

**Anglican Church Noosa**  
**September 13**  
**Genesis 25 and 26**  
**Call | Covenant | Cost - Family Dysfunction**  
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There's a particular kind of comedy that happens in families, isn't there?

You can be perfectly normal everywhere else.

You can be patient at work.

You can be gracious at church.

You can be thoughtful with friends.

But then you get home...

And somehow the people who know you best can bring out the worst in you.

Families have a remarkable ability to expose us.

Because family is where we are known.

And where we are known, our strengths **and** our weaknesses become visible.

Genesis 25 to 27 give us a family that is very much like that - this is the family of Isaac and Rebekah.

Now we need to remember that they are the family of promise.

They are God's covenant people.

They have received God's promises to Abraham.

And yet ... they are profoundly dysfunctional.

There is parental favouritism. There is sibling rivalry.

There is deception. There is fear. There is conflict.      There is a repeated failure to trust God.

And yet, amazingly, God continues to work through them.

And that's where I want us to land today:

***God's covenant purposes continue  
despite our family dysfunction,  
but God's grace calls us  
to break the patterns of dysfunction  
rather than pass them on.***

We're going to see three things today.

**1. Dysfunction is often passed from one generation to the next.**

**2. Our attempts to control life reveal our failure to trust God, and dysfunction can become deception.**

**3. God's faithfulness gives us hope for our families.**

## 1. Dysfunction is often passed from one generation to the next

Genesis 25 introduces us to Isaac's family.

Isaac and Rebekah have twin boys:

Esau and Jacob. You will remember that we read of their birth last week. From the beginning, these two boys are in conflict. They struggle together in Rebekah's womb.

God tells Rebekah: "Two nations are in your womb... and the older will serve the younger." When the boys were born, Esau came out first, with Jacob following, grasping Esau's heel.

So today, we find the boys grown up, and there's this extraordinary sentence: "Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob."

It's shocking in its simplicity and directness.  
Dad loves Esau. Mum loves Jacob.

And we shouldn't gloss over that - because favouritism within a family is deeply destructive.

Children notice....

- who gets praised.
- they notice who gets listened to.
- they notice who seems to be the favourite.
- they notice who gets compared with whom.

And even when parents don't intend to communicate favouritism, children can experience it.

But here, the text deliberately shows us the division. Isaac has **his** son. Rebekah has **hers**. And the result is .... rivalry. Jacob and Esau aren't simply different personalities. They are competitors.

And then we get this episode about the birthright. Esau comes in from the field exhausted and Jacob is cooking stew. Esau says: "Give me some of that stew!" Jacob says: "Sell me your birthright first." Esau is just plain hungry, and Jacob sees an opportunity.

And sadly, Esau trades something immensely valuable for something that is immediately satisfying.

It pretty clear this is a family where everyone is looking after number one.

Isaac favours Esau. Rebekah favours Jacob. Esau thinks about satisfying his appetite. Jacob thinks about getting what he wants.

And before you know it, the family of promise looks remarkably broken.

But it important to note that this **didn't** begin with Isaac and Rebekah. We've seen the same patterns in the previous generations. Abraham and Sarah struggled with God's promise.

Sarah and Hagar were caught in a conflict. Abraham showed favour to Ishmael. Sarah insisted that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away.

And now, in the next generation, we see division between these two sons. Dysfunction can travel through generations. Not inevitably. But often.

What we experience can shape what we reproduce.

- If you grow up in a family where anger is normal, you learn anger.
- If you grow up in a family where conflict is avoided, you learn avoidance.
- If you grow up in a family where love has to be earned, you spend your life trying to earn love.
- If you grow up being compared with your siblings, you can become competitive.

- If you've been wounded, sometimes you can unintentionally wound others.

But that's why the gospel has such good news for families.

Jesus doesn't merely forgive individual sins. He transforms the patterns that shape our lives, the patterns that shape who we are. The fact that something has been happening in your family for generations doesn't mean it has to continue through you. You can be the person who says: "It stops here." Harshness; bitterness; manipulation; comparison; the refusal to apologise; the silence. By the grace of God, a new pattern can begin.

Through the work of the gospel in our lives, we can be the ones who say: "It stops here."

## **2. Our attempts to control life reveal our failure to trust God and dysfunction can become deception**

Now let's move into chapter 26

We didn't read this portion, but here's a catch up. There's a famine in the land. And God speaks to Isaac in v2: "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live."

And Isaac goes to the land of the Philistines. And God repeats the covenant promise. Listen to v3: "Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and I will bless you." And v4: "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky... and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed."

This is crucial. God has promised Isaac: "I will be with you." "I will bless you." "I will keep my covenant."

Isaac doesn't need to manufacture the promise. He just needs to trust God. But then we get v7 and Isaac is afraid. The local men ask about Rebekah. And Isaac says: "She is my sister."

Why does he say that? Well he's afraid they will kill him because Rebekah is beautiful.

Now, if that sounds familiar, it should, because Abraham did almost exactly the same thing. Twice. Isaac is repeating his father's behaviour. God says: "I will be with you." Isaac says, in effect: "Yes, but I need to protect myself."

And isn't that something we all do?

God says: "Trust me." We say: "I know, but..."

