

# MODERN FAMILY

## Each week we will seek to:

- Understand the context of the topic for discussion
- Watch a video of Charlotte and Ryan sharing about this topic
- Share with one another what we are processing
- Read and study the Biblical account of a character from which we can learn
- Reflect on what Holy Spirit is revealing to us
- Pray together

As a connect host, you may want to prepare in advance as some of the Genesis study can be dense and so we recommend reading through it before gathering and identifying how best to lead your group.

Below is a discussion guide. We encourage you to use the material in such a way you can meet your group where they are at. If this means adding, changing, or taking away from the content, then do what you need to make this the most formational night for your group as we seek to become more like Jesus together.

# WEEK 1 – THE POWER OF US

## Understand

Have you ever wondered why the Bible goes to such great pains to deliver all the relational connections and family trees?

The Bible is not an account of some super-star individual journeying with God as part of personal and dislocated callings. It is the story of God's faithfulness to complex groups of people, families, tribes, nations and ultimately the human family. It is the story of his faithfulness in the middle of the chaotic relational threads of humanity throughout history. It is the story of his faithfulness in the middle of the brokenness and beauty of these units and groups. It is the story of his presence and our invitation to partnership not just personally but collectively as a connected and interwoven whole.

The Genesis narratives are particularly filled with the behind-the-scenes relational life of God's people because **God does not just care about the sacred space within us, he cares deeply and works through the sacred space between us.** Abram, Isaac, Sarai, Rebecca, Jacob, Esau, Leah, Rachel; a motley crew of chaos, yet God calls them and his kingdom comes through them. Through them the world will be blessed. And through this family the Lord would begin the work of creating his global, generational family of the Church throughout history.

We are now adopted into sonship, brothers and sisters in Christ, a new kind of family. Only together will we be able to walk into calling. In the Genesis' family we are going to study over the next few weeks, NO individual was capable of independently bringing about the purposes of God. Only together would they be able. We too have a collective calling not just an individual one. Only together will we be able to complete the assignment and gain our spiritual inheritance. If we do not find a way to walk together, we will walk with a limp. If we want to complete our assignment we have no choice but to figure out how to function together as a unit. We are the modern family.

## Watch

You could either have everyone watch the video before joining together or play the video now and watch together as Ryan and Charlotte share about our collective calling.

## Share

From watching the video, what stood out to you and why?

## Read

- Genesis 11:31 & Hebrews 11:8-9
- Genesis 12:1-20
- Genesis 14:22-24

## Faith is Never Just About You

Our journey begins with a man called Abram who was made a promise (Genesis 12:1-7). Family meant security in their context, not like today where people live individualised self-sustained lives that can easily be relocated or dislocated without huge risk. In Abram's day they were safe because they were together. Only together could they survive the chaos of the ancient world. This would have taken enormous faith.

The promise made would have seemed ridiculous. There were just three of them – Abram, Sarai and Lot. One old, one barren and one who wasn't even an heir of Abram. How could this be the starting point for a nation?

Abram's faith was exceptional but it was also extensive. His choice to have faith would not affect him only. His crossroads of faith would impact his family, his nation, the world. **Because of the relational nature of humanity, your faith is never just about you.**

## Faith is About Stewardship

While it may look like Abram was starting from scratch, he was also stewarding a journey his Father had begun (Genesis 11:31). Terah set out in the right direction and got to Haran. Then that became the point from which Abram was called on. He, in essence, continued a journey in the same direction his father had begun. After this his sons would then inherit the journey Abram took (Hebrews 11:8-9). **Each generation is handed something a previous generation had, to steward and continue, so that the next generation will inherit a story that has progressed in our lifetime in the direction of promise. The next generation of the world will inherit what we do with the journey towards promise that has been handed to us.**

## Fear: Self-protection over Self-sacrifice

Abram was a man of faith, but that is not all he was. If we are to deal and live honestly with one another, we must expect people to be nuanced. Often disappointment comes because someone who is good makes a bad choice. But we are all a mixture of beauty and brokenness and if we cannot accept this, we will not be able to accept each other. Abram acted on faith but then he acted from fear. Both were inside him. (Genesis 12:10-20)

