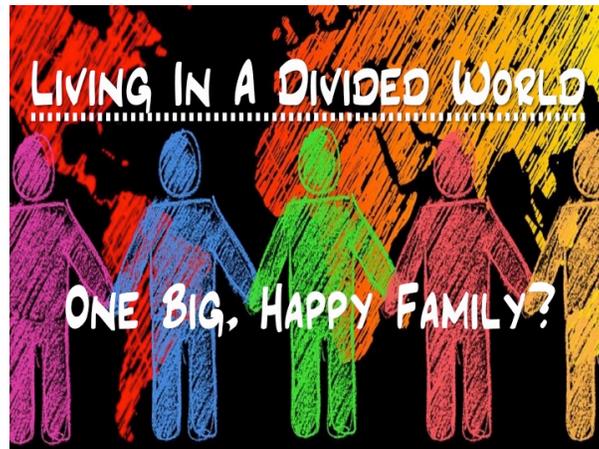


September 23, 2018
Genesis 37:17-22
I Samuel 23:15-18
Mark 3:20-21



Happiness, the late comedian George Burns said, *is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family...in another city*. Whether or not we want to admit it, all of us can appreciate those words as sometimes expressing how we feel about family.

This morning, as we continue our series of messages titled *Living In A Divided World*, we come to the message *One Big, Happy Family?* This is a message about family, and the sometimes difficult and challenging realities of family life. Tanya and I have been married for over 34 years, and for the entirety of that time we have lived hundreds of miles from our closest family members. I sometimes joke that there is good news and bad news about living so far away from your family. The bad news, of course, about living so far away from our family is that we are far away from our family. The good news about living away from our family is...we are so far away from our family. You laugh at that because you don't want to admit it, so I'll admit it for you – sometimes, we all could use a little space from our families. Am I right? That's not a commentary about what goes on in your family or mine; it's just how things sometimes are. Family is a beautiful, wonderful gift of God, but sometimes family is a challenging gift as well.

As I thought about this message, two things immediately came to mind – first, there is so much territory that is possible to cover with this topic. I have spoken about family on a number of other occasions so my purpose is not to go back and cover all of that ground, and certainly not all of the other possible topics related to family. Second, I spent a good deal of time thinking about which Scripture passages to use. There are a number passages to turn to, as the Bible has many stories about not only family life, but also includes in those stories some of the dysfunctions that come along with family life. There is conflict and dysfunction from the first story of family life, as we read of the tragic violence between Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16). There is also the struggle between Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:19-34); Isaac, Sarah, Hagar, and Ishmael (Genesis 16:1-16 and Genesis 21:1-20); Jacob and Laban (Genesis 30:25:1 – 31:55); there are multiple examples of dysfunction in the family of David, such as the violent episode directed at his daughter Tamar (II Samuel 13:1-39) and David's struggles with his son Absalom (I Samuel 15:1-37 and II Samuel 18:1-33); and there is the Prodigal Son and his family (Luke 15:11-32), which, although we don't always think of it as a story of family struggle or dysfunction, those elements are certainly there. There were three other passages that also came to mind, and I considered using just one of them but then decided to use a portion of each one for this morning's text. The first passage is the one I imagine is most familiar, the second less so, and the third is a passage

you might not recognize at all. I want to use each of those passages as representative of personality types that we find in every family, personality types that we will all recognize.

The first story comes from Genesis and tells a portion of the story of Joseph and his brothers. This is from one of the longest stories in the entire Bible and the story of Joseph and his brothers is captivating and fascinating, and I encourage you to read it in its entirety in the coming days. The second story comes from that of David and Jonathan. The story of David and Jonathan tells us of one of the great friendships of the Bible, but it is a friendship that was greatly complicated by the fact that Jonathan's father is Saul, the king of Israel. Saul is very jealous of David, and when he realizes that David has been chosen to replace him as king, Saul plots to kill David. The particular passage we will study this morning is when Jonathan is finally coming to this realization and helps David escape to safety. The third passage is one with which most people are probably not familiar. It is a passage, actually, that takes many people by surprise, as it tells of a time when the family of Jesus believed he was *out of his mind* and they come to take possession of him (the next time your family thinks you're crazy, don't feel bad, as Jesus' family thought that about him).