God says: "I will provide." We say: "Yes, but I'd better make sure I've got a backup plan."

God says: "You are secure in me." We say: "but I need everyone else to approve of me."

God says: "Forgive." We say: "they don't deserve it."

God says: "Don't be anxious." We say: "but what if...?"

The problem isn't that Isaac doesn't know God's promise. He does.

The problem is that fear becomes more real to him than God's faithfulness. And fear is powerful.

Often the dysfunction in our families isn't about bad people doing bad things. It's often about frightened people trying to protect themselves.

And the answer isn't: "Try harder."

The answer is: "Trust God more deeply."

God is faithful.

And that is the great theme of these chapters. [The family is dysfunctional. God is faithful. The people are inconsistent. God is consistent. The covenant family keeps making mistakes. God keeps his covenant.

But then we come to Genesis 27, and this brings all of this family dysfunction to a head.

Isaac is now very old and his eyesight is failing. He decides it is time to bless his eldest son. But notice what is happening: **Isaac is still favouring Esau.** God had already told Rebekah, before the boys were born, that “the older will serve the younger.” Yet Isaac seems determined to give the primary blessing to Esau. Rebekah overhears the conversation and devises a plan. Jacob disguises himself as Esau, and walks into his father's room carrying food. Isaac asks, “Are you really my son Esau?” And Jacob says, “**I am.**” The promised son becomes the deceiving son. The family that was supposed to be shaped by God's promise is now being torn apart by people trying to make God's promise happen **their way.**

And notice how many layers of dysfunction are operating here. Isaac is driven by preference. Rebekah is driven by control. Jacob is driven by ambition. Esau is driven by anger and revenge. Nobody is trusting God. Everyone is grasping for what they think they need. And the consequences are devastating. When Esau discovers what has happened, he cries out in anguish: “Bless me—me too, my father!” But the blessing has gone. Then Esau says, “The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.” Rebekah's attempt to secure the blessing has actually helped fracture the family she was trying to protect. Jacob has gained what he wanted, but he has to run for his life. **Sin promises that if we take control, we'll get what we want; Genesis 27 shows us that sometimes we get what we want and discover that we've lost something far more precious.**

There is also a sobering word here for us about **the difference between God's promises and our methods.** God had promised that Jacob would be the one through whom the covenant would continue. Rebekah was right about the destination, but profoundly wrong about the route. She believed God's promise but didn't trust God's timing or God's ability to fulfil it. That's something we can do too. We can know what God wants and still try to achieve it through manipulation, pressure, control or deception. We might want our children to follow Jesus so badly that we try to control their faith. We might want reconciliation so badly that we manipulate someone into it. We might want our church to grow so badly that we compromise our integrity. We might want something good, but pursue it in a way that doesn't look like Jesus. **Faith means not only trusting God's promises, but trusting God with the way he fulfils them.**

And yet—and this is where the gospel gives us hope—**God does not abandon this dysfunctional family.**

Genesis 27 is not the end of the story. Jacob will eventually be confronted by God, humbled, transformed and given a new name. Esau's anger will eventually give way to an extraordinary moment of reconciliation.

The family will remain complicated, but God's covenant will remain secure. That means our failures don't have to be the final chapter either.

Perhaps there are things in your family that you deeply regret.

Perhaps you have been Isaac, favouring one child. Perhaps you've been Rebekah, trying to control an outcome. Perhaps you've been Jacob, deceiving to get what you wanted. Perhaps you've been Esau, carrying anger and hurt.

The gospel doesn't tell us to pretend those things don't matter. **It tells us to bring them into the light, repent where we have sinned, receive God's forgiveness, and trust his grace to write a new chapter.** The family may be dysfunctional, but God's grace is not.

### **3. God's faithfulness gives us hope for our families**

This is perhaps the most important point. If our hope depends upon us getting our families right, we're in trouble. Because we're not going to get everything right. Parents will fail. Children will fail. Spouses will fail. Siblings will fail. We will all fail.

But our hope isn't that we are faithful enough. Our hope is that God is faithful. That's what Genesis keeps showing us. God's covenant doesn't depend upon Abraham being perfect. It doesn't depend upon Isaac being perfect. It doesn't depend upon Jacob being perfect.

**God** is faithful. And ultimately that covenant finds its fulfilment in Jesus. Jesus comes from this deeply imperfect family line. He enters our broken world. He becomes one of us. And on the cross, Jesus takes the sin and dysfunction that we cannot fix ourselves. Selfishness. Pride. Anger. Fear. Manipulation. Failures to love. Failures to forgive. Our failures as parents. Our failures as children. Our failures as husbands and wives. Our failures as brothers and sisters.

Jesus takes all of it. And he dies for us. Then he rises again. And in Christ, God doesn't simply say: "I'll forgive your past." He says: "I am making you new."

## **Conclusion**

Genesis 25 and 26 give us an extraordinary picture.

This is the family of promise. And yet it's a mess. The parents have favourites. Two brothers compete. Mistakes are repeated. And yet through it all: God is faithful.

**That** is our hope. Because the God who kept his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is still faithful.

And so we can say:

"Lord, my family isn't perfect. Neither am I. But you are faithful."  
enough. Amen

And that is