Abram centred 'self' and therefore risked those relationships he was called to steward (Sarai). When we centre self, we will sacrifice other's good to protect our own interests at all costs. Abram placed Sarai at risk to protect himself. Initially the pathway of self may look beneficial (Genesis 12:16-17), Abram gained wealth through ignoring kingdom ethics. But in the end, we lose. This moment, this choice, would cause more harm than good in his family dynamic as his wife (who was essential to the fulfilment of God's promise to him) would be damaged in her capacity to trust him.

However, the beauty of this story is the redemption. In this moment Abram accepts the wealth of a king that resulted from an act of disobedience and self-centring. But later (Genesis 14:22-24) we meet a very different version of Abram, a man who has learnt to trust God and reject earthly cultural norms. When offered wealth from another king he refuses in favour of total dependence on God. This gives us hope. **If we have been guilty of damaging others by self-centring in our past, we can, with God's help become someone who behaves very differently in our future.**

## Future

**When Abram risked his relational strength, he risked his future.** Abram believed Sarai was peripheral to his promise and calling to father a nation. Abram gave Sarai over to Pharaoh and he may never have seen her again. It seems he believed following God into his future did not require Sarai beside him. And we too can be derailed by this delusion. In a world of individualism, the Church in the west has become more concerned with individualised calling than collective calling. But individualised calling is a myth. God is building something through us that only works when we are united. If we don't understand this, we will easily chuck people out of our relational circles at the first sign of trouble or cost, not realising that we are disregarding that which is central to the fulfilment of our calling. This is a very clever work of the enemy. **Often the relationships most contested are the relationships most central to our commissioning. We must do the costly work of relational repair to fully become who we were created to be.**

## Reflect

What are we stewarding (both personally and as a local church family) because of the faith-filled journey of those who went before us and travelled in the direction of the promise?

How well are we stewarding our journey for those who will follow?

Where are we tempted to self-centre instead of self-sacrifice? What will that cost in the end?

Who have we disregarded as non-essential to God's purposes in our church community or lives?

What is helpful in maintaining the sacred space between you and others?

## Pray

# WEEK 2 – BREAKING FAMILY PATTERNS

## Understand

When the Bible uses the word family, it refers to our entire extended family over three to four generations. That means your family, in the biblical sense, includes all your brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, grandparents, great-grandparents, great-uncles and aunts, and significant others going back to the mid-1800s! While we are affected by powerful external events and circumstances through our earthly lives, our families are the most powerful group to which we will ever belong. Even those who left home as young adults, determined to “break” from their family histories, soon find that their family’s way of “doing” life follows them wherever they go.

**What happens in one generation often repeats itself in the next. The consequences of actions and decisions taken in one generation affect those who follow.**

For this reason, it is common to observe certain patterns from one generation to the next such as divorce, alcoholism, addictive behaviour, sexual abuse, poor marriages, one child running off, mistrust of authority, pregnancy out of wedlock, an inability to sustain stable relationships, etc. Scientists and sociologists have been debating for decades whether this is a result of “nature” (i.e., our DNA) or “nurture” (i.e., our environment) or both. The Bible doesn’t answer this question. It only states that this is a “mysterious law of God’s universe.” Consider the following:

God, in the giving of the Ten Commandments, connected this reality to the very nature of who he is:

“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below... for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:4-6).

God repeated the same truth again when Moses asked to see God’s glory: “And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. ... Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation’” (Exodus 34:6-7).

When David murdered Uriah in order to marry his wife Bathsheba, God declared, “Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own” (2 Samuel 12:10). Family tensions, sibling rivalry, and internal strife marked his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren for generations.

