

## Family Dynamics

1. Warm up: Share something quirky or unique about your family from when you were growing up. Nothing heavy. Just something quirky.
2. Newton's First Law of Motion says that a body in motion tends to stay in motion, and a body at rest tends to stay at rest, until acted on by a greater outside force. In other words, patterns tend to perpetuate. Families are like that too. Patterns handed down from generation to generation tend to be enormously resilient to change. That means, before you were ever born, you were already being shaped by patterns at work in your parents and grandparents and generations before them. We see that same phenomenon powerfully at work in the life of Jacob. Read Genesis 25:19-28, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. Verse 22 tells us that before Jacob and his twin brother Esau were born, they were already "struggling together in the womb." In literature, that's what's called "foreshadowing." The words suggest that before Jacob's story began, he and his brother were already destined to become bitter rivals due to patterns set in motion in the lives of his parents and grandparents. This is an important reminder to us that, as Jeff put it, "Your story began before it ever began." We are all heavily influenced by patterns handed down from our ancestors. Picture a pie chart representing all the forces and experiences (past and present) that have shaped who you are. What percentage of those forces and experiences would you guess were put in motion before your birth? In other words, how much of who you are is a result of who your parents and grandparents were? Explain your answer.
  - b. Some of the patterns of thought and behavior handed down from our parents and grandparents are dysfunctional. Theologians sometimes refer to these patterns as "Generational Sin," i.e., negative patterns passed down through a family from generation to generation. The Generational Sin of Jacob's family was favoritism. Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, had two sons: Isaac and Ishmael. Abraham loved Isaac more than Ishmael and, at the insistence of Isaac's mother, Abraham exiled Ishmael and his mother. He just sent them away. How do you think that affected Ishmael? Ishmael's mother? Isaac?
  - c. Have you ever experienced favoritism in your own family or observed it in someone else's family? How did it affect the family?
  - d. Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Verse 27 tells us, "When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game, but Rebekah loved Jacob." So the same pattern of favoritism that tore Isaac's birth family apart eventually rippled through his own family and ultimately resulted in Jacob having to live in exile for many years (just like Ishmael had). Eventually Jacob had his own children and guess what? He played favorites with them, setting in motion tragedy for his children. Why would Jacob inflict the pain of favoritism on his

own children when he himself had been so wounded by favoritism? Why do you think the ripple effects of Generational Sins are so hard to stop?

3. Now let's make this concept of Generational Sin personal. Jeff described a Generational Sin handed down in his family from his parents – an excessively cautious, fearful approach to life. How about your family?
  - a. What is your family's greatest Generational Sin?
  - b. How has that Generational Sin affected you?
  - c. Have you been able to break the cycle of the Generational Sin or are you unwittingly passing it on to your children or others close to you? What are some ways to break these cycles of Generational Sin?
4. The patterns handed down through our families aren't all negative. Virtually all families are a complex mixture of both good and bad. So some of the patterns handed on to us can be wonderful and positive. You might call those patterns "Generational Blessings." Jacob experienced that too. His grandfather, Abraham, lived with an incredible sense of adventure and destiny. Read Genesis 12:1-7, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. Jacob grew up hearing the story of his Grandfather's bold decision to leave his native land and migrate to a place he'd never known before, believing God would make of his descendants a great nation that would bless the world. How do you think Jacob felt hearing those stories? How do you think they influenced him?
  - b. When Jacob himself was forced to flee his home and travel to a faraway land, he exhibited the same sense of adventure and destiny as had animated his Grandpa. And God ended up using Jacob's exile to further the fulfillment of the promise for building a great nation. Did your family imbue you with a sense of adventure and destiny? If so, how has that affected you? If not, how has that affected you?
5. Now let's make the concept of Generational Blessing personal. Jeff shared several stories about how parents, by their example, gave their kids beautiful patterns to carry forward in their own lives. Think about your family.
  - a. What is wonderful Generational Blessing handed down to you through your family or through a key influencer in your life?
  - b. How has that Generational Blessing affected your life?
  - c. Have you been able to pass your family's Generational Blessing on to your children or to others close to you? If so, how?
6. Has this conversation about Generational Blessings and Generational Sins caused any lightbulbs to go on for you? Has it affected the way you think about your family and upbringing? Has it affected how you think about your power to impact your own children or others close to you?

## **Genesis 25:19-28**

19 These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, <sup>20</sup>and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. <sup>21</sup>Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. <sup>22</sup>The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. <sup>23</sup>And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger."

<sup>24</sup>When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. <sup>25</sup>The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. <sup>26</sup>Afterwards his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

27 When the boys grew up, Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. <sup>28</sup>Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

## **Genesis 12:1-7**

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. <sup>5</sup>Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, <sup>6</sup>Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup>Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.