

Genesis 33 — Reconciliation

June 19, 2016

It is great to have you at CrossWinds. If you are a visitor, we are thankful you chose to join us. We have a unique Sunday. I am going to preach on Genesis 33 but I am giving a shorter message. Pastor Jordan, Roland Schmidt and I will spend a few minutes at the end of the service updating you on the Spencer campus and our plans for its future facilities. There will also be a time for Q&A at the end of that presentation.

While my time is short, I am going to dive in because we are talking about a very pressing topic. Today, we are talking broken relationships and how to reconcile them. Most of us in the room are feeling the pain of a broken relationship. For some of us, it is a deep and agonizing pain, like divorce or the cheating of your spouse. For others of you it is a broken relationship with your children. They left home and won't come back home. Some of you have broken relationships at work. Wherever we find them, all broken relationships are incredibly painful.

The Bible tells us the source of all these broken relationships; it doesn't matter if they are divorce, racism, hatred, war, and criminal activity, all come from one source. It is called sin. God didn't create the world with broken relationships. When sin came into the world it broke the relationship between Adam and Eve and the consequences of sin continue to spread continuing to break relationships today. Ultimately, sin is the source of all broken relationships. If we are ever going to fix a broken relationship, the ultimate problem to be fixed

is the sin problem. Everything else is just a Band-Aid. Today, we are going to see what we can learn about fixing those broken relationships from Genesis 33.

Restoring broken relationships is a big theme in the Bible. God tells us to forgive our enemies. He tells us to love those who do evil against us and pray for those who persecute us. One of the great defining qualities of God's people is they are always working to restore relationships.

What I also love about the Bible is that it is honest. While we may try to restore a relationship, not every relationship can be fixed.

[If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Romans 12:18 \(ESV\)](#)

Paul said that even if we extend a hand of friendship and work hard to fix a relationship, with some people it will not happen. Don't be naive and assume that if we want to fix a relationship the other party has the same goal. We can apologize for our sin, but the person we sinned against may not forgive us. We can forgive someone for sinning against us but that doesn't mean the other person will repent and stop his or her sinful ways. As Christians, we have the responsibility to forgive and work for restoration but that doesn't necessarily mean it will happen. Here is why.

How many people does it take to forgive? One. How many people does it take to reconcile in a relationship? Two. It takes two people repenting and forgiving for a relationship to be reconciled. I can forgive you but if you don't repent, the relationship can't be fixed. Reconciliation means both parties confess their sin. It involves both parties extending forgiveness. That is why we do everything in our power to make reconciliation happen but we live with the reality

that it might not happen. Knowing reconciliation is a two-way, not a one-way street brings us to Genesis 33.

Genesis 33 is the story of the reconciliation of two brothers, Jacob and Esau. They had a long history of conflict. They were fraternal twins that were literally beating the tar out of each other while they were still in the womb. To make matters worse, their parents played favorites. Rachel loved Jacob, and Isaac loved Esau. That was a bad move by Mom and Dad that furthered the division between these brothers. Jacob was a trickster and deceiver. He stole his older brother's birthright and blessing. Those were worth a ton of money in that culture. That was a major sin. Today you would do jail time. Esau was so angry he planned to kill his brother. When you are literally planning to kill your own flesh-and-blood brother, that is a bad conflict. I know some of you went through painful divorces but in that divorce you were probably not comforting yourself by deliberating if you should murder your spouse with a brick or a crowbar and when you were done how you would dispose of the body. You know things have really fallen apart when you are planning a murder.

Jacob ended up running for his life. He spent the last 20 years out of town. While gone he ended up with four wives, a dozen kids and plenty of cash. At God's prompting, Jacob was returning to the Promised Land after being out of town 20 years. While it was not a geographical necessity for him to meet Esau when he came to town, it was a spiritual necessity. If Jacob was going to make any spiritual progress he needed to address the huge elephant in the room, which was the hatred between him and his brother. For the last 20 years, as

Esau and Jacob lay in bed at night, the pain of their sin reared its ugly head during the quiet moments. That relationship needed to be fixed and Jacob was going to take the risk and do the hard work of trying to restore it. Let's see what we can learn from their reconciliation to help us with our reconciliations.

