



“Our Flawed Family”

Hope in the midst of Fragile, Fractured, and Faulty Families

Flawed: meaning imperfect, even after fixing or healing, you will always carry a scar, or flaw, with you. You are never exactly the same after a serious injury or wound. This wound can be physical, emotional, mental or spiritual.

Fragile: meaning easily broken. Every family is always on the precipice of becoming fractured and broken. It can happen at any instant, without warning. It may be a sudden loss, a long term illness, a loss of job, addiction, or mental health to name a few.

Fractured: meaning broken. Families have all experienced brokenness at some point. Most families have endured many instances of being broken. When a tragedy or trauma happens in our families it affects individuals and relationships between individuals.

Faulty: meaning it just doesn't work quite right. Families are never working 100% perfectly smooth. We are always trying to fix or tinker with some aspect of the family and family dynamic that isn't working quite right. We try to find a balance between what we can do and what only God can do.

All of us have flawed, fragile, fractured and faulty families. We are not alone; there are many stories of defective families in the Old Testament of the Bible, and specifically Genesis (the very first book). There are many things we can learn from these stories but the bottom line is that God uses all these defective families in his larger plan to offer redemption to all of creation. Stories such as: Adam and Eve; Cain and Abel; Noah and his sons; Abram and Sarai; Abraham, Sarah, & Hagar; Jacob and Esau.

As dismal as the family portraits are in Genesis, the struggles are part of a heroic larger story. Genesis is a raw and transparent testimony of the faulty and fractured state of human relationship. This may serve two purposes, one, to force us to see and acknowledge our need for God in our families and two, to give us hope that God uses fragile, fractured, and faulty families to do heroic things in order to move His good and perfect plan forward.

Is it possible God is using your flawed family in a way that has not yet been revealed to you? Is it possible God is using your fractured family in His perfect plan of redemption?



One more thing... when you become part of God's family you also become part of another imperfect family (as adopted brothers and sisters in Christ) with a Godly purpose.

Week 1. Adam and Eve (Husband and Wife)

Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15—3:24

listening, cooperation, accountability & acts of love.

The Flaws:

1. They do not hold one another accountable; instead they become co-conspirators in disobeying God's command to "not eat of the tree of knowledge." They become enablers of one another.
2. They both feel shame, guilt, embarrassment, and fear.
3. They hide for the first time from God.
4. They resort to blaming someone else for their irresponsible actions. They don't take responsibility for their part in the infraction. They become defensive.
5. They doubt God's word of warning to them. They do not trust in God's word.
6. By their action they remove all descendants from being able to have a full and complete relationship with God.

The Hope:

1. -It is normal to not want to be alone. God said it is not good for man (mankind) to be alone. Man/humankind/mankind is not alone because of Adam and Eve. We have one another as a family of God.
2. -Perhaps Eve offered Adam the fruit because she did not want to be alone in the knowledge of good and evil. Perhaps Adam reciprocated not because he was dumb or naïve, but because he loved Eve and did not want her to be alone in the knowledge of good and evil. They were in it together, come what may.
3. -Expect love to challenge you: Adam and Eve persevered... that is love. They stayed together until Adam reached 930 years old.
4. -The Bible is one epic love story. A love story needs two entities. Adam and Eve is the first love story in the Bible between two people. Love is alive and well in the flawed lives of Adam and Eve.
5. -They are still made in the image of God. God did not remove this, or change it. We still "praise Him for fearfully and wonderfully making" us (Psalm 139:14).
6. -We also are now privy to the knowledge that it would be through Adam and Eve's lineage that humankind's redemption would be made freely available to all who accept it (Jesus Christ). Genesis 3:15 speaks to the "seed" of Eve bruising the head of the serpent (later referred to as the dragon in Rev. 20:2)

Our challenge and our hope:

1. -Will we choose to be like Adam and Eve before the fall and continue to behave in ways that are not of God's desire or command?



2. -Will we chose to be like Adam and Eve after the fall and persevere through the difficult times. Never giving up, no matter how grim. Picking ourselves up out of the dust and moving forward together; seeking to follow God's will.
3. -We have the luxury of being alive in the time after Jesus was born and died for all sinners. We can rest in God's peace because of what all the flawed, fragile, fractured, and faulty families of the OT endured and persevered through.

