

My family

Standing in the driveway around the age of four as my father packed the car with his belongings to leave my mother, older sister and I was a landmark and life-altering moment. I still remember the tears and despairing chaos of that moment; my own, my mother's and my older sister's. As anxiety-inducing as were the regular loud verbal, and sometimes physical, fights between my parents, watching dad backing his car out never to return left an ever-present wound and an ache that, though attenuated over time, deeply imprinted my life and personality. Almost forty years have passed, but my parents' acrimonious divorce was not so much an isolated event in time, but more like the releasing of a chaotic energy that stubbornly refuses to be completely tamed or nullified.

In reflecting on recurring themes in my ministry to date, the experience of my parents' acrimonious divorce, and the subsequent family dysfunction, is not a theme per se, but a back-drop and back-story that colours and permeates everything else.

Family- a mixed and colourful reality for us all.

The world was wrecked by humans, God begins a plan to put it back together and he begins with a married couple and ultimately families.

- Isaac marries his cousin Rebekah- prayer involved in finding a marriage partner. Families involved.
- Isaac tries to protect himself by making out that Rebekah is his sister, just like his dad, Abraham did.
- Rebekah give birth to twins: Esau and Jacob Esau is a man v wild, hairy hunter and rugged bloke. Jacob likes to stay at home and bake with mummy.
- Jacob deceives Esau and receives his fathers blessing- unheard of that the younger would inherit. God inverts our customs and cultures to fulfill his purposes. Esau gives away his future for a bowl of bean stew!
- Jacob has a dream and encounters the God of his fathers. The promises given to Abraham are now given to him.
- Jacob and Rachel (& Leah) Jacob falls in love with Rachel and is willing to work for seven years to win her hand in marriage.

16 Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. **17** Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful. **18** Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel." (Ge 29:16–20).

- His Uncle Laban tricks him and gives him his other daughter, Leah on the wedding night. He then promises Rachel for another 7 years work.
- Leah and Rachel have a baby bake off and throw in their maids to try and have the most children.
- God blesses Jacob materially like he did Isac and Abraham.
- Jacob runs away from his father in law after amassing wealth.

- Jacob wrestles with God. A breathtaking and deeply mysterious event. Imagine going 12 rounds with God Almighty? Jacobs name is changed to Israel.
You cant live on your parents faith...you must meet with God your self.
WBC For Jacob, this was his first personal encounter with God; he knew his parents' faith and of their own religious experiences, but now for the first time he has come face to face with God, and he is scared and overwhelmed. He confesses, "Truly the Lord is in this place, yet I did not realize it."
- Jacob has to face his past as he meets up with Esau. The last time he saw him, Esau had promised to kill Jacob.
"But the story of the conflict between Jacob and Esau does not end with Genesis. As their names and the oracle make apparent, Jacob and Esau are the forefathers of two nations, Israel and Edom, who were bitter rivals throughout the OT period" Hebrews warns "See to it ... that no one be immoral or irreligious like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears" (Heb 12:15–17).
- Jacob has 12 sons, and a daughter Dinah, who is raped.
- Rachel dies giving birth. ('give me children or I'll die', be careful what you ask of God.)

1. God is at work to rescue, redeem and renew all things through the mundane and normal workings of everyday life. Look at how unremarkable, and in a sense, how supernatural the narratives of these families are. Decades of life are condensed into a few pages. They go about their work, get married, and meet God- rarely. And yet in hindsight we see how God is working in their lives and through their lives.

Both Isaac and Jacob find their wives in the mundane daily working life. Perhaps our expectations through decades of soppy Hollywood movies and romance novels has made us think meeting someone has to be some dramatic event. When in fact they meet amidst the normal routines of daily life and working life.

Reminds me of Paul- make it your ambition to live a quiet life. And Jesus, do not worry about tomorrow.

11 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. (1 Th 4:11–12)

Beware of Gnosticism- a spiritual life lived 6 feet above the ground, and the promise of special knowledge and special events that lead to spiritual fulfilment. In Christ God has become flesh and blessed and inhabited our physical and so called mundane world.

2. Marriage and children are a gift of God and are very good things to be received with gratitude.

God performs the first wedding Adam and Eve, and God fulfills the last wedding the people of God joining with their God for eternity. And the first public miracle we see of Jesus in the gospel of John is enjoying the wedding and turns water into wine!

WBC “Bigamy is not explicitly condemned in the OT, unless Lev 18:18 refers to it. However, Ge 2 records that the Lord only created one wife for Adam, which implies that anyone who takes an extra wife is going beyond what God intended. Furthermore, all the polygamous marriages of Genesis turn out to be disasters.”

The family stories in Genesis clearly show us that there are no perfect soulmates who are completely fulfilled out there to marry. There are only people like ourselves; flawed inconsistent broken and needing love.

Divorce

The view of self in the formation of children into adulthood is intrinsically connected to the security and consistency of nurture and support provided by primary caregivers. Most typically parents are the primary caregivers, and where love and nurture are consistent the child is more likely to develop positive models of self and others. Obviously the converse is true.