1. Reconciliation doesn't always work.

And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. Genesis 33:1 (ESV)

I know this is a depressing first point but it is honest. Reconciliation doesn't always work. Don't be naive. While we may try to reconcile a broken relationship, that doesn't mean the person we hurt will want to work things out. I have seen this many times, especially in marriage counseling. A man is literally on his knees in my office begging for forgiveness and restoration with his spouse but his spouse won't budge. She says, "Why should I forgive you? You will just hurt me again," or "After what you did, I can't forgive you. I don't love you anymore. I am not interested in putting this marriage back together," or "I don't care if you want forgiveness. I just want you out of my life." At that point it is a one-way street and you can't reconcile a relationship that way.

Jacob knew his attempt to reconcile with Esau may not work. Esau had 400 men so Jacob took precautions and split everybody into two camps. That way if Esau started whacking the heads off one camp with the sword, the other camp could run for their lives. Jacob knew reconciliation may not work because it didn't just depend on him, it also depended on Esau. Since he couldn't control Esau's reaction, he was taking precautions. When it comes to restoring a broken

relationship, always seek the best but prepare for the worst. Let me say that again. Seek the best but prepare for the worst.

This means if you are trying to reconcile with a business partner that stole money from the company, you do your best to fix the relationship but you also consult a lawyer in case your business partner continues to be a crook. This means if you are trying to reconcile a broken marriage with a cheating spouse, you do your best to fix the marriage but you also get legal counsel on what to do if your spouse continues to pursue divorce. You always seek the best but prepare for the worst.

2. Reconciliation requires humility.

And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. Genesis 33:2–3 (ESV)

Reconciliation requires humility. The reason we don't see more reconciliation in broken relationships is because humility is in short supply. Most of us see humility as a form of weakness. We think self-esteem and achieving our potential are the secrets to life. Jesus is our hero. He said the exact opposite. Jesus said humility is the ticket and he modeled it for us. The Bible tells us that God the Father planned creation but Jesus is the one who made all of creation. God the Father also planned redemption of our sin but it was Jesus who carried it out. He went from enjoying non-stop worship as the Son of God to pouring all of himself into a human body and fusing himself into a man. As the mighty exalted creator of the universe he humbled himself to wash people's feet. He picked the crusty stuff from between their toes. He humbled himself to die on

a cross for our sins. He didn't deserve any of this. He died in our places out of love for us so he could reconcile our relationships with God. Jesus showed us that if there is ever going to be reconciliation in any broken relationship there needs to be a ton of humility. We need to drop our rights and humble ourselves, like Jesus. Unfortunately, most of us are far too proud to for this. That is why too many of our relationships don't reconcile. We are not humble and willing to endure pain we don't deserve, like Jesus did for us.

Look at Jacob. He was the heir to Isaac's millions. He owned millions of dollars himself, yet he was bowing down seven times as he approached Esau. In this culture that is how you approached a dignitary, like a king. This was great humility on Jacob's part. Jacob's actions were saying, "Esau, I sinned against you. I am here to acknowledge my sin, confess my sin and seek your forgiveness." If there is going to be any reconciliation in our broken relationships, our actions and the words need to be filled with humility, like Jacob's and like Jesus'.

We see humility as a sign of weakness but in reality it contains great power. It is disarming. Have you ever had someone sin against you and you are stewing over it? While you were getting ready to burst, the person that sinned against you came and apologized. They told you they were wrong. They had nobody to blame for their sin but themselves. They were repentant and they asked for your forgiveness. When someone takes total ownership of his sin, he repents and asks your forgiveness, it is like a breath of fresh air in a room. It drains the pain of your anger. It is hard to stay mad at someone like that.

Humility is a powerful tool to change a heart. If you are going to restore any relationship you need to have it.

Some of you don't display humility because your goal is to look good, not to actually be good. You don't want to admit your sin, own your sin or confess your sin because for you it is more important to look good than to be good. That is backward. It is better to be good and confess your sin than to hold your sin and try and look good. Too many of us only care about looking good. That doesn't restore relationships.

Some of you sin against someone, like your spouse, but you won't tell her what you have done. You think what your spouse doesn't know won't hurt her. For example, sometimes a guy will tell me he was looking at something inappropriate on the Internet. He doesn't want to confess it to his wife because if she knew it would hurt the relationship. She would think he was a pervert. The truth is he is a pervert. The truth is, even if you don't confess to your wife you sinned against her, she knows something is wrong in your relationship. She can feel it. She knows there is a chill in your relationship and she feels the distance. By trying to look good and not confess rather than to be good and humbly confess your sin you are hurting yourself, your spouse and your marriage. Be humble. Confess your sin. Don't just look good. Be good.

