6. Finding Rest in Family Ties (3Q 2021—Rest in Christ)

Biblical Material: Genesis 34; Heb. 11:17–22; Deut. 4:29; 1 John 3:1, 2; Genesis 39; Eph. 6:1–13; 2 Peter 3:17, 18.

Quotes
- Family ties mean that no matter how much you might want to run from your family, you can’t. Anon.
- The most important thing in the world is family and love. John Wooden
- Family and friendships are two of the greatest facilitators of happiness. John C. Maxwell
- A happy family is but an earlier heaven. George Bernard Shaw
- The capacity for friendship is God’s way of apologizing for our families. Jay McInerney
- You must remember, family is often born of blood, but it doesn’t depend on blood. Nor is it exclusive of friendship. Family members can be your best friends, you know. And best friends, whether or not they are related to you, can be your family. Trenton Lee Stewart.

Questions
What do families have to do with “rest in Christ”? How do we deal with family crises that can be so damaging? What do we learn from our family as to how God deals with us? Why does the Devil seems to expend so much energy in trying to break up families? Why does God use family language to describe his relationship to us, and us to him?

Bible summary
Genesis 34 is the story of the rape of Dinah, and the deadly revenge taken by her brothers. Heb. 11:17–22 details the faith of the patriarchs in their families. “If... you decide to come to the Lord your God, you will find him if you come to him whole-heartedly, with complete commitment.” Deut. 4:29 FBV. God calls us his children, and is planning great things for us (1 John 3:1, 2). In Eph. 6:1–13 Paul gives instructions to all members of families. We are called to remain committed to Jesus (2 Peter 3:17, 18.).

Comment
One of the Bible passages included in our study for this week is Joseph’s life story. Talk about conflict in the family! What kind of dysfunctional family is described here? One in which there is hatred and jealousy, favoritism and foolishness! Let’s list out some of the problems: Joseph was the favorite son. Favoritism is a big mistake on the part of any parent. Knowing your father loves your brother more than all the rest of you is calculated to develop envy and jealousy. Jealousy when it continues over a long time can become hatred. Joseph seems very naive in telling his family about his dreams. Didn’t he anticipate the way they would react? Maybe he was just too innocent, or perhaps foolish? If he had been wiser he could have lessened the possibility for conflict. Joseph’s dreams as he related them could have been seen as if he were proud and arrogant. Certainly that is how they were perceived by his brothers.

The next part of the story is Jacob sending Joseph to check on his brothers, and being sold into slavery by them. At least they didn’t kill him, as some of the brothers wanted. Thankfully God was able to save Joseph’s life, and he began again in Egypt. Then there was trouble in the next family. Potiphar’s wife tries to seduce Joseph, and when he stands for his principles he is accused of rape and thrown into jail. But even there. Joseph remains true and
faithful, and is eventually brought out. He becomes so useful to Pharaoh that he rises to the #2 position in all of Egypt—second only to Pharaoh.

However, the really interesting part of the story is when Joseph meets his brothers again. There he tests them to see if they have really changed. For the last test he has his own silver cup placed in Benjamin’s sack. Benjamin is found with it, and is charged with theft. Judah’s speech on behalf of his brothers is one of the most heartfelt in the whole of scripture. Instead of wanting to sacrifice Benjamin, as he did Joseph, Judah is willing to take Benjamin’s place and accept his punishment. Now Joseph sees how changed his brothers are, and he breaks down, and reveals who he is to them.

What an incredible resolution to this family in crisis! How the brothers were reconciled. And soon the whole family is together there in Egypt, and Jacob has his long-lost son Joseph returned to him. The dysfunctional family is healed, they are reunited and live together in peace and happiness.

In this story we see how families can change, and despite jealousy and a history of hostility, there can be harmony and trust once more. This is what this week’s study is all about.

John 17 reveals the kind of family God is looking for. It is not based on blood relationship, lineage, or descent, but on the deliberate choice of right, an acceptance of God and his kingdom. The Father of this family does not rule by virtue of procreation or position or power, but by inviting choice and acceptance. Our heavenly Father is so different to an earthly father it is hard to comprehend, but God has chosen family relationships to most closely represent the relationships he wants with us. So it is indeed a good idea to look at these models, while recognizing they are but images of the perfection God has planned for us in our eternal relationship we each can have with him.

This in turn means it all comes down to love. That can sound very trite. Love is a damaged word that can mean many things. But in the sense of the altruistic principles by which God runs his universe, then it means so much. That is what John is explaining in 1 John 4. So ultimately through the love we may find in family we can catch a glimpse of God’s love in his family. And despite all the failures and misrepresentation in our earthly families, “We have experienced and trusted in the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who live in love, live in God, and God lives in them.” 1 John 4:16 FBV.

Ellen White comments

The only remedy for our churches, for our families, and for individuals, is entire conformity to the will and character of God… Envy and jealousy are diseases which disorder all the faculties of the being. They originated with Satan in paradise. He started on the track of apostasy, and his jealous spirit caused him to see many things that were objectionable, even in heaven. After he fell, he envied Adam and Eve their innocence. He tempted them to sin, and they yielded, and became like himself, disloyal to God. But they repented of their sin, received Christ, and returned to their loyalty. So the enemy tempts men and women today. Those who listen to his voice will demerit others, and will misrepresent and falsify in order to build up themselves… O that such would become changed by beholding Christ! O that they would become meek and lowly by learning of him! Then they would go forth, not as missionaries for Satan, to cause disunion and alienation, to bruise and mangle character, but as missionaries for Christ, to be peacemakers and to restore. Let the Holy Spirit come in and expel this unholy passion, which cannot survive in heaven. Let it die; let it be crucified. Open the heart to the attributes of Christ, who was holy, harmless, undefiled. {RH, September 14, 1897 par. 7}