There is so much that we can say about family, but obviously I am limited in the amount of time that I have, and not wanting to impose upon your Sunday lunch with your family, I am scaling down what I have to say about the three different types of characters that we find in all families, which are – the *divider*, the *appeaser*, and the *manager*. Each of these personalities comes from the passages we will study, and they each exist in every family. You will recognize each of these characters in your family. In fact, you might already have attached some names to those character types, but if you are sitting with your family, keep those names to yourself. Please. And if we are very honest, we might also recognize some of these characters in ourselves. I represent one of these personality types, and you will probably guess which one before I tell you.

I should say at this point that each of these three personality types have their positive attributes. Not every aspect of a *manager*, for instance, is negative. I should also reiterate what I have said in earlier messages from this series, and that is the reality that conflict is inevitable in life, and that includes the reality that there is conflict in families and conflict in relationships where love is incredibly and deeply rooted. Just because there is conflict in your family, however, does not mean your family is dysfunctional and weird and in need of serious therapy. It simply means your family is normal and like every other family. Everyone in a family is different, and those differences are one of the sources of conflict. There are some things I just don't like, and they are things that Tanya loves. I don't like much of the music she likes, and she doesn't like much of the music I listen to. We have different tastes in what we read and what we eat and in many other things as well, and sometimes we wonder how we get along so well when we have such different tastes in most things. But our core values about life and about what we believe are the same, and that is very important.

Well, that long introduction doesn't give me much time, and as I have already been reminded several times that Jordan let you out earlier last week than I normally do, I better get moving.

The Divider

Genesis 37:17-22

17 Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan.

18 But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

19 "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other.

20 "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams."

21 When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said.

22 "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

Years ago, my family gathered at the home of one of my siblings for Thanksgiving dinner. All five of us, and our extended families, were able to attend, so it was a large gathering. Several of us stayed at the home of my mom, and before leaving for dinner my mom gave a very stern warning to one of my brothers-in-law and myself about not getting one of our relatives all wound up, because we had already planned to mention some of the political issues of the day, knowing we would stir up a big discussion with that person and get them upset. Looking back on this, I don't know why we felt compelled to do such a thing, because all it did was bring about a level of division. We thought it would be funny, but in reality, it was an immature and unfortunate decision on our part.

That was a conscious decision to do something that caused division, but many *dividers* do so without even realizing they are being divisive. Joseph was such a person. Joseph was favored by his father over his other brothers, and he was gifted in many ways, one of which was the ability to interpret dreams, interpretations which he sometimes used to hold over the heads of his brothers, such as telling them that they would one day bow down to him (Genesis 37:1-11). Doing so became so divisive that even Joseph's father, Jacob, rebuked him for not just his dream, but for the way he seemed to enjoy what his dream meant.

I don't think Joseph understood the discord he was sowing in his family. Even though he was correct in what he said – his brothers would indeed one day bow down to him – there is a way to deal with people and a way not to deal with people, and one way *not* to deal with people is to rub your successes into the faces of family members. What wants to hear about someone's promotion and accompanying large raise when you are struggling in your work and struggling to pay your bills? Who wants to hear about that trip around the world when you struggle to pay for the gas to go across town to the grocery store, let alone come up with the money to buy some groceries? Who wants to hear about a big new house when you know that if you miss one more mortgage payment your house will go into foreclosure? It is a wonderful gift to have such blessings, but basic sensitivity will make us realize there is a way to talk about all manner of things in our lives without being divisive. Joseph seemed more interested in reveling in his status as the chosen child and bragging about the successes he would one day enjoy than he was interested in showing some level of sensitivity to his brothers.

