

Class Notes

(To go with Packet 6)

I. Medical Model of Intervention

- a. Primary

- b. Secondary

- c. Tertiary

II. Three way we might respond to hurts as described by David Augsburger in his book, Helping People Forgive:

- a. Account

- b. Appease

- c. Apologize

Other notes:

Lesson 6 Handouts – Family Conflicts

I. Introduction

Many incidents of conflict between parents and their children and between siblings are recorded in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, Jesus predicts conflict among family members. Since most of us spend our first 18 years with our family of origin (or parts of it) and eventually many more years with the families we go on to establish, it should come as no surprise that many of our conflicts are experienced in these close relationships.

When a child is born, it enters the world totally dependent on adult caregivers. Increased independence is gradually sought and granted as that child grows in years and in maturity. Eventually, the child ventures out on its own – some sooner than others!! Parents who have been accustomed to meeting their children’s needs and making early decisions on their behalf often find it difficult not to interfere as those children make their own choices. Different expectations and goals, the tendency of parents to overprotect and hang on, and the child’s move toward independence – sometimes including outright rebellion – all make family times challenging in the best of circumstances. Conflict will be encountered in the normal course of events. Some have said, “All families are dysfunctional!”

In many homes, there are added stressors to deal with: parental substance abuse, domestic assault, child neglect or abuse, losses of many kinds, chronic illness or other special needs, and traumatic events. Life is often hard; events can result in a sense of guilt and times of confusion, extreme pain, and estrangement.

Hurt within a family can be particularly painful and damaging. Home is where we expect to feel safe and supported. Minor disagreements can escalate to major feuds. Betrayal or other deep hurts can result in distance and silence.

This week we are going to explore what forgiveness within a family might look like. God intended families to be a nourishing setting where faith can be passed on and healthy living experienced. But in this fallen world, things can and do go wrong.

TO DO: -Brainstorm a minute and jot down examples of conflicts – small and large – that you have experienced in your own family or observed in families of others. An example would be divorced parents competing for a child’s devotion, criticizing each other and asking the children to take sides.

-In your immediate or extended family, can you identify relationships that need healing?

II. OPTIONAL: Mother-Daughter Conflict

Read the excerpt from the book, Between Heaven and Texas on the next few pages and **answer the questions** at the end. **NOTE: This is optional.**

Between Heaven and Texas: A Challenge in Forgiveness

This novel centers on the lives of twin sisters whose husbands have left them. They are in close contact with their families of origin as they face the challenge of being single parent families. **Mary Dell** and her husband **Danny** had longed for a child for years. They were thrilled with a late, unexpected pregnancy. However, when little **Howard was diagnosed with Down Syndrome**, his father was unable to cope and left. Mary Dell is totally accepting and loving – and fiercely protective of her baby. She is living in a setting where people are not familiar with Down Syndrome, so she researches and advocates for him. She has had a tenuous relationship with her own mother, Taffy, who tends to be dramatic and difficult, often alienating friends.

In this context, Taffy is often centered on how circumstances are affecting HER rather than focusing on supporting Mary Dell and Howard. During a picture taking session in the hospital when she is holding newborn Howard, *“after the shutter snapped, Taffy turned him (Howard) around, looked into his little face, and started to weep. “Oh, you poor little thing! What’s going to become of you? Oh, this poor baby!”*

Dutch (Taffy’s husband and Mary Dell’s father) was at her side in an instant. *“Hush now, darlin’,” he said, patting her shoulder. “Hush.”*

He looked up at Mary Dell, who was staring at Taffy.

“Don’t pay any mind, baby girl. Your momma is just tired. Come on now, Taffy. It’s going to be all right. Stop crying.”

But Taffy did not stop crying. Instead, she lifted her eyes from Howard’s face to her husband’s and back again.

*"How? How is it going to be all right" Everything has gone wrong? First Lydia Dale gets a divorce, and now my grandson is born a **retard!**"*

Mary Dell had heard that word before, of course, but never in reference to her son. Over the years, she would hear it used in the same way again, many times. It would always unleash a flame of fury in her breast, but it never burned quite as high or hot as it did on that day, when that ugly, awful, dehumanizing word came from the lips of her own mother.

"Give me my baby."

Taffy sniffled, wiped her eyes on her sleeve, got to her feet, and handed Howard to Mary Dell, who handed him to Donny before turning back to face Taffy."

