

Good morning everyone. My name is Richard Kerry and I serve on staff as the Marriage and Parenting Pastor. It's really good to be with you this morning.

As most of you know, last week we started a series called *Awkward Family Photos*. We are taking the summer to look at families in the Bible that went through an awkward time, a dysfunctional time, a painful and broken time, but God in His sovereignty had a purpose and plan to use that family for His glory and the good of His people.

To start this morning, I thought it would only be fair for me to show you an awkward picture of me and my family. This picture - y'all - I'm feeling a little embarrassed even showing it. When you think of awkward family photos you think of being young and your parents making you pose funny with your siblings. This picture isn't from when I was 2, 10, or 15. I was 22 stinking years old. My parents paid for professional pictures and we can debate just how professional they were in a minute – and please know my sister and I objected to some of the poses – but ultimately we were told we didn't have a choice and we ended up with this...

SHOW PICTURE

How terribly awkward, right? Our parents are sitting on us. I don't even know how to make that an illustration and I don't know what that says about their parenting. But there it is in all its glory. Gosh that's terrible to see on those giant screens. Ok, let me switch gears a little. Let me show you a picture that's less awkward but honestly, it's a little painful for me.

SHOW PICTURE

This is a picture of my Pop – my mom's dad – one of two blood-related men that I have EVER had any significant contact with – the other being his dad – my great-grandfather. When I was a baby, Pop would walk me around the block in the middle of the night when I couldn't sleep. My first few years of life I spent a great deal of time with him. When I was 4 – I wore cowboy boots like him, I gestured like him, I talked like him. He was my idol. A few years later, Pop moved to another city out of state, and I heard from him less than 10 times after that. He missed me playing sports, my high school graduation, he came to my college graduation but left before the ceremony finished, and then no-showed my wedding. And to top it off, he's only met one of my 3 children.

That picture is painful for me because intentional or not, my Pop caused a significant wound in my life. A wound that even today can be sensitive to the touch. Honestly, I wasn't even sure I could talk about it this morning. In just a few weeks, he and I will be at my cousin's wedding. Over the last month as I have thought about that interaction, I

have had to do some major heart checking in my attitude towards him and how I will show up at this wedding. I have to make a choice **NOW** how I will treat him **THEN**.

This morning I am going to guess that if we went through the photo albums of your life, like me, you'd have some really awkward photos. Hopefully none of your parents are sitting on you. There would also be pictures of your best moments in life – the victories and celebrations. But as we turned the pages, we'd see photos that hold the memories of some really painful moments of your life. Even if you don't have the physical pictures, they're forever engrained in your memory. That's because most of you have experienced pain at the hands of someone supposed to love you or wounded by someone you trusted. For many of you, that damage was caused by someone in your family – others it's been through marriage, a friendship, church relationship, or maybe all of the above.

Turn with me to Genesis 37 where we're going to see a family's story that is filled with wounds, and the people in this story choose different ways of dealing with that pain. And at the end of the story, we'll see a specific calling from the Lord for each of our lives.

Before we read the passage, I need to give you some backstory. This family is what experts would call – let me make sure I say this correctly – jacked up. The father in the family, Jacob, is a notorious deceiver. In his adulthood, he marries not one but two women - sisters. He's tricked into marrying the first wife, Leah. And in Genesis 29 we're told that Leah is hated. But the other wife, Rachel, Jacob loves. She has his heart.

To complicate matters, Jacob starts having children, all sons, with Leah. Rachel can't bear children, so she gives Jacob her maid who bears Jacob sons on her behalf. When Leah stops conceiving, she gives Jacob her maid, too. Somewhere in this **messed up story**, Jacob's oldest son sleeps with one of his brother's mothers. Then God remembers Rachel, the wife Jacob loves, opens her womb and she gives birth to Joseph and Benjamin. And unfortunately for the whole family, Rachel dies while delivering Benjamin.

Ok, I've caught you up. Genesis 37:2-4: Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was *still* a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father.³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic. ⁴ His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and *so* they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms.

Jacob, a man known for showing favoritism with his wives – does that very thing with his sons. He gives his favorite son, Joseph – his first son with Rachel, a multicolored tunic – one fitting for royalty and the owner of the birthright – not a shepherd and not

the 11th of 12 boys. Jacob's preferential love of Joseph leads to bitterness and resentment from the brothers – so much so that they couldn't even speak to him on friendly terms. It's not that they just didn't get along – they ***hated*** Joseph.