Reflections and Questions:

1. Whose fault was it that communion with God was lost?
2. Who do you picture when you hear the word "family?" How does singleness play into your conception of family?
3. Which gender most closely resembles God?
4. Does the story of creation intend to communicate that women are subordinate to men?
5. What flaws are present in this familial relationship?
6. What are the glimmers of hope in the midst of this fractured relationship?

Week 2. Cain and Abel (Brothers)

Genesis 4

Sibling rivalry and Violence

The first act of violence on earth is between brothers (family).

Our Jealous nature and how it leads to acts of violence (physical, spiritual, or emotional).

The Flaws:

1. Cain did not give God his best. Cain did not give an offering that demonstrated his faith in God's plan for him.
2. Cain feels jealous (envious) of his brother Abel. Cain compares himself to Abel in a destructive way.
3. Cain feels anger toward God and Abel.
4. Cain resorts to violence as a reaction to his anger, jealousy, and hurt.
5. Cain murders his brother, Abel.
6. Cain lies to God about Abel's whereabouts.

The Hope:

1. Adam and Eve are assured that they can still fulfill God's command to multiply. The birth of Cain and Abel is proof of this.
2. Even after the mistakes and misdeeds of Cain, God shows mercy and protects him from being killed.
3. Cain's family & descendants have a role and a purpose in God's plan.
4. Adam and Eve do not give up on growing their family, even after the tragedy of Abel's murder. Later God provides another Son to Adam and Eve (Seth). It will be from Seth's lineage that Jesus Christ will be born; the hope for all creation.

Our challenge and our hope:

1. Whatever tragedy or hurt we may have suffered in our families we can continue to have hope that our families can heal and even become a source of joy in our lives.
2. We have a chance to change the offering we give to God. In the next act of our worship, in the next season of our harvest, we can begin to give God our best from a place of faith. In what areas do you feel like you are holding back from giving God your first (best): time, talents, or treasures?
3. Sometimes we are "Abel", but sometimes we are "Cain" in our family. What hurts are you responsible for in your family? Like Cain, God's grace is there to cover you. Have you sought forgiveness from those you hurt; have you confessed to God?



4. Adam and Eve's family appears to be irreparably broken after Abel's death by his brother's hand. However, God's plan is to use this broken family for His glory (Jesus Christ will be descended from this family). Isn't it more that just a little possible that God will use your flawed family, and you, for His glory?

Additional Reflections and Questions:

1. Who are the modern day equivalents of Cain and Abel? How does this story help us empathize with both Cain's and Abel's?
2. How and where do you see "sibling rivalry" play out in your community and church?
3. What has been your experience with sibling rivalry (with either a blood sibling or with a person in your community you regard as a brother)?
4. Where is God in our rivalries?

Week 3. Noah: Ham, Shem, and Japheth (Noah's sons)

Genesis 6—10

The Flaws (Step 2):

1. Read through Genesis 9 together.
2. Noah gets drunk and lays in his tent naked.
3. One of Noah's sons, Ham sees Noah and dishonors Noah.
4. Noah curses Ham while blessing his other sons.

The Hope (Step 3):

1. Before all of the family drama and curses occur, God (still) blesses Noah's family to continue to fill the earth.
2. God also makes a covenant with Noah's family, the rainbow.
3. Amid the curses and brokenness, Christ has come to bring blessings and beauty to all people groups, and generations.

Our challenge and our hope (Step 4):

1. Ham may have done more than just see and shame Noah's nakedness, but even at that point, Ham was sinning by dishonoring and disrespecting his father. Sin is sin, no matter how small it may be. The degrees of consequences for every sin do vary, but before a holy and perfect God, our sin matters. What are some sins in your life that you often overlook or disregard?
2. Start strong and finish stronger! Noah definitely started off strong as he found God's favor and as he faithfully built the ark as God told him to. But as Noah's life continued, his life was characterized by drunkenness, cursing one of his sons, and living a pretty "boring" life before he passed away. What's your story of faith in God, and how can you live a life that not only starts off strong but finishes stronger?
3. May we be and have mutual support! We will all have moments of weakness, tiredness, and loneliness. May we love, honor, and support one another rather than shaming and dishonoring one another. Who are the people in your life that you consider to be your support group? Who are the people in your life that you can reach out and support?