The *divider* is also the one who uses politics, faith, and the issues of the day to drive wedges between family members. We all know that, at family gatherings, there are those conversations everyone hopes won't come up because seated across from one another is one member of the family who supported Hilary Clinton and another who supported Donald Trump. Just mentioning those names makes us tense up, right? The difficulty is that rational, polite conversation can so quickly deteriorate into name-calling and shouting, which does absolutely nothing to bring a family closer together. Any time you begin a conversation, or further a conversation, by asking a question in this way – *please tell me how someone as intelligent as you can believe, support, or vote for...* Questions and comments that immediately put others on the defensive do nothing to further understanding and family harmony. It is better, I believe, to ask questions that lead to greater understanding, not questions that are accusations and insults that masquerade as questions. Ask questions such as, *what is it that you see in that person, that belief, or that policy that is important to you? Help me to understand what you would like me to know about your stance and your belief. How can we disagree on such fundamental beliefs and not allow those differences to divide us as family members who love one another?*

Also understand that dividers are a personality type who seek to create a diversion from what is going on in their own life so that they do not have to deal with those matters. Illusionists, for example, perform their illusions by creating some kind of diversion. They get us to look over here, at one hand, while over there, with the other hand, they are doing something they don't want us to see. Dividers often create conflicts and division in order to divert attention from themselves and from the issues in their lives that they do not want to address.

The Appeaser

I Samuel 23:15-18

15 While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life.

16 And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God.

17 "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this."

18 The two of them made a covenant before the Lord. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh.

I may be a namesake of David, but I am the personality type of Jonathan. I am not the David of the Bible, in terms of personality but like Jonathan, I want everyone to just get along. My personality type, in case you hadn't already guessed, is that of an *appeaser*. Can't we all just get along? I'm the one who, on a camping trip, will tell you, *that bear really doesn't want to eat you. Yes, he's hungry, but he just wants food, and isn't that what we all really want? We all get hungry. Why punish a bear for being who he is? Let's just give him all our food and hike that 500 miles back down the trail without any food of our own because it will make the bear happy.* Am I speaking for anyone else?

I think Jonathan was a really kind-hearted person. I imagine Jonathan as the kind of person who got along with everyone and was the kind of person everyone liked, because Jonathan was an *appeaser*, and what appeasers want above all else is for everyone to get along. The problem is, appeasement is not always a good idea, because others will take advantage of the desire that everyone get along. Saul would have liked nothing better than for Jonathan to bring David to him, under the guise of making peace and trying to have everyone just get along. Jonathan could not see that his father was so jealous and so threatened by David that the only solution he could consider was killing David. And that meant that the last thing needed in that situation was for Jonathan to be blind to his father's threat against his friend David and to formulate any plan to overlook or downplay that threat against David. David needed wise counsel and protection, not appeasement.

Now, it should be said that there is often a need for someone to keep some measure of peace in a family. Someone needs to, at times, take someone aside and say *is it really necessary to speak to your parents that way? Is it really necessary to treat your children that way? Is it really necessary to treat your siblings that way?* I knew two siblings who lived only a few miles from each other and went over thirty years without speaking to one another. Thirty years! It would have been so helpful had someone talked to them and said *does this really need to continue? Isn't it time to work out your differences?* That is being a peacemaker, however, not an appeaser.

The danger of the appeaser is this – the appeaser is like the homeowner who papers over a crack in the wall but does nothing to fix what caused the crack. Everything might appear fine and good when you paper over the crack but underneath, the problem continues to grow, which will ensure that not only will the crack reappear, but when it does reappear it is going to be far more serious and far more difficult to repair. Jonathan was dangerously mistaken about his father, and when he said to David, *don't be afraid. My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this*, he was being dangerously naïve. Jonathan was, however, correct on one point – everyone, including Saul, knew that David would be king, but his belief that Saul would not hurt David was wrong to the point of putting David's life in danger. Jonathan was so interested in everyone getting along that he could not see his own father's murderous intentions toward David, his closest friend. Jonathan's desire to appease his father was wrong to the point of being dangerous.

Jonathan either did not see – or would not see – what his father was capable of. Some people cannot, or will not, see the harm that is taking place in their family. Some people turn a blind eye to abuse in their family. Sometimes some, or most, of a family will be aware of harm or abuse in a family and the damage that is being done, but no one wants to say anything because they don't want *to cause any trouble*. How rescuing someone from trouble becomes causing trouble is beyond me. What it

generally means when someone says *we don't want to cause any trouble* is this – *we don't want to deal with the fallout from confronting what needs to be confronted*. Some things just need to be said, and Jonathan had the wrong thing to say, initially, to David. Sometimes there are difficult things we need to say.