How incredibly painful it must have been to be one of these brothers? Growing up in an incredibly dysfunctional and incestuous family where you know one of your siblings is loved more than you. But Joseph isn't innocent. He finds ways to twist a knife in the wounds of his brothers, injecting more hostility into the family. He's a tattletell – delivering bad reports about his brothers to Jacob. If you have a sibling – you know there's nothing worse. And then we find out in the next few verses that Joseph has dreams – dreams that when interpreted indicate he'll one day be in a position superior to everyone in the family – parents and brothers included. And in 37:5 we're told that these dreams cause his brothers to "hate him even more." So, the anger and the passion with which these brothers feel that anger is only growing. ***I told you, this family is jacked up.***

Here's the first truth about families I want you to know this morning. **Intentional or not, All families experience pain. All families experience the awkwardness of pain.** I know that isn't rocket science to you. I know you know that. All families have to walk through seasons of difficulty. All families struggle.

In this family alone, we have deception, favoritism, anger and hate, death, jealousy, strife, envy, bitterness, resentment, bribery, adultery, fits of rage and revenge, and the list goes on and on. And your family, more than likely, is no different. You probably haven't experienced all of those situations in your family at the same time, but you've found yourself burdened, saddened, and angered by the experiences you've had with people in your family and that's because every relationship close to you has experienced dysfunction on some level. Even for those of you who had relatively good experiences growing up, you're not immune because every single person you are in a relationship with is sinful. And that's why really, ***EVERY*** intimate or meaningful relationship we ever get into has moments of pain and dysfunction.

John Piper says this, "Humanity is not harmonious. We are alienated — alienated from God and each other. So, put alienated, selfish sinners together in a home (or in a church, or in close proximity to each other), sharing possessions and the most intimate aspects of life, having different personalities and interests, and a disparate distribution of power, abilities, and opportunities, you have a recipe for a sin-mess."

All people are broken people, interacting with broken people. And when you put a bunch of broken people in the same space together – pain happens – sin-messes happen. Sometimes we are the recipients of that pain, and sometimes we are the ones that cause it. No matter which end of that you have been on, are currently on, or will be on in the future – I want you to know this today...

Pain evokes a natural reaction. All families experience pain is the first truth about awkward families. The second is that pain evokes a natural reaction. It doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter if the pain or stress is physical, emotional, or spiritual – **it will always evoke a natural reaction.**

Notice this morning, I didn't say response. Reactions and responses sound similar but they're light years apart. Let's talk about reactions first. Reactions aren't rational or thoughtful. They aren't logical. Reactions are rooted in our flesh – they're rooted in our pride and they lack clarity and wisdom. They're selfish. They don't take into consideration long term effects. And more times than not, they're something you regret later. It's the idea that every action has an equal and opposite reaction.

Reactions are fight or flight. On the fight side, it means when you get verbally or emotionally hurt or stressed, you react with a verbal or emotional jab of your own. If you get pushed, you push back. In those moments, we want the other person to back down or to make them feel as bad as we do – to experience the same kind of pain we do. In those moments, we're seeking our own justice and control.

On the flight side of reactions, it means either removing yourself from the situation or pretending the pain doesn't exist. It's all about finding safety and security. It most often involves avoidance. And the idea is that if I avoid the pain long enough, maybe I won't have to deal with the ramifications of it. But unfortunately, over time those painful feelings we've been avoiding accumulate and often times come out in very unhealthy ways. Those painful feelings build into resentment and bitterness and maybe even hatred. That's the point Joseph's brothers have reached. Every time their dad shows favoritism, every time Joseph gloats, every time they see those two hug, every time dad brags on Joseph their resentment and bitterness grow and grow. And eventually, their pain comes out reactive and destructive.

Let's pick up in Genesis 37:18 to see how. Joseph's brothers go out to tend to their sheep. Jacob sends Joseph to find his brothers.

¹⁸ When Joseph's brothers saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death. ¹⁹ They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer! (Do you hear the bitterness and resentment there?) ²⁰ Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then let us see what will become of his dreams!" ²¹ But Reuben heard *this* and rescued him out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life." ²² Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father. ²³ So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him; ²⁴ and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it.

Notice, their treatment of Joseph isn't responsive. It's reactive. It doesn't take into consideration the ramifications or consequences of their behavior. They've allowed things to boil over to this point and their decision is made out of anger and pain – not out of love and care. It's made hastily, not with wisdom and prayer. Their decision is made out of resentment and is seeking revenge in the worst possible way.