Family patterns from the past are played out in our present relationships without us necessarily being aware of it. Someone may look like an individual acting alone—but they are really players in a larger family system that may go back, as the Bible says, three to four generations. Unfortunately, it is not possible to erase the negative effects of our his-tory. This family history lives inside all of us, especially in those who attempt to bury it. The price we pay for this flight is high. Only the truth sets us free.

(Taken from “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality”, Pete Scazzero, p.51-52)

## Watch

You could either have everyone watch the video before joining together or play the video now and watch together as Ryan and Charlotte share about the power of family and generational patterns.

## Share

From watching the video, what stood out to you and why?

## Read

- Genesis 26:1-11
- See also Genesis 20

Isaac, afraid of confrontation and war with the Philistines, asks Rebekah to pretend she is his sister and not his wife (Genesis 26:7-11). Thus, he places Rebekah in extreme danger in order to chart an easier personal pathway. His love of harmony has led him into passivity in the face of confrontation and an abdication of his responsibilities. This inevitably affects his relational world, his wife and his community and his actions are in no way sanctioned in the passage by God.

As you hear this story you might begin to wonder if you have heard the story before. And you would be right. An almost identical scenario played out with Isaac's father and mother Abraham and Sarah. (Genesis 20). While some might be persuaded that this is just an historical editing issue, the Bible goes to great lengths to ensure we understand these incidents as two separate occurrences not one simply told two ways. Genesis 26 opens with a statement that this is a different famine in a different time that drives Isaac in the direction of the land his father entered. **The two stories are remarkably similar because this is often what happens in family lines. Poor history not confronted can repeat.**

One generation is not only tasked with stewarding the blessing of the previous but also confronting the brokenness of the previous generation. Isaac was not only having to overcome apathy, he was having to overcome family patterns of dealing with adversity. This kind of work takes strength, effort and commitment and oftentimes help from our friends and community or even professionals.

## Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: An example of generational patterns

Genesis, the first book of the Bible, relates how the truth that sins and blessings are passed from generation to generation works out. On one level, the blessings given to Abraham because of his obedience passed from generation to generation to his children (Isaac), grandchildren (Jacob), and great-grandchildren (Joseph and his brothers). At the same time we observe a pattern of sin and brokenness transmitted through the generations. Truly, more is caught than taught.

**For example, we observe:**

### A PATTERN OF LYING IN EACH GENERATION

- Abraham lied twice about Sarah.
- Isaac and Rebecca's marriage was characterised by lies.
- Jacob lied to almost everyone.
- Ten of Jacob's children lied about Joseph's death, faking a funeral and keeping a "family secret" for more than ten years.

### FAVORITISM BY AT LEAST ONE PARENT IN EACH GENERATION

- Abraham favoured Ishmael.
- Isaac favoured Esau.
- Jacob favoured Joseph and later Benjamin.

### BROTHERS EXPERIENCING A CUTOFF FROM ONE ANOTHER IN EACH GENERATION

- Isaac and Ishmael (Abraham's sons) were cut off from one another.
- Jacob fled his brother Esau and was completely cut off for years.
- Joseph was cut off from his ten brothers for more than a decade.

### POOR INTIMACY IN THE MARRIAGES OF EACH GENERATION

- Abraham had a child out of wedlock with Hagar.
- Isaac had a terrible relationship with Rebecca.
- Jacob had two wives and two concubines.

## The Great News of Jesus Christ

The great news of Christianity is that your family of origin does not determine your future. God does!

What has gone before you is not your destiny. The most significant language in the New Testament for becoming a Christian is “adoption into the family of God.” It is a radical new beginning. When we place our faith in Christ, we are spiritually reborn by the Holy Spirit into the family of Jesus. We are transferred out of darkness into the kingdom of light.

The apostle Paul used the image of Roman adoption to communicate this profound truth, emphasising we are now in a new and permanent relationship with a new Father. God becomes our Father. Our debts (sins) are cancelled. We are given a new name (Christian), a new inheritance (freedom, hope, glory, the resources of heaven), and new brothers and sisters (other Christians) (Ephesians 1).

Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived at a house where he was teaching, looking for him to come outside. Jesus replied to the crowd inside the house sitting at his feet:

“Who are my mother and my brothers?” ... Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:33-35)

The church for the believer was now the “first family.” In the ancient world of Jesus, it was extremely important to honour one’s mother and father. Jesus demonstrated that, even while hanging on the cross. He entrusted the care of his mother to the apostle John. Yet Jesus was direct and clear in calling people to a first loyalty to himself over their biological families, saying:

“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37).

Discipleship, then, is the putting off of the sinful patterns and habits of our families of origin and being transformed to live as members of Christ’s family. This is the Christian life. God’s intention is that we grow up into mature men and women transformed by the indwelling presence of Christ. We honour our parents, culture, and histories but obey God. Every disciple, then, has to look at the brokenness and sin of his or her family and culture. The problem is that few of us have reflected honestly on the impact of our family of origin and other major “earthquake” events in our histories.

Philosopher George Santanya said it well: “Those who cannot learn from the past are doomed to repeat it.”

For example, perhaps your family defined success by profession or education or money. Maybe there were underlying messages that in order to be loved, cared for, or accepted you needed to do certain behaviours. This impacted your view of yourself (i.e., your self-esteem).

In God’s family, success is defined as being faithful to God’s purpose and plan for your life. We are called to seek first his kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Everything else, he promises, will be added to us. Moreover, God declares we are lovable. We are good enough in Christ (Luke 15:21-24).

Discipleship, then, is working these truths into our practical, everyday lives. Sadly, when we look deep beneath the surface of our lives, most of us are not doing anything fundamentally differently from what our families did.

God’s intention, however, is that our local churches and parishes are to be places where, slowly but surely, we are re-parented in doing life Christ’s way.

(Taken from “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality”, Pete Scazzero, p.53-54, 57-58)

## Reflect

What family patterns handed down to me require examination and work with the Holy Spirit and the help of others? (See the “Ten Commandments” of Your Family below).

Where have you experienced the power of Christ to redeem generational patterns in your life?

## Pray

You could take time to listen to Holy Spirit individually and then come back to share and pray together. If someone has never thought about family patterns this could be a heavy moment for them.

## Extra

### The “Ten Commandments” of Your Family

(Taken from “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality”, Pete Scazzero, p.54-55)

We often underestimate the deep, unconscious imprint our families of origin leave on us. In fact, my observation is that it is only as we grow older that we realise the depth of their influence. Each of our family members, or those who raised us through childhood, has “imprinted” certain ways of behaving and thinking into us. (Likewise our cultures, the media, our interpretation of events that happen to us also imprint us.) These behavioural patterns operate under a set of “commandments.” Some of them are spoken and explicit. Most are unspoken. They were “hard-wired” into our brains and DNA, so much so that apart from the intervention of God himself and biblical discipleship we simply bring these expectations into our closest relationships as adults.

Consider the following Ten Commandments:

#### **MONEY**

- Money is the best source of security.
- The more money you have, the more important you are.
- Make lots of money to prove you “made” it.

#### **CONFLICT**

- Avoid conflict at all costs.
- Don’t get people mad at you.
- Loud, angry, constant fighting is normal.

#### **SEX**

- Sex is not to be spoken about openly.
- Men can be promiscuous; women must be chaste.
- Sexuality in marriage will come easily.

#### **GRIEF AND LOSS**

- Sadness is a sign of weakness.
- You are not allowed to be depressed.
- Get over losses quickly and move on.

#### **EXPRESSING ANGER**

- Anger is dangerous and bad.
- Explode in anger to make a point.
- Sarcasm is an acceptable way to release anger.

## **FAMILY**

- You owe your parents for all they've done for you.
- Don't speak of your family's "dirty laundry" in public.
- Duty to family and culture comes before every-thing.

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

- Don't trust people, they will let you down.
- Nobody will ever hurt me again.
- Don't show vulnerability.