Additional Reflections and Questions (Step 5):

1. Noah and his family were essentially "stuck" together in the ark for a year. There must have been some family conflicts as well as clashing of preferences and opinions that occurred, leading to unaddressed issues and family trauma. For us, we have been "stuck" with our family and loved ones during these tough times of



COVID and SIP. Are there any forms of bitterness, unease, or unforgiveness that needs to be addressed?

2. During the family drama between Noah and his sons, Noah's wife seems to be MIA (missing in action). That is not to say that she is to be blamed, but it does lead to an interesting thought and reminder that every person matters when a family goes through the ups and downs of life. How can you be more involved in your family's good, bad, and ugly times?
3. God is a God of hope, redemption, and transformation when everything seems hopeless and broken. Share a time when you got to witness and experience God bringing hope and beauty into your life / your family?

Week 4. Abram and Sarai

Genesis 12:1—20

Trusting God in convictions both in the initial excitement, but also through the times of waiting, patience and trials.

Making sacrifices for the family: relocation, forgoing education, child rearing, caring for aging parents, etc.

The Flaws:

1. The biggest flaw starts in losing sight of the greatest hope. God gave Abram a great promise in the beginning of Genesis 12 and expands on it when He shows Abram the land his descendants would own. Abram trusted God enough to leave (see point 1 in “the Hope”) but not even to wait.
2. Abram heads down into Egypt without prompting, looking for relief from the famine there instead of coming to God for provision.
3. In a foreign country, Abram fears for his own life, misunderstands the culture, and devalues the relationship he has with his wife Sarai. He creates a lie, or a hiding of the truth.
4. Abram also asks his wife to join in his lie, putting her at risk by being taken in the harem of the Pharaoh. How would this affect not only Sarai’s trust in Abram, but also in her faith in God and His call for their offspring and future generations?
5. The decision to lie also affected the lives of people around Abram and Sarai, including the Pharaoh and those in Egypt affected by the diseases brought upon them.

The Hope:

1. God promises a future for Abram and calls him into an uncomfortable place, but with provision of blessing and protection.
2. Despite Abram’s own shortcomings, God still keeps his promises. (2 Tim 2:13)
3. A mistake can cause consequences in those moments, but God will continue to work His plan. Even with us stumbling, God can use our mistakes and restore us to a place to make other choices, allowing us to continue to be a part of His story.
4. When we trust God’s calling, and we move, there will be moments where we endure well, and times where we may fail. God knows all of these things before He calls us and He has a plan to use all of it if we would only offer up our successes and our failures to be used for His glory.

Our challenge and our hope:

1. Conviction: Calling - What has God called you to do? What has He put on your heart and where has He called you to serve? If you’re still looking for that purpose in ministry, ask your life group, discipler, elders or staff at the church and allow people who know you to speak to your strengths and areas that you can use your gifts to serve. How has he called you to exist in your family, neighborhood, workplace, etc?

2. Conviction: Move - After knowing what God has put on your heart, how will you take action? Abram was told to leave his comforts and the world he knew. What sacrifices will following God's call cost you? What kind of encouragement or support do you need to be able to take that step?
3. Conviction: Endure - Some of you may be in the midst of following God, but the road has been hard and the excitement of that initial conviction may seem to be wearing. What is the hardest part about continuing in what God has asked you to do? What do moments of not trusting God look like in your life? How has God faithfully walked you through those moments of stumbling? How can you move to get back on track?

Additional Reflections and Questions:

1. What missing voices, silences, and unmentioned concerns are in the journey of Abram following God's call? What might Sarai's words have sounded like if they were included in the story?
2. What insights emerge from the biblical journey of Abram and Sarai that shed light on the life changes that families face today (moving for career, forgoing education for your family, caring for children or aging parents).
3. What are the sacrifices you have made for the good of your family? Did you feel you had a choice in the matter? Would you do it again?
4. What can this story of Abram and Sarai teach us about caring better for individuals or families who are dealing with major changes that require self-sacrifice (moving, becoming new parents, caring for aging parents)?
5. What flaws are present in this familial relationship and story?
6. What are the glimmers of hope in the midst of this faulty relationship?

