysfunctional at times?** They perfected the art of backstabbing and exploitation. Their relationships were laced with competition, deception, jealousy, favoritism, secrets, envy, selfishness, control and insensitivity.

It appeared everyone was guilty. No one was innocent. All of them played the game and contributed to the problem.

**What was the result?** For generations, their family endured numerous misunderstandings, hurt feelings, broken relationships and multiple factions. Mistrust led to resentment and revenge, traits which were passed on to future generations.

**How do you think God felt about all of this?** It had to break His heart, yet God loved Jacob and his family unconditionally and never gave up on them. God called upon them to renew the sacred covenant made with Abraham and seek His heart. God continued to work with them, in spite of their many flaws, to build a world based upon the ethic of love. It was a struggle, but God did not give up on Jacob and his family just as He doesn't give up on us.

**How does your family stack up against Jacob's?** Do you have some of the same dynamics going on? Do you see many similarities?

No one inherits a perfect family or develops flawless friendships. Every relationship has its ebb and flow. Misunderstandings are inevitable and feelings get hurt. People and circumstances change and so must relationships. This is normal and natural.

This is why developing and maintaining healthy relationships require an enormous amount of time and energy. Relationships demand attention, and when they don't get it, they suffer.

**What do you need to do this week to repair a broken relationship or maintain a healthy one?** I want you to think about this in the days ahead. Let me give you some things to consider.

*Identify anything which has become more important to you than maintaining healthy relationships with those around you.* Relationships will not survive if they are not your top

priority. Whatever becomes more important to you than cultivating healthy relationships will not only surpass the relationship but ultimately destroy it. What rival is threatening your relationships today?

*Take responsibility for what you are doing to contribute to the tension, turmoil and chaos among your relationships?* If your relationships, like Jacob's, are laced with competition, deception, jealousy, favoritism, secrets, envy, selfishness, control and insensitivity, you must ask if you are contributing to the problems. Own up to your part and begin working on changing your attitude and behavior.

*Learn the art of communicating, especially the difference between constructive and destructive criticism.* Choose your words carefully when talking to family members and friends. Words are powerful and cannot be taken back once spoken. Don't make a bad situation worse with inflammatory or degrading words. Learn how to be honest while expressing your thoughts in non-threatening ways.

While on vacation, I was reminded of the importance of words. Someone used a word in one of our conversations our six-year-old twin grandchildren, Kate and Jack, reacted to by saying, "We don't say that word." "What word?" I asked. "The 'S' word," they responded. "And what is the 'S' word?" I quizzed them. "Stupid," they replied.

"What other words should we not say?" I asked them. "The 'H' word...hate; the 'SH' word...shut-up; the 'F' word...fat; the 'D' word...dumb..." they told me. I have to tell you I was a little relieved over hearing the list of words because they could have been a little more shocking. However, I am thrilled they are learning the stewardship of words.

What words do you need to put on a "Don't Say" list? I have an idea you know them all too well!

*Adopt the mind of Christ and live by the Golden Rule.* Value love over hate, giving over getting, serving over being served, honesty over deception, selflessness over selfishness, healing over hurting, humility over arrogance, being kind over being cruel, forgiving over seeking revenge, encouraging over discouraging, being helpful over being critical, and building bridges of goodwill and understanding over walls of suspicion and hate. These values will provide fertile soil for relationships to grow.

*Be responsible and productive.* Don't expect others to carry your load. Laziness and indifference will erode relationships as quickly as deception and jealousy, so be disciplined and industrious.

*Be tenacious.* Don't let a relationship die without turning over every stone to resolve the problems.

*Ask God to help you.* If Jacob's life teaches us anything it is that God works on behalf of families like his. Look to God for the help you need to change your attitude, beliefs and behavior. Ask God for the humility you need to seek counseling and admit your faults and weaknesses. Lean on God to help you persevere when you want to quit.

**What is the first step you need to take today to begin this process?** By God's grace, I know you can do it.