## **ATTITUDES TOWARD DIFFERENT CULTURES**

- Only be close friends with people who are like you.
- Do not marry a person of another race or culture.
- Certain cultures/races are not as good as mine.

## **SUCCESS**

- Is getting into the "best schools."
- Is making lots of money.
- Is getting married and having children.

## **FEELING AND EMOTIONS**

- You are not allowed to have certain feelings.
- Your feelings are not important.
- Reacting with your feelings without thinking is okay.

You can easily add to this list. What messages did you receive about parenting? Gender roles? Marriage? Singleness? Physical affection and touch? How did your family view God, other churches, other faiths? It is essential that we reflect on the messages that were handed down to us, submitting them to Christ and His Word.

# WEEK 3 – NAVIGATING DIFFERENCE

## Understand

Rebekah is described by some writers as the most decisive and energetic of all the patriarch wives and goes on to become the wife of Isaac and mother of Esau and Jacob. In Genesis 22 she is the only listed female of Nahor's descendants and will go on to play a significant role in this family line.

We catch glimpses into the type of person she was; willing to leave the safety and security of her family home to marry Isaac and despite their relationship being one of love the complexity of relational dynamics plays a big role in Rebekah's life. She was adventurous and Isaac seemed passive and so we can learn a lot from how her story unfolds.

## Watch

You could either have everyone watch the video before joining together or play the video now and watch together as Ryan and Charlotte share about the challenge of differences between us.

## Share

From watching the video, what stood out to you and why?

## Read

- Genesis 25:20-35
- Genesis 27

Often, significant relational moments, both good and bad, don't happen out of nowhere. They are the culmination of many smaller moments that crescendo in a pivotal moment. Rebekah's journey begins with a struggle with infertility, which would have been deeply problematic and painful for her, yet, after 20 years the Lord speaks to her about what is to come through the twin boys she was carrying (Genesis 25:22-23).

In Genesis 25:28, we see cracks beginning to show in the love between Isaac and Rebekah. How this marriage that started in love is now splitting under the pressure of favouritism toward separate boys. Isaac for Esau and Jacob for Rebekah.

If God is committed to unity, Satan is committed to the opposite. He will often use places of disunity to breed chaos. Therefore, what seem like small cracks in our relational circles, are not insignificant to the plans and purposes of God. They deserve and require our prayer, attention and sometimes our confession.

By the time we get to the end of Genesis 27, one brother is plotting to kill the other while the lies and manipulation of a husband and wife continues. How can a family who started in love and commitment end in such chaos and brokenness?

It seems Isaac was more passive in his ways and Rebekah was much more the type to take life by the horns. Isaac a quiet man of peace, Rebekah an active woman of faith. Just like today, the potential issue they face is the difference between them. The capacity for disunity inside this diversity is extreme and there are signs that this caused chaos in their parenting. Genesis 27:46 is Rebekah's disgust with Isaac's passivity toward their sons and here we begin to see the danger of difference. She takes matters into her own hands despite Jacob questioning the morality of her manipulation in verse 12 of Genesis 27.

There is a lesson here for those of us who are wired for action. While that can be a beautiful trait, if not careful, others perceived passivity can lead us into the territory of manipulation and control of them. We can qualify ungodly action with, "Well someone needs to do something." This is Rebekah's story and it does not end well.

It makes for painful reading when you realise in one day Rebekah will lose both her sons. One to hatred and the other to banishment. It does not take a genius to help you realise the complexity of relationships. If we do not allow God to knock off our rough edges, reveal the shadow side of our strengths and sanctify our personalities toward the image of Christ then we too may experience the temptation to manipulate and control.

Are we aware of how our differences may cause disunity between us? In marriage, friendships and families. In the office or place of work and the home. There is an opportunity to invite the Holy Spirit into our diversity in order that he may make it a place of mutual respect and mutual benefit instead of a place of war and chaos.

## Reflect

Where do differences in temperament currently cause tension in our relationships and how might the Lord want to use that diversity to bring beauty and health?