Week 5. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar, Ishmael

Genesis 16 and 21

The first blended family. Taking matters into their own hands

Main Point: We cannot control or determine all of the situations we find ourselves in, but we always have control over how we react to those situations. What we choose will reveal what or who sits on the throne of our hearts.

The Flaws:

1. Here we notice a continuation from the flaws in our last story of not trusting God's promises and taking matters into their own hands. Sarai gives Hagar to Abram to have a child with, and Abram "listens to the voice of Sarai." Sarai shows a lack of faith in God's promise and timing, and Abram trusts in Sarai over God.
2. We see many flaws in how those in Gen 16 react in different difficult situations which causes each reaction to be more extreme. Sarai is bitter towards Hagar after she did what Sarai asked her to do, Hagar resents Sarai, Sarai treats Hagar harshly, Hagar runs away.
3. In Gen 21, the family feud continues as Ishmael mocks Isaac and Sarah (Sarai after her name change) does not want Hagar's son to have any part as an heir of Abraham. We see this continue to this day in the Israel/Palestine conflict between the Jews, descendants of Isaac, and the Palestinian Arabs, descendants of Ishmael.

The Hope:

1. No matter what situation we find ourselves in, whether it is out of our control or consequences of our own actions, we can choose to do the right thing by trusting God above all other voices. After so many examples of Abram/Abraham not waiting on God's promises, we see him begin to listen to the voice of God, even when it's hard. He sends Ishmael away with Hagar, not by Sarah's request, but in God's leading. In Genesis 22, after waiting 25 years for a child with Sarah, Abraham offers his son up to God in total sacrifice and surrender.
2. God will still keep His promises, and He sees them all through. Abraham did have a child with Sarah. His name is great (seen all throughout scripture). His descendants are more than can be counted, and this through Isaac and Ishmael. Even though God is consistently faithful, learning to trust God builds equity in our own ability to follow how He leads us.
3. The promises of God can be trusted, because the one who promises can be trusted.

Our challenge and our hope:

1. What difficult situations do you find yourselves in? Long term? Short term? Out of your control? Or as a result of your own actions? No matter how you got where you are, God is calling you to do the right thing in faith. How can you move in this situation?



2. What things has God gotten you through in the past? How has that led you to trust Him more in other difficult situations? How has trusting God in small things led to you taking bigger steps of faith now?
3. How does your family, work place, neighborhood, church, etc. look like a blended family with people from different backgrounds? What tension or miscommunications, posturing or comparisons, do you find yourself in within these groups? How can you choose to react in the way God is calling you to?

Additional Reflections and Questions:

1. Looking at the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, have you ever identified with Hagar's experience?
2. How is society like a blended family? Do you see some groups treated differently than others?
3. How is the church a kind of blended family? How do you see your congregation bringing people into the family? Could your church do better?
4. Think about all the people in our society who care for children. How well are we caring for those who take care of God's children? How can we do better at this, personally and as a church?
5. What flaws are present in this familial relationship?
6. What are the glimmers of hope in the midst of this flawed family?

Week 6. Esau and Jacob (Elder and younger brothers)

Genesis 25:19—34; 27:1—45; 32:22—32; 33:1—17

Our studies in this series will follow this general outline each week.

1. Read the featured story of this week's Old Testament family (Genesis 25:19—34; 27:1—45; 32:22—32; 33:1—17 this week).
2. List and discuss the key flaws that the featured family exhibits in their relationship with one another and in their relationship with God.
3. Discover the areas of hope that can be found in the midst of this faulty Old Testament family.
4. Share with one another the personal challenge this story reveals in your own family dynamic (immediate family, extended family, or church family). How does this story provide you with a perspective of hope, as well as challenge, in your family situation?
5. If time permits dive into the reflections and questions at the end of this study.

So, for this week's study follow the five steps above. To help keep things moving, each week you will be given some guidance on steps 2, 3, and 4 with notes from the pastors. These are not comprehensive lists or textbook type answers. They are meant to help stimulate dialogue and deepen spiritual discussion.

Main point: God's power to restore and redeem is limitless. Your fractured relationship is not more powerful than God's ability to heal it. Do not give up, do not give in; there is always hope when we put our faith in the power of Jesus Christ.

