

*Read also Colossians 3:8-14. Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).*

How are your families getting along these days? Are you loving one another? Today we talk about a family in the book of Genesis. In this family there are moments of greatness and moments of sheer agony—ill-spoken words, deception, broken promises—and kept promises; the good, the bad, and the ugly. One thing I love about the Bible is that it tells it like it is. And it shows where God is in it all.

One of the greatest characteristics of God is God’s intention and ability to reconcile people, us with Him and also us with one another.

**Reconcile.** Do you know what that means? It means simply “compatible.” Agreement, harmony, become amicable or friendly.

When I was a child my mother’s way of conveying that was “kiss and make up.” My brother and I were not done with an argument until we did just that. Sometimes it was hard. Who wants to kiss their brother? But my mother made it easy. She simply told us we had to stay in our rooms until we were ready to do it.

Well, this story’s resolution is a little more difficult than a kiss. Tell “The Stolen Blessing” (Genesis 27:1-45).

What do you think? Is there hope? When we read this in “Conversation with God” this week, it was such a depressing story.

- Two sons, both desperate for blessing
- But only one blessing, so one was left out
- Parents were divided against one another
- The one who lost the blessing was miserable and turned to hate
- The one who won the blessing was banished and became a fugitive
- The mom’s scheme backfired. She never saw the son she loved again.

Out of something good, utter disharmony flowed. Irreconcilable differences because Jacob was so desperate for a blessing from his father. His whole life was about getting blessing. But he sought it from all the wrong places. If you know his story, you know he wanted the most beautiful wife. He was obsessed with success. His father’s blessing would make him alright. But, there were long-term consequences that no one anticipated.

The offended one, Esau, wanted to retaliate, but “two wrongs don’t make a right.”

What do you think? Can this be resolved? On Monday night, we couldn’t stop here. We had to hear the rest of the story. So here it is. Twenty years passed. Then Jacob sent a message to his brother . . . (READ Genesis 32:3-20, 33:1-11)

Have you ever felt an urge inside to do something? He felt an urging from God to reconcile. Perhaps Jacob also told himself, “I’ve had enough.” Or “I’m sick of the burden of dealing with

this pain.” But when he went, did you notice his worry? Would you define him as cautious, even terrified?

And wouldn't you say Esau seemed a little defensive as well? Was his intention to attack with his 400 men—or, not? It's hard to tell, and you might wonder how it could ever come off.

Reconciliation can be so tense.

Yet there was such a beautiful surprise when, Jacob bowing down, Esau ran to him, threw his arms around his neck, embraced him, and kissed him! They kissed and made up! And they both wept.

It makes me weep thinking about it because I can put my own family members or people close to me in this picture.

One day a pastor was leaving his church for the day. His wife had joined him there and they were going out to celebrate her birthday at a nice restaurant. About that time, an elderly man and his wife were walking on the sidewalk in front of the church when the man collapsed, an apparent heart attack. The minister rushed over to him while his wife called 911, and he began talking to the man, loosening his shirt, trying to calm him. To his surprise, the man looked up at him and said, “Forgive me, Charlie.”

“I'm not Charlie,” he said. “I'm Pastor Sam and I'm staying with you until we can get you help.” But the man urgently said, “Charlie, please. Forgive me.”

Again the pastor said, “I'm not Charlie. Stay calm now, and we'll get you to the hospital.”

But the man kind of turned ashen, and his condition was obviously worsening. Now in a whisper he repeated, “Charlie, I'm begging you. Please forgive me.” And the pastor then took him in his arms and said, “I forgive you. I forgive you.” Just afterwards, the man closed his eyes, his breathing stopped, and he was gone.

The next day the pastor found out that Charlie was the man's son, but he worried, ‘Should I have spoken that word of forgiveness on behalf of an estranged party?’ But he realized that forgiveness is God's intervention into a broken world.<sup>1</sup>

There are three sides of forgiveness, you see. God precipitates forgiveness. You never face it alone.

Jacob shows us that. He prayed to God when considering going home. There you will see God's willingness to help:

“O God of my grandfather Abraham, and God of my father, Isaac -- O LORD, you told me, ‘Return to your own land and to your relatives.’ And you promised me, ‘I will treat you kindly.’ I am not worthy of all the unfailing love and faithfulness you have shown to

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<sup>1</sup>Tom Long, “To Err is Human; To Forgive...?” in *Forgiveness* (Waco: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2001), 34-35.

me, your servant. When I left home and crossed the Jordan River, I owned nothing except a walking stick. Now my household fills two large camps! O LORD, please rescue me from the hand of my brother, Esau. I am afraid that he is coming to attack me, along with my wives and children. But you promised me, ‘I will surely treat you kindly, and I will multiply your descendants until they become as numerous as the sands along the seashore -- too many to count’” (Gen 32:9-12).

His prayer shows that God moved him to go back and reunite with his brother. It also shows God had made promises to him. So he trusted those promises because God had blessed him.

God blesses you too! Can you trust your blessings, that they are God’s favor toward you? Do you understand that as you try to do the right thing and lean on him, God will help you?

This is the three-sided coin of forgiveness. There’s your side and then there’s the other person’s side of the story—and then there’s God’s work, the bond in between. You never face forgiveness alone if you are a believer.

There are thousands of family situations, but let’s step back a little and see where forgiveness can go. Remember the civil war in Rwanda in the 1990’s that led to the genocide of about 800,000 people (United Nations estimate). One ethnic group against another, when it was all over, the country’s population had been severely diminished and its infrastructure decimated.

Recently, the New York Times highlighted an exhibit by photographer Pieter Hugo, [\*Rwanda 20 Years: Portraits of Reconciliation\*](#), which is currently on display in The Hague. The series was commissioned by Creative Court, an arts organization which has a program exploring the theme of forgiveness.

Churches have been active in helping people in Rwanda forgive, reconcile, and heal. The people who are photographed worked closely with AMI (Association Modeste et Innocent) and Pax Christi, the International Catholic Peace movement. Their work includes extended counseling, culminating in the perpetrator’s formal request for forgiveness. Other Christian organizations, like World Vision also work in Rwanda toward reconciliation.

Hear some of their stories about the power of forgiveness: (click on link above to see pictures and read stories)

Out of their extraordinary pain, Rwanda has become a light to the rest of the world. Forgiveness is a gift of God in which God is totally active. Thus there are three sides. Grasp the power of forgiveness.

AMEN