*"Now you listen to me, Momma," she said in a voice that was low and fierce, a tone unlike anything any of them had ever heard her use before, "because I'm only giving you one chance. I'm not going to let you make my baby feel like he's not good enough, or smart enough, or **ANYTHING** enough to please you. It's one thing to do it to me, but I won't let you do it to my son. He is beautiful and smart. And he's going to learn to walk, and run, and read, and go places, and do things you've never even **DREAMED** of doing.*

*"And if you ever, I mean **EVER** call him retarded or use that word in my presence again, that will be the last time you ever see Howard or me."*

Taffy's jaw dropped and her eyes, already brimming, spilled over with a fresh wave of weeping. She started to speak, but Mary Dell wouldn't allow it. She lifted her hand and pointed a finger of warning, ramrod straight, at her mother's face.

"I mean it, Momma. Never again."

Taffy's lips twisted. She let out a cry and ran from the room sobbing, the sound of her cries and footsteps echoing down the corridor. For a breath of a moment, the family stood stunned and watched as Mary Dell lowered her hand....." (pp. 101-102)

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When Mary Dell made up her mind to be happy, she was. End of story.....After the initial shock of the diagnosis, Mary Dell saw Howard as the answer to her prayers, a gift from God. Once she'd made up her mind about that, she couldn't understand that anybody else might not feel the same way or take longer to reach the same conclusion. All she had wanted was a healthy and happy baby, and that's what she'd gotten. She understood the responsibility and challenges that lay before her, but that didn't stop her from being thrilled by this miracle child. (p.122)

After a couple months, Danny - Mary Dell's husband and Howard's dad- disappeared and sent Mary Dell a letter containing the words, "You are so strong, Mary Dell. That's one of the things I've always admired about you. You'll do a better job of raising Howard on your own than with me there, getting in the way. I know you might not believe that right now, but it's true, and in time you'll see I was right. I don't expect you to forgive me for going away or understand why I can't stay, but try to believe me when I tell you I can't..."

.....Taffy felt this crisis presented the perfect opportunity for her to return to her daughter's good graces. After what Donny had done, surely Mary Dell would realize that her regrettable but innocent utterance of one teeny-weeny offensive word was not so terrible, or at least not spoken with malice. After all, Howard was her grandson and Mary Dell was her daughter and she loved them both, no matter what...It was the duty of a mother to come to the aid of her daughter at her moment of anguish and despair. Mary Dell needed her

It took some doing, but Lydia Dale (Mary's sister) eventually convinced Taffy that this was **NOT** the proper moment for a mother-daughter reconciliation...and that if she really wanted to help, the best way to do so was to take care of the grandchildren while others talked with Mary Dell..... (pp.27-128)

Some time later.....

Mary had ongoing contact with her father but little with her mother. She commented to her dad, "Here, Daddy, I'll take him (Howard). We should get going anyway. I just wanted to stop by and let you know what I was up to." She kissed him and took the baby from his arms. "Tell Momma and Lydia Dale where I went, will you?"

"Baby girl, don't you want to run up to the house and tell your momma yourself? She's all torn up to think you're still mad with her. And she's just itching to get her hands on this little baby. She wanted to come see you when you were feeling so low, but your sister didn't think that would be a good idea."

....."You know," Dutch went on, "Taffy didn't mean what she said at the hospital that day – not the way it came out. It was a terrible thing to say, but people or age...well it was just ignorance, that's all. And she was upset. We all were. Took a little getting used to, even for you. Don't try to say it didn't."

"I know," Mary Dell said. "But Daddy, I got a lot on my plate right now. And Momma...every time I see her, there ends up being some kind of drama. I just don't have the energy for it. Or the time. I'll see her when I get back. And I'll bring Howard."

"Thank you, baby girl. I know that'll mean a lot to her..." (p.145)

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After Taffy has caused another kind of stir in the family, Mary Dell thinks, "I've had it with her! And if she EVER says another careless word about Howard – that's it. I'll never speak to her again, and I don't care what Daddy says."

Mary Dell felt a twinge of guilt. She knew she should forgive and forget, but this was easier said than done. She'd never been particularly short tempered, not until recently. These days, it took just about every ounce of energy she had to keep from exploding, sometimes over the silliest things. She'd always said that there would be less offense given if less offense were taken. But when those offenses were directed toward Howard, it was a whole different ball game. When someone was mean to her baby, she became not just offended, but incensed.....

