

## I. Set Up

- A. Campus pastor walks onto stage with a suitcase.
- B. Good morning. Welcome. Introduction
- C. So... you are wondering about the suitcase. Yes, about that. I am not moving, nor am I about to race to catch a flight. This is to make a point.
- D. I want to help you realize that we all carry around some “baggage.”
1. We all have a history. We all have “issues.” You might even say, we all have some “wounds.” We are slowed down in certain ways by our past. Some of us have a lot of baggage – show a picture of someone with lots of luggage.
  2. The big point at the moment is, some of us have processed most of this, and so we are not caring as much baggage as others.
  3. It’s ideal to travel light. It’s ideal to “unpack” if you will. You do not want to be the person who is lugging around six big suitcases everywhere you go. Today Mike is going to talk about that.
- E. We are going to be looking at someone who has a lot of baggage – and consequently a lot of Blindspots. His name is Jacob. He is the son of Isaac, the grandson of Abraham, and the twin brother of Esau.
- F. And in his specific case, a lot of his baggage is from his family. Let me read an account for you about Jacob and his family. It is found in Genesis 25:19 – 27. I am reading from The Message paraphrase:
1. **This is the family tree of Isaac son of Abraham: Abraham had Isaac. Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan Aram. She was the sister of Laban the Aramean.**
  2. **Isaac prayed hard to God for his wife because she was barren. God answered his prayer and Rebekah became pregnant. But the children tumbled and kicked inside her so much that she said, “If this is the way it’s going to be, why go on living?” She went to God to find out what was going on. God told her,**
  3. **Two nations are in your womb, two peoples butting heads while still in your body. One people will overpower the other, and the older will serve the younger.**
  4. **When her time to give birth came, sure enough, there were twins in her womb. The first came out reddish, as if snugly wrapped in a hairy blanket; they named him Esau (Hairy). His brother followed, his fist clutched tight to Esau’s heel; they named him Jacob (Heel). Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.**
  5. **The boys grew up. Esau became an expert hunter, an outdoorsman. Jacob was a quiet man preferring life indoors among the tents. Isaac loved Esau because he loved his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.**
- G. Right now...

## II. Intro

A. There have been a few moments in my life when I realized how much I had been shaped by my family.

1. During my freshman year in college, I realized that one of my roommates was much closer to his Dad than I was to mine. At first, I thought he was weird. I later became a bit envious.

2. During my sophomore year I took a developmental psychology class that required me to write a long paper about my experiences growing up. The process of writing the paper – and reading other people’s stories – helped me see some good things about my family. And some not so good things.

3. After getting married, I realized – we both did – that we had some different assumptions about some things we didn’t even know we had assumptions about. We had been shaped by our families in some different ways.<sup>1</sup>

4. At some point I realized that my father had been shaped by the poverty he grew up in – and that shaped had in turn shaped me. Along similar lines, at some point I realized that my Mom’s father had been mentally ill – something no one ever told me. But at some point, I realized, “Oh, that’s what was going on. That is why he never worked.” And I realized, that is part of my Mom’s story. It shaped her, which in turn shaped me.

B. I could go. But you get the point. Most – though not all (I don’t think Pat the Cubs fan is quite there yet). But most of us eventually realize: 1) that the family we grew up in was different than other families; 2) that some of those differences were good and some “not so good” (some maybe very bad); and 3) that all of them shaped us.

C. And then we have to ask, what have I done with that. How has my past shaped me? Are there things I need to work through? Are there things I need to celebrate – people I need to thank? Are there people I need to forgive? Things I need to let go of? Has any of this created some blind spots I need to deal with.

D. I ask all of this because, today we start to look at Jacob. He has blind spots that cause all kinds of problems for him. And we can see some of them starting from his days as a child.

III. Last week I laid out some starting assumptions for this series. I said:

A. You want to get better. We want to grow. Better is better.<sup>2</sup>

B. Two: Better looks like Jesus. He is more than a model for us to follow. He is more than that – He is our Savior and Lord. But he is not less than that.

C. Better is hard. Real life change is a work of the heart that takes work. We do not accidentally qualify for the Boston Marathon or embody the Fruit of the Spirit.

