

Down Home: Names, faces, a huge 'family' & embarrassment

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Have you wondered about biblical situations that aren't mentioned specifically in Scripture? They're in the Bible, all right, but you can't cite chapter and verse.

For example, think about Jacob's grandchildren. Do you reckon the old patriarch could call them all by name?

The Bible tells us he had 12 sons, and Lord only knows how many daughters came along. They all had large families back then. So, Jacob could have been called "Grandpa" by well more than 100 grandchildren. Do you think he kept them all straight?

'You sort of look like Naphtali'

If you use your spiritual imagination, you can see old Jacob heading out to the corrals late in the afternoon, his mind on dinner. "You, boy!" he calls out to a small child with curly black hair. "You're one of Naphtali's sons, right? You sort of look like Naphtali. Go fetch your granddad a goat."

Sometimes, I think about Jacob when I attend large Texas Baptist meetings. Our "family" is huge, and one of the challenges at these gatherings is matching names with faces in a nanosecond. At any event, any one of thousands of folks could show up. And we don't see each other all that often, so pairing the right name with the right face in a given moment creates an intricate memory obstacle course.

Sadly, I must admit failure. This wasn't the first time, but that doesn't make it any less distressing.

Recently, I traveled to Waco for the [funeral of Diana Garland](#), the wonderful founding dean of Baylor University's school of social work, which now bears her name.

After the service, I saw a woman I've obviously known before. She stepped around a longtime out-of-state friend I was waiting to greet. The second I saw her, I associated this woman with the daughter of another longtime friend, for two reasons: She closely resembles the daughter of my friend. And that daughter of my friend also is closely connected to the other friend I was waiting to greet.

An embarrassing moment

So, after we both said hi, I asked this young woman, "How's your mom?" because my friend has had some health issues. A cloud crossed her face. She mumbled, "Just fine." She excused herself and disappeared in the crowd.

Shortly afterward, but not quickly enough, I realized: "She is *not* who I thought she was. ... So, who is she?" Before I could go after her and apologize, she was nowhere to be found.

Since then, I've been psychologically whacking myself for messing up like that. Part of my preacher's kid predisposition is to not hurt people's feelings. And nothing stings quite like not being known.

I even found some Facebook pictures of the woman for whom I mistook this young woman and sent them to a friend who probably knew almost everyone in the room. "Do you know a young woman who looks almost like this but is not this person?" I asked.

He wrote back to say he saw the woman I mentioned, and he thought she was the person I originally labeled her as. That made me feel a little better, but I was no closer to making a positive ID so I could look her up and

apologize.

What's the point of all this? Well a couple of things.

First, when you go to big Baptist meetings and you're not wearing a nametag, say your name when you greet people. Don't assume other casual acquaintances know you instantaneously. There are just too many of us, and we don't see each other often enough.

God loves each of us

And second, I'm so grateful God Almighty knows each of our names. When you contemplate the universe contains billions of galaxies, each with billions of stars, we can feel miniscule. But the Bible says God not only knows us, but God knows all about us and loves us. What a gift.

Oh, and third, if you're a young woman who attended a funeral in Waco, and I asked, "How's your mom," and I don't know your mom, then please forgive me. And please, please chalk my forgetfulness up to age and not intention.