This is hard to hear if you are divorced, and be assured that God’s grace and blessing will sustain you and help you. And, the good news of Genesis is that God will still work in and through your life.

Timothy Keller “So in our society we are too pessimistic about the possibility of "monogamy" because we are too idealistic about what we want in a marriage partner, and this all comes because we have a flawed understanding of the purpose of marriage itself. 37

Tim Keller: Ministering in the center of New York City, in the late 1980s, Kathy and I were constantly struck by the deep ambivalence with which Western culture views marriage. It was then we began to hear all the now society-wide objections-marriage was originally about property and is now in flux, marriage crushes individual identity and has been oppressive for women, marriage stifles passion and is ill-fitted to psychological reality, marriage is "just a piece of paper" that only serves to complicate love, and so on. But beneath these philosophical objections lies a snarl of conflicted personal emotions, born out of many negative experiences with marriage and family life. Mom 11 I'm tired of listening to sentimental talks on marriage. At weddings, in church, and in Sunday school, much of what I've heard on the subject has as much depth as a Hallmark card. While marriage is many things, it is anything but sentimental. Marriage is glorious but hard. It's a burning joy and strength, and yet it is also blood, sweat, and tears, humbling defeats

and exhausting victories. No marriage I know more than a few weeks old could be described as a fairy tale come true. *Meaning of Marriage*, 21

Timothy Keller on DAting

Before the 1900s in most cultures and times, marriage was usually arranged by families. Social and financial issues were very important and marriage was seen as something which belonged to the whole community.

Then in 1900s came a system of courtship and calling where a young man would visit a young woman in her home with her family present. Again, very communal.

Around the 1920s, we see a new term: dating. Before this, there was no such thing. With the advent of the car, now the young man took the young woman out of the family home for a date.

And now we have the hook up and friends with benefit culture. Basically this is about just meeting for sex with no commitments emotionally,, financially or relationally.

This is not to say everything was wonderful and perfect in the older ways, just that things have changed. So, if you are a follower of Jesus and single...

1. Recognise that there are seasons when it is not wise to seek marriage. Times of big transition such as finishing a course of study, moving to a new city, the death of a loved one, or other major events are not the ideal place to begin looking for a marriage partner.
2. Understand the gift of singleness. This does not mean that you have no desire to meet someone and marry, but to use this time well and wisely being fruitful and faithful for God.
3. Get more serious about seeking marriage as you get older. Act your age. Don't mess with someone's emotions by dating them if you have no real intention of exploring the possibility of marriage- especially if you are an older young adult.
4. DO not allow yourself deep emotional involvement with a non-believing person. This is not narrow-mindedness or being judgmental. IF Jesus is central to your life, then not being able to share this with the person closest to you sets up all sorts of issues.
5. Feel attraction in the most comprehensive sense. That is, not a superficial looks and money attraction, but: Character, mission, their future self, spiritual bonds.
6. Don't let things get too passionate too quickly. Take time to really get to know someone and observe them in different settings. Getting sexual quickly ignites and fuels connections that are just emotional and romantic. They are an important part of marriage, but won't sustain it.
7. Beware of being a fake spouse. That is, if a courting relationship is going on and on with no real progression of marriage, then get real.

8. Get and submit to lots of community input. Date with other couples and hang out together at communal events. If a guy, or a girl begins to isolate their dating pattern this is not ideal.
9. Pray.

Marriage and children are a gift of God and are very good things to be received with gratitude.

3. No matter how wonderful, no matter how dysfunctional, your family is, God is able to use you and your life for his purposes.

Esau's marriage choice upsets his parents as he marries foreigners.

Favouritism of Isaac with Esau and Rebekah with Jacob is unwise.

One of the points worth noting here is that the rivalry between siblings. First of all you have Cain and Abel, then Isaac and Ishmael and their struggles in the struggles between their mothers. Jacob and Esau and the trouble and struggles the Bay have together. Then you have Rachel and Leah sisters who are also are competitive and struggle against one another. And a bit later you will have the struggle between Jacob's own sons especially as they all gang up against a little brother Joseph.

The picture here is one of dysfunctional families. In fact, since the fall they are only dysfunctional families. The point is that some are less dysfunctional than others.

WBC: "There is no disguising the failures of the chosen line. Noah stumbles. Abraham goes astray more than once. Isaac and Rebekah are partisan. Jacob is at times positively obnoxious, and the author of Genesis does not disguise his disapproval of such conduct. Yet despite all their sinfulness, God's chosen are preserved and blessed. God's saving purpose is not thwarted by human weakness, though it may be delayed. God chooses the patriarchs not because they are particularly loveable characters but because of his declared intention that in them all the families of the earth should find blessing. So the patriarchs emerge from Scripture not as lily-white heroes but as real men of flesh and blood, red in tooth and claw."

16 Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore **God is not ashamed to be called their God**, for he has prepared a city for them. So, whatever your family situation and experience...

11 Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.¹

¹ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Heb 2:11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.