

Reconciled by Grace

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

August 2020 (2-29 August)



This month we are going to do a bit of family introspection. During lockdown some very interesting stories have appeared on the internet about how families have coped with the pressure of being together in a small space for such an extended period of time. At the other end of the scale there are those who belong to extended families who have had to live through isolation shielding themselves because of their underlying illness. All the tensions associated with loving, caring, providing, supporting, listening has meant that there has been a knitting together of some relationships while other have been like the knitting that has been ripped apart.

It would appear that lawyers specialising in family issues have been reporting an increase in divorce requests, while others such as care organisations have been highlighting the issue of domestic abuse. Children and teenagers have also been separated out as vulnerable groups having to deal with issues that may affect them for many years to come.

Only the naive believe people of faith are immune from family struggles. A cursory glance at the Bible will soon make you aware of flawed and broken individuals. Many of them had to face up to the results of their behaviour and the behaviour of others and in doing so live through the consequences. This month we hope to glean fresh insights into the nature of God and how God deals with flaws and failings as an example or a blueprint for us all to follow.

*The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the [Reconciled by Grace Resource Pack](#) to help adapt the material for small group work. They are divided into 4 parts to correspond with the 4 weeks of the Daily Worship theme. **These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through all the given questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose, or adapt to what interests your group.***

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Part 1: Restless God talk leads to a restful mind

Read Genesis 32: 22-31

Jacob's family life was complicated. 11 sons, 1 daughter, 2 wives, estranged from his brother... His life up to this point has been a wrestle — whether with his twin, his dad or his father-in-law. But tonight Jacob would face the wrestle of his life that would leave him limping.

How do you think Jacob would have been affected in his various roles as dad/husband/brother/son-in-law after this transformative experience of coming face to face with God?

Read Matthew 14: 13-21

We commonly refer to this event as 'The Feeding of the Five Thousand' but there were more than five thousand fed! Apparently the women and children were in addition to the five thousand.

What would be an alternative name to describe this moment?

Read 1 Peter 5: 6-11

These words remind us that we are in solidarity with brothers and sisters outside of our conventional family units. Luis Palua the Argentinian evangelist is credited with saying "God has no grandchildren" and in Christ we have no second-cousins-once-removed... just brothers and sisters!

In what ways can remembering our brothers and sisters across the globe regularly in our prayers help us with our own anxieties?

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Part 2: It's our families that cause the most pain

Read Genesis 37: 1-11

If you were Joseph and you had dreams like that would you have told your brothers about them?

Why is it that it's often our family members who irritate us the most?

Read Psalm 85

A vision of restoration, of renewed relationships — beautifully expressed in verse 10:

“Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.” (NRSV)

How can we respond to God's grace and embody steadfast love so as to meet faithfulness, righteousness and peace in our homes, our churches and our local communities?

Read Revelation 21:1-5

In amongst the rich, vivid, ornate language of Revelation there is this simple ordinary picture of God wiping away tears. A tender moment of a beloved parent caring for an upset child with a gentle thumb on our cheekbone to dry our crying eyes. God cares deeply for each one of us.

One day mourning will be no more, but we live through mourning now. How can we be more attentive to the tears of others? How can we be more like God and be responsive to the pain and struggles that others go through?

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Part 3: Healing a family rift — Reconciled by Grace

Read Genesis 45:1-15

Joseph is incredibly gracious to the brothers who sold him into slavery. He short-circuits the cycle of blame. He is holding all the cards, and yet he chooses happily to fold.

Why is it so hard to surrender the moral high ground when family members argue with one another? How and when do we manage to step down?

Read Isaiah 56: 1-8

'I will gather still others to them
besides those already gathered.'

The family of God is not limited by genetics, culture, language, time or space. God's invitation is simply to those who want to come. To all who are thirsty. Regardless of DNA, background, or location.

All who are thirsty. Not all whom we choose. Not all whom we get on with, gel with, or click with.

How have we been guilty at ignoring the sacrifices and contributions of others — because we reckon they don't count or matter in the same way?

Read Psalm 133

What do you make of the striking metaphor in verse 2? What can we learn about living together in unity from the comparison with precious oil liberally applied?

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Part 4: Healing and re-shaping the family history

Read Exodus 1: 8-22

Let's hear it for Shiprah and Puah! Their quick thinking saves lives, keeps families intact and frustrates the will of a bloodthirsty xenophobic despot! Picture it: 'Call The Midwife BC Edition' with courageous women going from house to house on their donkeys with compassion, ingenuity and bravery.

Who are the vigorous women who have kept our families and communities and churches together over the years?

Read Romans 12: 1-8

A key part of restoring relationships is often having a sense of humour and being able to be generously self-deprecating. In verse 3 we are given a wee reality check. It's good now and then to take stock and look at ourselves honestly (but also compassionately).

Why is it that being able to have a sense of and perspective and humour about yourself and your abilities helps mend fraught relationships?

Read Ephesians 4: 1-6

Bearing with one another in love can be very hard. In the coming weeks, months and years we face many challenges as families, as communities, as societies indeed as a common humanity — as one body with many parts.

What is our prayer for the week ahead? What is our prayer for the year ahead? What is our prayer for the coming decades? How can we lead the way in showing humility, gentleness and patience?