3. When reconciliation works, it is worth the effort.

But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. And when Esau lifted up his eyes and saw the women and children, he said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." Then the servants drew near, they and their children, and bowed down. Leah likewise and her children drew near and

bowed down. And last Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down.
 Genesis 33:4–7 (ESV)

When reconciliation works, it is worth the effort. Sometimes reconciliation is a long time coming. It may be years. Sometimes reconciliation takes a lot of hard work and a ton of humility and self-sacrifice. Even after lots of work sometimes the relationship may not be restored. If the relationship is reconciled, you will always find it was worth the work.

Jacob and Esau were separated for 20 years. When Esau heard Jacob was coming to town, I think his old hatred swelled up. It doesn't say it in the text but it implies that when Esau left to meet Jacob, he planned for heads to roll. That is the only explanation I can give for why Esau brought 400 armed men. He planned to kill Jacob and slaughter his family. My guess is that just as God worked on Laban by speaking to him in a dream telling him not to touch Jacob, I think God worked on the attitude of Esau while he was traveling, changing him from hatred to love towards the brother he originally planned to kill. I don't know if that is what happened but I think that is what happened. What makes this especially important is that Esau was not a believer. God supernaturally worked in unbelieving Esau's heart to restore his broken relationship with Jacob.

This is a great point of application. You never know how God can change someone's heart, even if he or she is an unbeliever. When you try to reconcile a relationship, God can change feelings of hatred to feelings of love even if someone is not a believer. Some of you are in incredibly difficult relationships. Some of you have broken marriages and your spouse is not a Christian. God may not restore that relationship. According to the New Testament you are not

obligated to stay in marriage with an unbeliever if he or she desires to leave (1 Corinthians 7:15). But God can still change his or her heart, just like he changed Esau's. That is why we always try to work it out, just like Jacob did. We hope and pray for God's grace to be operative in the life of the person that hates us. When you see Esau, remember God can even change an unbeliever's heart.

4. Reconciliation often includes restitution.

Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company that I met?" Jacob answered, "To find favor in the sight of my lord." But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." Jacob said, "No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand. For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me. Please accept my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." Thus he urged him, and he took it. Genesis 33:8–11 (ESV)

Reconciliation often includes restitution. Jacob stole his brother's birthright and blessing. Last week we saw Jacob sending gifts to his brother ahead of his arrival. He sent a huge quantity of animals, 550 animals plus a bunch of other bling. He sent Esau so much stuff it was a gift fit for a king. The point is that if your broken relationship came from taking something that wasn't yours or breaking something that was loaned to you or causing someone to lose money or time, restoration doesn't just mean asking for forgiveness. It also means going out of your way to make it right. Reconciliation usually involves restitution. A lot of people want to be forgiven but they don't want it to cost them anything. How much is it worth for you to make something right? When you back into somebody's bumper and dent it, how do you respond? Do you just ask God to forgive you? Do you leave a note apologizing but assume that person has insurance? Do you leave a note and offer to pay for it? How much is it

worth to you to restore a relationship and make things right? To Jacob it was worth a great deal. He put his money where his mouth is.

Even though Jacob tried to pay Esau back, he wasn't interested in taking Jacob's stuff. Jacob insisted and Esau eventually acquiesced. Why did Jacob insist Esau take his gift? For there to be any true restoration for the sins Jacob had done, there needed to be some form of restitution for what he took, not just forgiveness. This is a great point of application. When we sin against someone and we try to restore what we broke or pay back what we took, many times people will simply refuse to take it. We need to insist they accept our efforts to pay them back. The only way true forgiveness will take place in their minds and our minds is if the person we stole from accepts some form of restitution.

If we only give a weak offer to repay what we took and they refuse the gift we offer we take the money and go out to dinner, you are worse off because they know you didn't really want to pay them back in the first place. Make a sincere attempt to restore what you took. It is an essential part of restoring this kind of broken relationship.

5. Sometimes reconciliation is followed by diplomatic separation.

Then Esau said, "Let us journey on our way, and I will go ahead of you." But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail, and that the nursing flocks and herds are a care to me. If they are driven hard for one day, all the flocks will die. Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, at the pace of the livestock that are ahead of me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir." So Esau said, "Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me." But he said, "What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord." So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth. And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram, and he camped before the city. And from the sons of Hamor,

Shechem's father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money the piece of land on which he had pitched his tent. There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel. Genesis 33:12–20 (ESV)

Sometimes reconciliation is followed by diplomatic separation. Just because you are able to reconcile a relationship does not necessarily mean you buy matching T-shirts, ride a tandem bike through Arnolds Park and drink from the same cup. Sometimes you reconcile with someone but it is not the right thing to stay close to him or her. How many of you had a friend that sinned against you? You reconciled with them but you needed to keep a safe distance away from him or her even after the relationship was restored? Sometimes that is appropriate.