We aren't going to read the verses following, but instead of killing him, they betray him in the worst possible way. They sell him into servanthood for 20 shekels of silver, which is far worse than dying for him. He goes from a member of the family that God promised to bless in every possible way into a place where he has no name, no identity, no future, no purpose. Once destined for greatness – now he's destined to die amongst the nameless. **Anytime we seek revenge in any way, we've stripped the other person of their humanity and God-given value. Sinful reactions to sinful behavior only doubles the destruction everyone experiences.**

When the brothers return to Jacob, they take Joseph's multi-colored tunic shredded up and dipped in goat's blood telling their father Joseph was killed by a wild animal. Their reactive handling of the situation brings tragedy to the whole family – particularly Jacob.

Every year I preach, I seem to always have a story about an issue that has arisen in my own marriage – which is pretty ironic for a marriage and parenting pastor **AND** licensed counselor. Maybe **YOU** all should start charging me for the free therapy I get whenever I air out my issues to you.

Just a few weeks ago, there was a reaction to pain in my own family and marriage. Thankfully, Erin didn't plot my murder and sell me into servanthood – although I think she'd like me to do a little more around the house.

This particular conflict was full of miscommunication and misinterpretation. There were raised voices, tears, anger, and pain. It was one of those situations, and married or not you'll understand this, where she made one little comment – a morally neutral and non-offensive comment that I took offense to and we were off and running. I'm mad. I'm reactive. I am saying things that don't make much sense rationally. It was the only argument we've ever been in that we let carry over into the next day because neither one of us saw a way forward the night it happened.

The next morning, Erin did something incredibly gracious, understanding and frankly – courageous. She made this comment to me, "It just seemed like last night was about something else. It was like you weren't even mad at me for what I said but for something else." And it dawned on me. She was right. Earlier that week I realized I was harboring some resentment towards her – unfairly – but it was there. I was mad at her for something beyond her control or capacity. It was my issue. I was withholding

forgiveness and holding onto resentment. And it all came out in one night because of one comment. **When we don't deal with our issues with people directly, we react to pain instead of responding to it – we give our pain power over us and those feelings fester and stir up all kinds of issues. That's what happened with Joseph's brothers.**

Listen, I'm so thankful my wife took a risk asking me if there was something else going on in my heart because when resentment is present in a relationship and it goes unconfrosted, it erodes the foundation of that relationship. That's incredibly important this morning. If not confronted, resentment and anger erode the foundation of every relationship. And when that foundation gets chipped away, all bets are off and pain and destruction aren't just possible – they're imminent.

Joseph's brothers acted out of years of anger and they react to pain with revenge. All families experience pain. Pain evokes a natural reaction. Here's the last truth about awkward families this morning and the way I believe God would have us to respond...

When it comes to dealing with pain, forgiveness is a supernatural response.

A response is the exact opposite of a reaction. A response is thoughtful. It's wisdom-filled. It's conscious. It's gracious. It's patient. It's prayerful. It's timely. It seeks the good of everyone involved. And for believers, it's Spirit-driven not flesh-driven. In our flesh we'd like to react, but through the Spirit we're capable of better. **Forgiveness is always the Biblical response because forgiveness paves the way for life and healing.**

We aren't going to recap everything leading into our next passage about Joseph and how he responds but what you need to know is that he goes through various trials and situations that lead him from slavery, to the servant to Potiphar, to prison, and eventually he's placed in charge of all of Egypt – second only to Pharaoh himself. From the pit of misery and death to the ruler of a country. The country is in the middle of a famine, and all families must come to Egypt for food. And guess whose family has to come to Egypt to get food? Joseph's. After a few trips back and forth for food, Joseph decides to reveal himself to his brothers...

Genesis 45:1-5, 13-5 and Genesis 50:17b-21

Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me." So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ² He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard *it*, and the household of Pharaoh heard *of it*. ³ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is

my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "(You're all going to die for what you did! No, it doesn't say that does it?) I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ¹³ Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and all that you have seen; and you must hurry and bring my father down here." ¹⁴ Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. ¹⁵ He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.

And later in Genesis 50 after their father's death, his brothers plead with him, "And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. ²¹ So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."

Listen, if there is anyone who has reason to retaliate, to react, to seek revenge and justice it's Joseph. And if anyone has the authority and power to make sure restitution is paid, it's Joseph. He's had plenty of time to plan out how he's going to react against his brothers out of his own pain, but **somewhere between the pit they left him in and the throne he now sits on – Joseph chose forgiveness.** He chose restoration. Joseph chose different. He didn't choose the path of least resistance. He didn't choose what would've been easy. He chooses what is right. He chooses what is good and beautiful but also incredibly difficult. He chooses the path of forgiveness. And forgiveness is costly.

