

Voices: A corrective action of God for a dysfunctional family

November 21, 2022

As every people group has its own culture and tradition, every family also has its own family system and way of management. When each family member follows the family system, that family will be called a functional family. When a family is functioning well, there will be peace and unity in the family.

In the Bible, there is a family not functioning properly. We may call it a dysfunctional family. This was Isaac's family. Isaac, one of the patriarchs, planned in his old age to bless his older son Esau before he died (Genesis 27:1-4). That was an acceptable right for a father in the ancient Jewish culture.

However, his wife Rebekah had a different plan against her husband. As a result, Jacob, the younger son, received his father's blessing in the place of his brother Esau (Genesis 27:5-23).

Since Isaac and his wife Rebekah were not in one accord, the family's unity and peace became impossible in the family. As a result, enmity arose between the twin brothers. It must have been heartbreak for both Isaac and Rebekah.

Jacob might have been feeling guilty and insecure for his wrongdoing. He should have done something to reconcile with his brother, but he didn't do it. Instead, he just ran away from his brother and went to his uncle Laban.

This story reminds me of the problem of some parents who have favoritism among their children.

What did God do with Jacob, a liar?

I strongly believe God was not happy with Jacob's lie. But God still loved Jacob and provided him a safe journey to his uncle Laban. Why? I don't know for sure. Only God knows it. God must have a reason (Genesis 28:11-22).

God blessed Jacob with wives, children and prosperity during his stay with his uncle Laban. The Bible tells us that even Jacob's prosperity exceeded his uncle (Genesis 30:43).

Jacob lived 20 years in Paran-aram, serving his uncle. He became rich, but he was not happy in that foreign land. As the Lord told him, Jacob was longing to go back to his father's land.

He still was feeling afraid of his brother, but a part of him was feeling homesick. He wanted to be reunited with his twin brother. So, he took a risk and journeyed by faith back to his father's land.

Jacob had a repentant heart.

He decided to ask his brother for his forgiveness by sending out his servants ahead of him. He sent them with oxen, asses, flocks, and men and women servants to meet his brother Esau (Genesis 32:1-5).

Jacob spent one night being alone and praying to God. The Bible says Jacob was wrestling with God and won the wrestling, but his hip was broken (Genesis 32:24-25). I do not believe Jacob literally won the wrestling. It may mean Jacob won the heart of God by his grace.

Jacob became a changed person after meeting with God.

God not only changed Jacob's heart but also his name. Jacob became Israel (Genesis 32:27-28). The word "Jacob" in Hebrew means "supplanter," which often is interpreted as someone who seizes, circumvents or usurps. The word "Israel" means "let God prevail."

At a crucial moment in his life, Jacob wrestled with a serious challenge. His heart was tested. Through his wrestling with God, Jacob proved what was most important to him. He demonstrated he was willing to let God prevail in his life. As a result, he was changed and redirected by God. Taking this new name was a sign of receiving the covenant his father and grandfather had received.

Jacob was reunited with his brother peacefully.

When Jacob met his twin brother Esau, he humbled himself and bowed to the ground seven times, which was a sign of respect. Esau and Jacob both became very emotional. The Bible says: "Esau ran to Jacob and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they wept" (Genesis 33:4).

What a joyful moment it might have been when the twin brothers reunited with a forgiving heart after 20 years of separation. The Psalmist expressed a similar experience: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1).

Conclusion

Jacob was born and grew up in a dysfunctional family. He and his twin brother faced the consequences of his family's dysfunctionality. However, God intervened in their family life.

As Jacob reminded himself of God's presence in his life, God guided his way and corrected him. At the end, he became a victorious person.

Today, every Christian family needs God's corrective action in their family life. There are many broken families in the world. Children are the victims of those broken families. God can do anything for us if we repent from our wrongdoing and let God prevail in our life.

Rev. Thong Kho Lun is the pastor of Greater Houston Burmese Christian Fellowship in Houston. The views expressed are those of the author.