

“But God” - Genesis 31:7

By Ray Ruppert



...BUT GOD

But God - in the Midst of a Dysfunctional Family:

Genesis 31:7 “Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. **But God** did not permit him to harm me” (ESV, emphasis added).

Your counselees come into your office and you ask them how things are going this week. The husband glares at his wife and blurts out, “Her father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times.” What do you do? Do you immediately paraphrase, “But God did not permit him to harm you!”

Of course not. You want to get to what is behind the obvious anger to see what happened. In Jacob’s case, twenty years of a dysfunctional family has been brought to a boiling point.

Digging deeper yields a myriad of problems in this family. There is the sibling rivalry that Jacob must deal with after marrying two sisters. Hopefully, you will never have to counsel someone in this position, much less someone having four wives! However, gathering data reveals more relevant issues:

- Leah is not loved, and even God says that Jacob hates her (Gen 29:31). That is a common theme in counseling.
- Infertility is another issue in counseling. Even though she is not loved, Leah is the first to conceive and have a child. That brings up the evil of envy within Rachel (Gen 30:1). How often is envy the root of the hurt that accompanies infertility? This issue is not out of place in today's society. If you read the advice columns you will find this is a reoccurring theme in dysfunctional families. The pressure of producing children is brought by husbands, wives, in-laws, cousins, and even friends. Yet this is just one more of the pressures on Jacob.
- Another problem with infertility is blaming others for it. Throughout these years, God is firmly in control of who is to have a child and who isn't. Rachel fails to see God's hand in this and blames Jacob (Gen 30:1). In Jacob's anger he has a theological revelation that it is God who is keeping children from Rachel.
- Extramarital affairs bloom in dysfunctional families. Though it was a cultural thing to do in their time (Rachel and Leah gave their servants to Jacob as wives), we see both husbands and wives rationalizing adultery and even condoning it for their spouse.
- In-law problems abound as well. It is extremely difficult for one or the other of a married couple to disengage from a controlling in-law. After fourteen years of serving Laban for his wives, Jacob wants to go home with his family. However, his father-in-law convinces him to stay and he will pay Jacob.
- Finances are often the string that the in-law uses to control the family. Laban doesn't do this out of the generosity of his heart but out of greed. He recognizes that his wealth depends on God working through Jacob. So now we have interference from the in-laws as Jacob becomes an employee after working off his debt for his wives.
- Manipulation is often done through dishonesty. Laban steals the very animals that he has promised to Jacob (Gen 30:35-36). This situation could be hitting closer to home with your counselees than some of Jacob's other problems. Working for the wife's father can be a very tenuous situation, especially when the working environment turns hostile.
- Jealousy within the in-laws adds to the dysfunction. Laban's sons see that their flocks aren't producing as fast or are as healthy as they used to be. At the same time, Jacob's wealth is increasing rapidly (Gen 30:42-31:1). They aren't seeing this from God's perspective so blame Jacob for their misfortune. They most likely complain to Laban.
- Dysfunction often escalates with threats of physical violence. Jacob also sees that Laban isn't being as kind to him as before (Gen 31:2). There could also be a threat of retaliation

which Jacob fears as he flees from Laban (Gen 31:31). In fact Laban even hints that he would have done something if God hadn't stopped him (Gen 31:29).

- Spiritual awakening for one or more members of the family doesn't always lead to resolving conflicts. In the midst of this family mess, Jacob hears from God and is plainly told to go home to his father. God tells Jacob that He will be with him (Gen 31:3). It may be at this point that Jacob started having a better understanding of how God had been leading him.

But God's command initially steers Jacob in the right direction with his family. In counseling, looking at God's commands with a dysfunctional family would be a starting point.

Jacob started with a family conference to discuss the situation (Gen 31:4). Clear, honest communication is vital to a healthy family (Eph 4:25-29). Jacob does not blame either Rachel or Leah for the problems that have beset him, even though he doesn't include Bilhah or Zilpah (probably a cultural issue since they were still servants).

But God protected Jacob. He speaks about God's faithfulness (Gen 31:5), His sovereignty, and protection (Gen 31:7). It is necessary to use Scripture to show a dysfunctional family who is really in charge as well as the root of sins that need to be confessed, resulting in true repentance.

- Counselors need to be reminded of the different times that God has been working in their lives. Jacob relates how God has been intervening on his behalf providing dreams and guidance from the angel of the Lord (Gen 31:9-14). Looking back on all the problems your counselees have, you can assure them with confidence that they would be in even worse position if were not for God (Eph 2:1-3).

- * **But God** Kept Them from Being Killed or Killing (literally or symbolically) each other or the in-laws (Gen 31:7).

- * **But God** Provided For Them (Gen31:9).

- * **But God** Was Working In This Situation For Their Good (Rom8:28-29).

- * **But God** Was Developing Their Character (Rom5:3-5).

- * **But God** was Bringing Them to Himself (Rom5:6-11).

As Jacob has his conference with Rachel and Leah, we see an unusual degree of unity as Rachel and Leah are on the same page with Jacob. There aren't any arguments or dissension. They both see what has happened with regard to their father and agree to do what Jacob says. This could have been a disaster if Jacob had simply told them what he was going to do, and they needed to toe the line. But God was working in them, just as He had been working in Jacob's life.

This isn't the end of the story; God isn't finished with Jacob. Neither will He be finished with counselees when they have completed their first conference table.