Discussion

What is the offense in this vignette?

What other crisis does Mary Dell experience that impacted her coping ability?

Discuss why it is so especially hard to forgive the ones closest to us?

Why do you think it was hard for Mary Dell to talk directly to her mother?

What role did her father play?

What did Taffy, Mary Dell's mother, feel and do that might eventually lead to softening of Mary Dell's attitude?

How have you handled inevitable tough moments between you and your mother? You and your daughter, if you have one?

III. Parental Favoritism and Sibling Rivalry

Ephesians 6:1 has been quoted so often that most parents and children can recite it: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” Not as familiar to many is the first part verse four of that same chapter: “Fathers, do not exasperate (provoke) your children...”

-What are some ways parents can knowingly or unintentionally exasperate their children?

A common experience among children is sibling rivalry. Although typical and a normal part of growing up, sibling rivalry can be exacerbated by parents showing favoritism. You may have experienced this as a child or as an adult – or you may have shown favoritism toward a child. Jealousy, rifts, resentment, bitterness, and/or alienation can occur as a result of actual or perceived favoritism. Siblings may end up in a place where they are faced with questions such as “Can I forgive my parent for that?” or “Can I stand to be with that sibling?” or “Will she forgive me?”

Total “fairness” is evasive, probably impossible. No matter how hard parents may try to avoid it, a child may still *perceive* favoritism from his vantage point. Remember the **brother of the prodigal son**? Other times, preference and favoritism is blatant.

Parental Favoritism in Genesis

A. Isaac and Rebekah:

Favoritism in two successive generations is described in Genesis. Isaac, Abraham's long desired son, married Rebekah when he was 40 years old. Rebekah had trouble getting pregnant but finally had twin boys 20 years later. Esau, the first born, was an outdoor type, while Jacob was a quieter lad.

-Read Genesis 25:27-28. "...Isaac loved _____ but Rebekah loved _____". Each parent had an obvious favorite with dire consequences.

-Read Genesis 27: 1-45.

1. What did Rebekah encourage and arrange?
2. How did Esau react in verses 33, 34, and 41?
3. As a result, what did Jacob do? (verses 42-45)
4. Jacob eventually married Rachel, after first being tricked into marrying her sister 7 years earlier. **What does Genesis 29:30 say?**
5. Below we will see this favoritism resulting in sibling rivalry for their children. Years later, Jacob realized he was going to meet up with his estranged brother, Esau. **Read Genesis 31:3 and 32:1-21.**

- What do you think Jacob expected?

-What makes you think he felt at least a little bit guilty?

-What happened when Jacob and Esau finally met? (See Genesis 33:1-5)

-What must have happened in Esau's soul (mind, will, emotions) during those years?

B. Jacob and Rachel:

Like her mother-in-law, Rebekah, Rachel also had trouble getting pregnant. Her sister, Leah, Jacob's other wife, bore Jacob many children. But Jacob's favorite children were his two sons with Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. In spite of his own bad experience as a child with sibling rivalry, Jacob repeated the pattern with his sons. **Read and write out Genesis 37:3a.**

1. To add insult to injury, Jacob made his favoritism obvious by doing what? (verse 33:b)
2. Joseph didn't help matters either. Read verses 5-11 of chapter 37 and **describe how Joseph taunted his brothers.**
3. Read the rest of Genesis 37, and **describe the brother's feelings and their actions.**
4. **Where did Joseph end up?**

23 years later Joseph and his brothers would meet again! In a future lesson, we will read the rest of this story. These passages describe the lingering effects of sibling rivalry. It is but one example of stress in a family that can lead to separation, sin, estrangement – with the challenge of forgiving and being forgiven.

There are ways other than favoritism that parents can knowingly or unintentionally "exasperate their children":

- little affirmation
- criticism

- lack of attention
- setting a bad example through problem substance use or disruption of a marriage including forcing children to take sides with one parent or the other
- setting one child against another
- physical abuse; sexual abuse

Thought Questions:

Write down any comments or observations you have after doing this lesson. Any action points needed in your own life? We don't seem to find Isaac or Jacob apologizing for what they stirred up in their sons, but could there be a benefit for you to do so – if you have shown obvious favoritism or caused other hurts that have caused stress that has not been resolved? Or is there a need for healing between siblings in your family of origin?