Are we having fun yet? This is not easy, is it? But let's continue on with our third and final personality type, which is –

The Manager

Mark 3:20-21

20 *Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.*

21 *When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."*

Again, you don't have to raise your hand, but I wonder how many of you see yourself as a *manager*? I understand this personality type very well, because I am married to this type of personality. Tanya is the most efficient person I know, and she can get more done in an hour than I can accomplish in an entire day. She is very driven and focused. She is so driven and focused, in fact, that she would run over her grandmother if her grandmother got between her and her task. She would not mean to run over her grandmother; she just wouldn't see her because of her intense focus. Most of the time, the *manager* is referred to as a *controller*, so if you do see yourself as this type, just to let you know, when I looked up some information on the *controller* personality type, here is how it was labeled in one article – Controller/Leader/Psychopath. Psychopath? I like that part about being a *leader*, but wow, that *psychopath* part really scares me! If you are a *controller*, don't worry, I'm not insinuating that you are a psychopath, but I found it interesting that in one article, that's how this personality type was listed.

In all honesty, every family needs a manager-type personality (and, after each worship service, I was reminded of this by many of you who fit this personality type. It was told to me more than once, *if it weren't for us manager types nothing would ever get done!* Fair enough, and point taken). Somebody, after all, must organize a family and their gatherings; plan and organize the reunions; make sure everyone is where they need to be, when they need to be; and help to keep everyone in line because, you know, sometimes families get out of line. What families don't need, however, is the person who takes it upon themselves to tell all the other members of the family how to live, where to live, who to love, where to work, and all the other details about life. People can make those decisions for themselves. In fact, people *will* make those decisions for themselves, and not always in the ways that please the manager.

If you are a *manager*, here's the best piece of advice I can offer – understand why. Seek to understand what has shaped you into being a *manager*, or *controller*. In some instances, the *manager* was raised in an environment where they were made to feel less than worthy, which caused them to create a personality that is very driven, very goal oriented, often a perfectionist, and seeking to control their environment in a way that will make them feel better about themselves. In many instances – not all, but quite a few – I have found that *managers* are individuals who come from a home where some type of addiction has been a factor. Did you know that? Don't raise your hand, but if you recognize yourself as a controller, has addiction been a part of your family history? I'm going to guess that there is a strong probability that it has been. What that addiction does, then, is it causes the person who is the controller to seek to control their surroundings because so often when they were younger their surroundings were out of control. Some of you were part of the prayer walk that took place here in Shelbyville yesterday morning. That prayer walk was to bring attention to the problem of addiction in our community and to pray for the individuals and families who are struggling with that difficult disease. I am sorry that I was not able to be part of that event, but I was in Scottsburg, Indiana for a

similar event. Our band had committed several months ago – before I was aware of our local event – to play at an event for an addiction ministry. At the event we heard several stories of how God changed the lives of people who had very difficult struggles with addiction. One of those individuals now works with the ministry, and his story was very powerful. Addiction led to him losing his family and losing five years of his freedom, as he was incarcerated because of crimes committed that were related to his addiction. He had fourteen car accidents under the influence, four of which took place while he was traveling at speeds of over 140 miles per hour, and he walked away with no injuries. He has now been sober for seven years, is an ordained minister working on the staff of a local church, serves on the staff of the addiction ministry, and has had his family restored. He is part of a prison ministry that has seen over 300 individuals baptized in the last seven years! God truly can change lives!

Wherever you see yourself in relation to these personality types, remember this – we are all created as unique, special creations of God. We are also, however, powerfully influenced by our surroundings and experiences, and those surroundings and those experiences can shape us in ways that create difficulties in the way in which we relate to others, especially our families. Your personality type has gifts that it brings to your family, but it also has challenges, challenges that can bring difficulty to your family. Take care to understand who you are and why you are who you are, so that God can make you fully into the person you were meant to be!