His response flows from the knowledge that God sent him ahead to preserve life. That God sent him ahead to pave the way for others. And that God is sovereign over the entirety of his life and that God is the One who determines justice.

"Forgiveness cost God his Son on the cross, but what does it cost us to forgive one another? Forgiving costs us our sense of justice. We all have this innate sense deep within our souls, but it has been perverted by our selfish sinful natures. We want to see "justice" done, but the justice we envision satisfies our own interests. We must realize that justice has been done. God is the only rightful administrator of justice in all of creation, and his justice has been satisfied. In order to forgive our brother, we must be satisfied with God's justice and forego the satisfaction of our own." – Jerry Bridges

Joseph understood that his vision for the future is limited but God's isn't and that's why he was able to choose forgiveness and restoration. Joseph's forgiveness saves the lives

of God's people. **Forgiveness always gives birth to life.** Where resentment eats away at the foundation of a relationship, forgiveness brings resurrection. Because where there is forgiveness there is freedom, peace, and unity. This morning you need to know that you have the opportunity to spread life throughout your relationships by choosing forgiveness and encouraging others to do the same. **God always brings life out of forgiveness.**

I know for some of you that's difficult. I know for some of you that means letting go of control. I know for some of you, you've been wronged in really terrible ways. But the greater the forgiveness extended, the greater the grace received. **The extent to which you forgive is driven by the extent to which you understand God's grace towards you.**

And this morning, I can't think of a more fitting example of this than in the life of Corrie Ten Boom.

Corrie Ten Boom and her family resisted the Nazis by hiding Jews in their home. They were ultimately discovered and sent to a concentration camp. Corrie barely survived until the end of the war; her family members died in captivity. Seared by this terrible trial by fire, Corrie's faith in God also survived, and she spent much of her time in the post-war years traveling in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, sharing her faith in Christ.

On one occasion in 1947, while speaking in a church in Munich, she noticed a balding man in a gray overcoat near the rear of the basement room. She had been speaking on the subject of God's forgiveness, but her heart froze when she recognized the man. She could picture him as she had seen him so many times before, in his blue Nazi uniform with the visored cap—the cruelest of the guards at the Ravensbruck Camp where Corrie suffered the most horrible indignities, and where her sister died. Yet here he was, at the end of her talk, coming up the aisle toward her with his hand thrust out. "Thank you for your fine message," he said. "How wonderful it is to know that all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!"

Yes, Corrie had said that. She had spoken so easily of God's forgiveness, but here was a man whom she despised and condemned with every fiber of her being. She couldn't take his hand! She couldn't extend forgiveness to this Nazi oppressor! She realized that this man didn't remember her—how could he remember one prisoner among thousands?

"You mentioned Ravensbruck," the man continued, his hand still extended. "I was a guard there. I'm ashamed to admit it, but it's true. But since then, I've come to know Jesus as my Lord and Savior. It's been hard for me to forgive myself for all the cruel

things I did but I know God has forgiven me. Please, if you would, I would like to hear from your lips too that God has forgiven me." Corrie recorded her response in her book:

"I stood there—I whose sins had again and again been forgiven—and could not forgive. It could not have been many seconds that he stood there—hand held out—but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. For I had to do it. I knew that. It was as simple and as horrible as that. And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. And so, woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, and sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. "I forgive you, brother," I cried. "With all my heart! For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then."

That experience enabled Corrie to pen these words, "Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuffs of hatred. It is a power that breaks the chains of bitterness and the shackles of selfishness." Corrie Ten Boom

This morning I need to ask you some questions: Who do you need to forgive? In what relationship do you need to let go of resentment and anger? A parent? A spouse? A friend? Someone in this room? What might God do in your life and in the life of others if you do that? What beauty and life could He bring from that?

Communion – At this time our ushers are going to come forward to pass out the elements for communion. As they do, I want to remind you that like Jesus, Joseph shows us that through forgiveness life is preserved and it is possible to have life in spite of deserving death. It's why the gospel is so compelling – that Jesus, who we've offended on a monumental scale, extends to us undeserved forgiveness and He does so freely. During these next few moments, would you think intentionally about the grace that's been extended to you and the forgiveness you need to extend to others?

Would you stand with me as we close our service in prayer?