What internal attitudes do I have towards certain people in my relational circles that need healing from the Lord before they cause greater pain?

Where am I seeking to control others to protect outcomes? What might I lose if I continue this path?

## Pray

### **Note for next time you meet:**

We will be looking at part of the story of Jacob, which is a considerable amount of Genesis – so we have broken this down into several passages to read. You can view the reading in week 4 and give it to your connect group in advance if this will help leading up to your next time together.

# WEEK 4 – THE POWER AND DANGER OF AMBITION

## Understand

Jacob is a highly important character in the story of God's people and dominates a lot of the story of Genesis. He was the first to be named Israel and the father of the 12 tribes.

Jacob's story begins in the womb of his mother Rebekah, who having struggled with infertility, finds herself pregnant with twins. Jacob and his brother, from the beginning, share a space, in this case the womb. From the womb these two are at war. Harmony and mutuality have become rivalry and war. This is the way of the world, but this is not the way of the kingdom for Christ has come to make us one.

From the start Jacob seeks to dominate his older brother, testified to by his name and is forever a reminder that he started life grasping.

From the beginning of his story Jacob is set up as ambitious and an avid chaser of the illusive blessing with a deep desire to make something of himself in the world.

## Watch

You could either have everyone watch the video before joining together or start your night by watching together where Ryan and Charlotte share about the gift of ambition but also the shadow side of it.

## Share

From watching the video, what stood out to you and why?

## Read

- Genesis 25:27-29
- Genesis 27
- Genesis 31:3
- Genesis 32:22-32
- Genesis 33:13-14

Jacob and Esau are divided from the start, Genesis 25 paints them as very different people which perhaps adds to the distance between them, but distance unchecked leads to division, and division is where hatred begins to flourish.

Jacob's ambition comes to the fore at this stage in the story as he seeks to use his brother's weakness to win financial gain. The birthright concerned only the material inheritance from the parents. The inheritance was divided into the number of sons plus one. The eldest son then received the double share. It was this double share that Jacob pried from his impulsive brother's hands in a moment of weakness.

What we learn from Jacob here is how our ambition can actually lead us to take advantage of other's moments of weakness, rather than being people who help redirect them toward wholeness and wisdom. It seems that Jacob comes out richer, but he has sacrificed long-term stability, relational peace, and his brother on the altar of his ambition. The obvious question we must ask ourselves is what are we willing to sacrifice on the altar of our ambition?

To summarise a longer journey, Jacob leaves but eventually takes his wives, 11 sons and all he owns and begins the journey home (on God's command - Genesis 31:3). Remember, that when he left, Esau wanted to kill him. But God had promised to be with him, and it was now God's word he took hold of as he made his journey home. This is a significant moment and begins to reveal to us the transformation Jacob is experiencing. Once eager for man's blessing, he now lived in the assurance of God's blessing despite the unknown future.

Jacob calls his brother "lord" and himself "servant" which shows his posture as he enters this meeting. Yet again, God meets Jacob when he is weak and anxious. He rolls around in the dirt of life and changed his name which Biblically would have meant a change of identity. Even his injury will serve him in the final aspects of his story. As Esau leaves, Jacob, the man who always had to be at the front, who tried to climb out of the womb in front of his brother, walks with a limp at the back with the children and animals (Genesis 33:13-14).

It is easy in this world for the enemy to hi-jack our ambition and lull us into believing we need to do whatever it takes to look out for ourselves. Climb over the weak, push and bully your way to the front, it's the only way, it's what everyone else does, eat or be eaten. But the story of Jacob reminds us that from our mother's womb God has set aside something that is ours and we will not have to sacrifice our relational spaces (colleagues, business partners, siblings, friends, spouses) to get what is rightfully ours.

## Reflect

Would you consider yourself ambitious?

Where has that been helpful and where have you have to be careful?

Is my ambition costing me relationally or has it in the past?

How do we remain ambitious people without it costing us relationally?

## Pray