

Series: "Good News for Families"

First Families

Genesis 1:26-31

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We're starting a series called "Good News for Families." A lot of people are worried about the family in our society. There is cause for concern. Society and culture have changed rapidly and dramatically—for good and for bad. We could use good news.

I'm not as interested in talking about "the family" in general. I want us to hear the good news in our particular situations. All of us have some experience with families. And we want what's good for our family. We pray for the health and well-being of our families. We want peace in our families. We want to be good parents or caregivers. We look for guidance in our relationships. You may be married or never married or no longer married. You may have young children at home or your children may be grown and gone or you may never have had children. Wherever we are and whoever we are, good news comes to us in the Bible.

In trying to hear the gospel, the good news, for families, I don't mean to exclude anyone. Something in these messages will apply to you wherever you are. We'll explore guidance for following Jesus that applies to all of our relationships. At the same time, we want to find some specific help for our family relationships.

Today, we're starting at the beginning to see God as the Source of life, including families. When Jesus was questioned about marriage and divorce, he referred people to the Creation story. As we review it, we'll get an idea of God's intention for families. We'll look at some of the first families in Scripture and see that things went away from God's intention, but we'll also be encouraged that God can work with messed up families.

Genesis 1 is a great hymn of creation. It celebrates that God is Creator and that God's creation is good. That good creation includes people who are made in God's image to relate to God and represent God. God creates so he can bless. God blesses fish and birds in verse 22. God blesses humans and in blessing them gives the commission to "Be fruitful

and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (28). "Subdue" there doesn't mean to run roughshod over the world or to destroy creation. It means to manage it according to God's character, to be stewards of what God gives.

But as we're talking about families, the point to emphasize is God's intention that human beings become fruitful and multiply. God intended human beings to reproduce and increase.

Genesis 2 tells another creation story. This one has a different emphasis. It focuses on the personal and relational aspect of God's creating humans. God creates Adam, the man. Then God creates the woman to be a suitable helper. God performs the first wedding as he presents the woman to the man. This is what Jesus referred to when he answered a question about marriage. God joins a man and a woman together in marriage and they become one flesh (2:24; Mark 10:1-12).

God creates us for relationships. We relate to God. We relate to each other in various ways. Marriage and family provide one of the structures for human relationships. In Genesis, this starts out so good. There's no competition or antagonism. The man and the woman are equal in value and status. There's a beautiful unity.

But then something goes wrong. Adam and Eve, who represent us, decide they want to be like God on their own instead of in right relationship with God. They disobey God and take matters of good and evil into their own hands. This causes separation between God and people and it introduces separations into human relationships. God pronounces curses on creation; these affect humans (3:14-19). But the curses aren't God's intention; they're the tragic results of the separation that comes through sin. God will restore people and the rest of creation to his original intention, but it will be a long and painful journey to achieve that.

In the rest of Genesis, we see the first families in the shadow of sin. I know we're supposed to be talking about *good* news for families, but we need to hear the bad news to appreciate the good.

Adam and Eve have two sons. Cain murders Abel and then goes into exile. One of his descendants becomes even more violent. Adam and Eve

have another son named Seth. Even when they sin, God shows grace to this family—preserving, protecting, and providing for them.

Later, Noah and his family are protected in the ark from God's judgment on the world. God's rebellious children had so corrupted creation that God decided to start over with Noah and his family. But the rebellion and corruption continued with Noah's descendants.

Genesis 1-11 shows God dealing with humanity in general. After each outbreak of human sin and rebellion, God allows the consequences of sin, but also responds with an act of grace. But in chapter 11, there's the Tower of Babel. Humanity disobeys God's command to fill the earth as they try to stay in one place and build a monument to themselves. God confuses their language and scatters them. There seems to be no act of grace here. But toward the end of Genesis 11, a family is introduced. It's the family of a man named Abram.

From chapter 12 on, the focus is on Abram, later called Abraham, and his family. The act of grace is God's calling Abraham and Sarah. God deals with this one family that will produce a nation that's to be a light to the other nations. God blesses Abraham so that Abraham will be a blessing to all people.

The story of Abraham's family fills the rest of Genesis. We see Abraham and Sarah hearing from the LORD and following the LORD. We also see them try to take matters into their own hands. They try to accomplish in their own power what God had promised to do for them. God makes a covenant with Abraham and Sarah. The covenant includes God's promises of descendants and land. It calls for them to trust God and obey him. They finally have the son God promised—Isaac. Later Abraham demonstrates his trust in God as he begins to sacrifice Isaac to the LORD. But God interrupts the sacrifice and provides a ram to be offered instead.

As you read these stories, you see all kinds of family dynamics. There's a lot of what we call dysfunction today. God's working through them and staying faithful to his covenant with this family is a witness to God's grace.

Isaac married Rebekah. They have two sons—Esau and Jacob. Again we see lots of dysfunction—or sin. The parents play favorites with their

sons. Jacob is a deceiver and trickster. He eventually has to run away to escape his brother's rage. He goes to live with his uncle, who is also quite the deceiver.

Jacob ends up marrying two women—Leah and Rachel. With them and their servant girls, he fathers twelve sons and a daughter. With his family and flocks and herds, he eventually makes his way back to the land God promised to give Abraham and his descendants.

Jacob fears meeting his brother Esau. But he finds grace and forgiveness, if not reconciliation, when they do meet again.

God changes Jacob's name to Israel. His twelve sons become the heads of the tribes of Israel. Jacob favors one son, Joseph, and there's jealousy and conflict among the brothers. They finally sell Joseph into slavery. He's taken to Egypt where God blesses him and uses him to preserve Israel's family. That's where Genesis ends.

Abraham's family becomes the nation of Israel. God delivers them from slavery in Egypt, leads them through the wilderness, and establishes them in the land of promise. They reach a point where they ask for a king. After kind of a false start with Saul, God appoints David as king. God makes a covenant with David and promises him that he will always have a descendant who will rule Israel. David's family was truly messed up. He had several wives and their children (half siblings to each other) raped and murdered one another. One of David's sons led a rebellion against him and was killed in the aftermath. Still, God kept working through this family to fulfill God's promise.

Some of David's descendants were faithful to God and some weren't. But God's promise to David gave the nation hope that there would be a great king, a Messiah, like David someday.

The New Testament opens with a genealogy that starts with Abraham and goes through David until it comes to Jesus the Messiah. This family tree of Jesus reminds us of God's promises and faithfulness to Abraham and David and all the others. It includes five women. That's unusual in itself, but these women also each were foreigners or outcasts in some way.

We get a little glimpse of the family life of Jesus in the Gospels. We'll look at that in a later sermon.

This survey we've taken today shows us that families were God's idea. That's good news. God cares about our families and wants us to be part of God's family. We've seen that the first families, and all the rest after them, went away from God and failed to fulfill God's intention. That helps us see why we and our families can be as messed up as we are. But we also see that God doesn't give up on us. God keeps working through messed up people. God remains faithful. God keeps his covenant. God will forgive and restore us when, with God's help, we turn to him in faith and commit ourselves to him. God wants to work in and through our families now. We'll spend the next few weeks exploring some ways God does that.

But today, we're invited to renew our covenant with God, to rededicate ourselves and our families to him, to open our hearts and homes to the Lord so he can do his gracious work in us.