The Flaws (Step 2):

1. Esau disregards his inheritance and disrespects his family and parents.
2. Isaac and Rebekah create a dynamic of comparison and competition between the brothers through their obvious favoritism for their favorite sons.
3. Jacob and Rebekah conspire and then deceive Isaac into giving Jacob the blessings that is intended for Esau.
4. Esau expresses a hatred of Jacob and vows to murder his twin brother.
5. Jacob does not seem to trust Esau's sincerity of forgiveness and does not accept Esau's offer of protection and guidance after their reconciliatory embrace.

The Hope (Step 3):

1. Jacob and Esau do reconcile later in life and there is a possibility of a new beginning.
2. God continues to show that He is faithful in His promise (covenant) with Abraham. Jacob (Abraham's grandson) continues to multiply his family and grow in his wealth and land.
3. It will be through Jacob's lineage that Jesus Christ will come.



Our challenge and our hope (Step 4):

1. It will usually be the ones closest to us that we are at the most conflict with. Why do you think that is? What is the possible reason for this?
2. Reconciliation within our families, no matter how improbable, is always possible with God. What relationships do you need to fully turn over to God?
3. Our position as children of God and co-heirs with Jesus Christ is offered through our faith in Christ. The faith that God's one and only son gave up his life in order that we might share in his inheritance and enjoy eternal life with God, the Father.

Additional Reflections and Questions (Step 5):

1. What can we learn from the relationship of Esau and Jacob that would pertain to our own siblings and our parents? How would these things apply to strained relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ?
2. Esau's response to Jacob seems full of grace and forgiveness; is there a time when you have experienced that coming from someone else? Have you been able to do this for someone who has wronged you?
3. What can Jacob and Esau's reconciliation help us imagine for the division we see in the church at large and in society as a whole?
4. After reading the story of Jacob and Esau what is the one thing you would want to say to a family member you are in conflict with (this includes your church family)?

Week 7. Sarah and Rachel (Death of Sarah, Death of Rachel).

Genesis 23:1—24:67; 35:16—20

Our studies in this series will follow this general outline each week.

1. Read the featured story of this week's Old Testament family (Genesis 23:1—24:67; 35:16-20 this week).
2. List and discuss the key flaws that the featured family exhibits in their relationship with one another and in their relationship with God.
3. Discover the areas of hope that can be found in the midst of these flawed Old Testament families.
4. Share with one another the personal challenge this story reveals in your own family dynamic (immediate family, extended family, or church family). How does this story provide you with a perspective of hope, as well as challenge, in your family situation?
5. If time permits dive into the reflections and questions at the end of this study. So, for this week's study follow the five steps above. To help keep things moving, each week you will be given some guidance on steps 2, 3, and 4 with notes from the pastors. These are not comprehensive lists or textbook type answers. They are meant to help stimulate dialogue and deepen spiritual discussion.

Main Point: Death is not a destination but rather an event. For a Christian, this event marks the beginning of an eternity in the presence of our gracious God and loving Father.

The Flaws:

1. Death is an inevitable event for every family and family member in the Old Testament.
2. Death means the end of our relationship with family members here on earth.
3. Grief, pain, and loss are all experienced by the surviving loved ones.

The Hope:

1. The surviving Old Testament family members inherited the covenants that God had made with the previous family members (e.g. the promised land and multiplication).
2. Death, and the grief that ensued, did not keep the surviving family members from following, and participating in, God's larger plan of redemption for His creation.

Our challenge and our hope:

1. We also will inevitably face the event of death (our own and our loved ones).
2. Trusting in God's promise of heaven and eternal life does not mean we won't grieve, feel sad, or experience a gamut of dark emotions when we lose someone close to us.
3. Our challenge is to move forward, through our loss, fulfilling God's plan and purpose for our lives.
4. It is our faith in God's promises that help us to live through our losses. How does your



faith in the promise of eternal life in heaven (for all Christians) influence your perspective on death?

5. In what ways can we lean on God to guide and support us through our grief?

6. In what ways can we lean on our Christian brothers and sisters for support during times of great loss?

Additional Reflections and Questions:

1. What are the ways our society, our community, our church tries to make sense of Death?

2. Who might be the modern day equivalents of Sarah and Rachel?

3. In what ways do the stories about death in the Bible illuminate deaths in our own families and communities?

4. How have you been influenced by the death of someone in your immediate family or church family?