

Pa232 Counseling

Lesson Pa232-22 Family Issues: Family Discord

A counselor's concern is not to find fault, but to help those in distress find some relief. Sometimes you may need background information or hear different points of view when a member of a family seeks your counsel. Some family members may ask for help, while others may not. One may be on the attack and another playing defense. Hopefully all of them are doing the best they can in their situation. It is usually true that some people, more than others, will try to work things out themselves. They may be embarrassed to share their problem with anyone. You can only help those who recognize their need of help.

Family members often suffer hurt, shame, division, or lack of understanding. The person who feels hurt can often be the most forceful in relating the events and their emotions. Their loss of confidence can be expressed to you quickly. Be careful not to take sides or express your own personal opinion. The right answer may seem clear to you, but ask the Holy Spirit's guidance as you encourage the person sharing with you. With a non-judgmental attitude and giving him or her freedom to speak freely, you help them gain confidence. The Holy Spirit then has a better chance of helping someone find a solution as you listen and pray.

Our story for this lesson is about Rebekah and Isaac and their twin sons. Their birth was an answer to prayer, because Rebekah had remained childless for 20 years. After she became pregnant and the babies began to jostle in her womb, Rebekah prayed to Yahweh. He told her that she was about to give birth to twin boys. Further, she was told that the older son would later be a servant to his younger brother. Now this was not the way things were done in those days. It was Jewish culture for the older son to inherit what was called the 'birthright.' This meant receiving a double portion of the property after the parents died. He would also receive the richest blessings of the father. It was custom for him to be the master; his sibling would serve him. We do not know if Rebekah shared God's unusual message with any of her family at that time, or not.

The Bible does tell us that the older son, Esau, was the favorite of his father. Isaac had a taste for wild game and Esau became a skillful hunter. Jacob, the younger son, was content to stay at home. So as they grew up, Isaac loved Esau and Rebekah loved Jacob. When Isaac came to realize that his death was approaching, he summoned his firstborn, Esau. Isaac said, "Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the Lord, before I die" (Gen 27:4).

Rebekah overheard her husband's instructions to Esau. So she called their younger son, Jacob, and told him to bring her two young goats to prepare a tasty dish for Isaac. She asked him to dress in his brother's clothes and cover his hands and neck with the goatskins. Esau was a hairy man. She fixed the meal for his father and Jacob brought it to him. Because of his poor eyesight, Isaac believed he was eating with Esau. He ate the meal and then gave the blessing to Jacob. Later, Esau came to his father as he had been instructed. When his father heard his voice, he realized that he had been deceived by Jacob. Angry and upset, Esau vowed that once his father had died, he would kill his brother. Being warned by his mother, Jacob went to live with her family, far away in Harran (Gen 27:1-43).

Any one of these family members could have sought counsel from you. Indeed, you may have already heard a similar story in your family or church group. If Rebekah had come, you might scold her for betraying her oldest child or for encouraging her younger son to lie to his father. Then when justice was sure to come, she had told him to run and hide with her relatives in the land of Harran. She may have thought she was doing God's work, as she understood his plan for her boys. But scolding would not solve her feeling of guilt and the painful absence of her favorite son.

What about the father in this story? He could say, "I love my boys. Why would my wife instruct our younger son to disrespect and deceive me? She knows our customs very well."

Then we have Esau. He could say, "I've been tricked twice by my brother. He stole my birthright and now my father's blessing. Why should I not try to get even with him?"

Finally, Jacob could have believed he should obey his mother's instructions. He could say, "My brother sold me his birthright for a just a bowl of soup. He must not have thought the birthright was very important."

Given the information you just heard, forming an opinion might seem easy. It would be natural to see where judgment should be applied. Having made a decision, it could be hard to keep your opinions to yourself. Obviously God is grieved by discord in a family. And it is just as clear that playing favorites is never a good plan for parents. If, however, you listen, remain quiet, and encourage conversation, God can speak. He can do the work in hearts and direct this family to find his solution. In this story we need to understand that God's will was being done—though maybe not in a way we think it should have been done. The Bible often shows us that God uses very imperfect people to accomplish his plan.

The right conclusion for the counselor is to learn to listen, encourage conversation, pray, and then allow the Holy Spirit to work. The wrong response is to want to judge and tell them just what you think they should do. A successful counselor will allow the Spirit of God to work through the members of this family to resolve the situation. God taught Jacob about sowing deception and reaping deception himself. The angel of God wrestled with Jacob and changed his name to Israel. He finally realized that it was God who held his blessing and destiny. And God had so blessed Esau that he had ceased holding a grudge.

We hear the end of the story of the brothers, many years later. Jacob sent a servant with a message to his brother Esau: "Your servant Jacob is here and I hope I can find favor in your eyes." Soon Jacob looked and saw Esau coming to meet him. In fear, Jacob "bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother. But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept" (Gen 33:3-4). God's will was done! They were both changed men.

This lesson is **important** because it illustrates how forming an opinion about someone might seem easy, based on your experience. As counselors, we should instead listen and encourage people in conversation. Then we let God work and direct people to find his solution. We see that

God can use even imperfect parents, favoritism, and family discord to accomplish his ultimate purposes.

The **main truth** of this story is that a counselor must avoid judging or instructing others what to do. Don't jump to conclusions or solutions that seem obvious. A successful counselor will allow the Spirit of God to work through the members of the family. He will help them find a successful path to solve their problem. God has a plan to help them to learn the error of their ways and to repent.

Review this lesson by answering the following questions.

1. What is the important thing to remember when you know the problems a family faces? [Pause]
A. If you said, "A counselor should listen, encourage conversation, and allow the Holy Spirit to help them find the solution," you are correct.
2. What must you be careful about as you listen to a family member? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "The counselor must be careful not to take sides or offer judgments," you answered correctly.
3. How did God bring resolution between Esau and Jacob? [Pause]
A. If you responded that Jacob, the offender, made contact with the one he had offended, Esau, you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story of Isaac, Rebekah, and their two sons. Listen to the counseling principles that pertain to the story. Then tell the story in your own words to another believer. Discuss how your families solve difficult issues when discord and favoritism are involved. Do they discuss issues together or does one person tend to solve the problems? Talk about how God's will and plan can be determined for a particular situation.