

God Can Work Through Dysfunctional Families

by Jonathan Hershberger

FAITH STORY:

Genesis 33

Background passages: Genesis 27 & 32

FAITH FOCUS:

Jacob was, by all means, the epitome of the spoiled younger brother. In the background passages he was terrible to Esau, stealing his blessing, which was meant for the oldest son. Despite Jacob's trickery, and the initial reaction of wanting to murder him, Esau found it in his heart to reconcile things with his brother. At the end of chapter 33, even though things were still imperfect because Jacob didn't follow Esau to Seir, Jacob was no longer afraid for this life, and Esau no longer wanted to murder his brother out of revenge. Their relationship had been, for the most part, reconciled.

SESSION GOAL & OBJECTIVES:

Students will see that even Bible families had issues, and that God can, and does, work through and overcome "big problems" within families.

- Become familiar with the Bible story and identify how God worked within that family.
- Identify ways that they can positively react to their family's problems.

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- Enough cookies for each student to have 1-2.
- Bibles for everyone
- Play-Doh

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS:

If there is an even amount (or close) of upperclassmen as there are underclassmen, put a cookie or two in front of each upperclassmen. If there is not a close to even number, then just randomly pick half of the group who will get cookies. Make sure that you tell them that they cannot eat

the cookies yet. First, they must go get the Bibles, paper, and pens that you “forgot” in another room. When the upperclassmen leave, instruct the underclassmen to take the cookies from the upperclassmen’s spots, but don’t eat them.

When the upperclassmen get back, tell them that you’re sorry, but it’s too late and there is nothing they can do to get their cookies back.

Discuss: how does everybody feel about what happened?

When you are done discussing, bring out more cookies, and give each of the upperclassmen 1-2 more, so now everyone in the group has a cookie or two.

CONNECT:

Ask the students the following questions:

- Is the situation with the cookies like any situation you’ve ever been in with a sibling?
- Have you ever been angry or upset with a parent or sibling for something you’ve felt they did against you wrongfully?
- What do you do when a family member does something that really hurts you?

EXPLORE THE BIBLE:

Option 1 (for smaller youth groups): Split the group up into three groups. Assign one group to read Genesis 27, the second to read Genesis 32, and the third group to read Genesis 33. After each group is done reading, have them create a skit about the passage.

Perform the skits in order so everyone has a clear understanding of what happens in these three chapters.

Option 2 (for bigger youth groups): Do the same procedure, except with 6 groups. Split each chapter in half, and have them create skits for their half of each chapter.

After the Genesis 27 group(s) performs its skit, discuss:

- What is the big deal about the blessing that Jacob stole?
- Why did Jacob want to steal it in the first place?

(The blessing during this time period was very important for the oldest son. It signified the elder son becoming the head of the family, made him the carrier of the family heritage, and gave him the responsibility to carry on God’s promises to the next generation.)

- Is there any visible way that the conflict could be solved? Is so, how?
- Did Esau overreact? Would he be justified going through with his plan to end his brother's life?

After the Genesis 32 and 33 groups perform, ask the following questions:

- What do you think about how Jacob acted towards his brother?
- How do you think Esau was able to forgive his brother for the wrongs he had done?
- Did Jacob ever fully reconcile with Esau, after Esau reconciled with him?
- Why do you think that Jacob didn't follow Esau?

APPLY:

Divide into 4 groups and give each group a scenario of conflict that could arise within a family. (If they prefer to come up with another conflict, that's okay too.)

- 1 You are supposed to have the car to go out with your friends, and your sibling takes it and leaves.
- 2 You're trying to watch a movie with your friends, but your sibling is blaring their music in the next room.
- 3 You and your sibling share a room, and their stuff is always thrown everywhere, leaving no room for any of your stuff.
- 4 Every morning while you and your sibling are getting ready for school, they always take too long getting ready in the bathroom, leaving no time for you.

Each group should discuss their scenario and come up with good ways to handle the conflict, and share their conclusions with the whole group.

Then talk about the fact that these scenarios are relatively small compared to the conflicts and challenges that many families face. Assure students that it's okay if their family isn't perfect—no family is—not even the ones that may look like it on the surface. Sometimes families have conflicts that seem unsolvable. These situations involve praying, trusting God, and possibly working on them with a pastor or counselor.

RESPOND:

Ask students to use the Play-Doh to create symbols of their family, and to include in those symbols something that is a challenge or conflict in the family. It will be up to you as the teacher to decide

if you want to have students share about these symbols, and if you do, allow students to pass. Whether or not they share about their symbols, gather the Play-Doh creations together, form a circle around them, and spend time in prayer for what they represent. Encourage students to pray as well. The prayers may be specific or more general—again, you as a teacher will know best what will work with your group.

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

Even though we may think that a problem in a family seems irreversible or unsolvable, today's Bible story shows that there can be reconciliation. Esau went from wanting to kill his brother out of anger, to loving him. Even though Jacob had done a terrible thing to his brother, they were still able to mend their relationship. This, however, did not mean that everything became perfect. Jacob chose not to follow Esau. However, Jacob was no longer afraid for his life, and Esau was no longer after it. Through God's transforming powers, their relationship was mended.

When you find yourself in a conflict that seems like it will never be solved, remember to trust God, and know that God is bigger than the problem. Remember that God can use situations within the family and mend them, or even make the family better for making it through the conflict. At the same time, just because the problem can be resolved through God's powers, that does not mean that everything will turn out exactly like we want. God's ways are not always our ways, and God's timing is not always our timing.

WORKS CITED:

Martens, Elmer A, and Howard H. Charles, eds. **Believers Church Bible Commentary: Genesis**. Kitchener: Herald Press, 1987.