In college, I had a friend whose summer job was cleaning the dorms. He had a building master key. He wasn't able to academically handle college so he didn't come back the fall semester the next year. A few months into the fall semester he showed up at the dorm knocking on my door. I asked him to come in and I could see he was visibly shaken up. He told me he had something to confess. During the summer he used his master key to break into rooms. He broke into my room and rifled through my stuff. He found my journal. It was the journal where I wrote all my Bible notes. It was the journal where I wrote out the details of my sin and confessed them to God in writing. It was the journal where for years I confessed in writing my sin, struggle and pain. He told me that he read the whole thing cover to cover. He wanted to know if I would forgive him. After I took my heart out of my throat and pushed out of my mind plans for murder and burying his body, I knew I had a choice. I either had to forgive him or

hold onto my hatred. In that moment, I honestly forgave him. I told him in all sincerity he was forgiven.

He immediately followed it up with, “That’s great! Let’s hang out tonight while I am in town. Let’s go to the cafeteria for dinner. We can catch a movie later that night and maybe even go to church together Sunday morning.” My response was, “Absolutely not! I forgive you but I don’t trust you and right now I do not want to hang out with you. You intentionally violated my privacy. You broke my trust. Your activities were criminal. They involved breaking and entering. You violated my privacy. You revealed serious defects in your character. I forgive you but we need some healthy distance between us.”

This is what happened with Jacob and Esau. Esau forgave Jacob, and Esau thought both families could go back to Mt. Seir where they could hang out together and live happily ever after. Jacob wisely realized that if the relationship was going to stay healthy, they needed some distance.

Jacob knew Esau and his company were hunters and killers. Their specialty was war and terrorism. They were not believers. Jacob’s family was the exact opposite. He had a dozen little kids and lots of grazing animals. He was a believer trying to follow God. Their families would have mixed like oil and water. The only movies Jacob’s kids watched were Veggie Tales. Jacob didn’t want his kids coming home from Uncle Esau’s house traumatized because Uncle Esau kept showing them R-rated movies. This restored relationship was still ripe for conflict. Esau and Jacob were like flint and steel. If the families hung out together too long it was only a matter of time before the sparks would fly. Jacob

was diplomatically trying to separate and go his own way. In the end Jacob lied and deceived to do it. He was wrong to lie and deceive but he was right that the families couldn't mix.

Let me get real practical. For some of you, when you try to reconcile a broken relationship you will need to tactfully define the new rules of the relationship after it is restored. It would not be good for you to talk every day on the phone. You don't need to text six times a day like junior high girls. They should not come over your house every Tuesday night to eat your wife's pot pie. The relationship is restored but to keep it restored you need some distance. You need time to heal and time for trust to rebuild. It may never be what it once was because of the damage that was done and the trust that was broken. In some cases a restored relationship that intentionally maintains a safe distance is appropriate.

6. Reconciliation is a demonstration of the power of Jesus to change a life.

...that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:19 (ESV)

Reconciliation is a demonstration of the power of Jesus to change a life. All relational breakdowns come from sin. God sent his son to pay for our sin and restore our relationship with God and to one another. If you are in a broken relationship, restoration begins by getting on your knees and asking God to forgive your sin through Jesus and restore your relationship with God. It is only after we have experienced the forgiveness of God that we can begin to extend that kind of forgiveness to others who need it in our lives. It is only by extending

the forgiveness we have received through Jesus that true reconciliation can happen. That is why getting on your knees and receiving Jesus is so important.

If Jesus is in the heart of both parties of a broken relationship, restoration should be able to take place. If Jesus is only in the heart of one party, restoration still may be possible if God supernaturally works in an unbeliever's heart, just like he did with Esau. If you cannot reconcile a relationship, what you can do is choose to forgive another person like Christ forgave you. You can't do both sides of restoring a relationship, but at least you can do your side. You can live at peace with others as far as it depends on you.

As I was talking, I know the Holy Spirit was bringing to mind the names of people with which you have a broken relationship. My challenge is to get right with God through Christ if you haven't already. Humble yourself, like Jesus humbled himself for you. Forgive these people like you have been forgiven and work at reconciliation asking God to change their hearts. If God doesn't change their hearts, you still obeyed Scripture and lived at peace in a broken relationship as far as it depends on you.



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