D. Four: One of the reasons – not the only by any means, but one of the reasons – that better is hard is because we do not see ourselves very clearly.

E. I went on to note that this is even more likely to be true if we have power or wealth.

F. Six: I argued that the Bible can help us. We then looked at I Samuel 15, which provides a classic Blind Spot illustration featuring King Saul. And then I said we were going to focus on Jacob, which starts today.

- G. Finally – the last assumption I listed was: you are willing to do the work to identify your Blindspots and grow.
- IV. I said some other things, such as the fact that none of this is new.
- A. Socrates said the unexamined life is not worth living.
- B. Calvin said, the way forward requires knowledge of God and knowledge of self.
- C. I also noted that a lot has been said and written about the challenges we have when it comes to facing the truth about ourselves. But I think you got that. Today we start a discussion about unpacking by looking at one of the common ways we get Blindspots. We are shaped by our family.
- V. The passage that was read is from Genesis 25.
- A. Genesis 1 – 3 gives us the grand set up for the rest of the Bible. It’s critical. If the Bible were a movie and you missed the opening scene, you would never completely understand what was happening. It’s there that three big ideas are set before us. It’s there we learn that:
1. An All-Powerful God created everything – including us, who were made in His image and commissioned to act as his stewards.
  2. It is there we learn that there was a rebellion against God – and a subsequent fall. We are now estranged from God and each other. Everything is broken.
  3. It is there that we are told that God has promised to send someone to restore us – to provide a way back. To fix things for them. Theologians call these verses (Genesis 3:15) the *proto-evangelion*. It is the first statement of the Gospel.
  4. It is the first place we get a hint at what God will do to for us.
- B. Genesis 1-3 sets up The Story – it sets up Our Story.
- C. Genesis 4 – 11 makes it clear that people really are broken and need help.
- D. In Genesis 12 the rest of the story begins. With Genesis 1- 11 as backdrop – with an understanding that the people and the world are broken and need help and have been promised help – have been promised that God is going to send help through the woman - we read on.
- E. We watch as God calls Abraham and offers him a deal. “If you will follow me, I will give you land and descendants and bless the world through you.”
- F. Abraham will say yes to God’s offer – he enters into a deal with God. (We call this the Abrahamic Covenant). He gets the land right away but not the descendants. There is some drama about all of this. Eventually Isaac is born.
- G. There is some drama between Abraham and Isaac – especially when God tells Abraham to kill Isaac, only to stop him at the last minute. But eventually things settle down, Isaac grows up and marries. And we start over again as Isaac and his wife Rebeca - struggle to have a child.
- H. After twenty years, Rebekah conceives. Twins. But trouble soon follows. This is where we turn to the passage that was read earlier. In Genesis 25: 22 we read:

1. **The children struggled together within her, and she asked, “Why is this happening to me?” So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her: Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.”**

I. Good news, you are going to have twins! Bad News, they are not going to get along. And the older will serve the younger.

1. Which is not the way things were done back then. In that culture – indeed, in many cultures still today – the first born received a double portion of the inheritance and would serve as the head of the family.

2. When Rebekah heard that the older one would serve the younger, she probably thought, “Oh great, my life is going to continue to be a soap opera. She already knew what this was like, because there was ongoing tension between her husband and his older half-brother Ishmael. No happy Thanksgiving meals for them.

J. And then, this where Jacob is introduced. Verse 24: **When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb.** <sup>25</sup> **The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.** There is some suggestion here that we have Transfusion Syndrome going on here, where you end up with one placenta for twins, and one of the infants gets most of the nutrients and ends up strong and vibrant while the other is much smaller and weaker.<sup>3</sup>

K. **V27: When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents.**

L. And then we get to the money verse for the day, chapter 25:28 **Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.** Let me read that again. You may have glossed over these lines before. You shouldn't. They are ominous. This is about all you need to read to know that they will end up on the Jerry Springer show. Mom and Dad had favorites. Dad liked the one who got him the kind of food he liked to eat. And Mom loved the other one. Well, what could go wrong with that?

VI. Now, before we unpack this, let me remind you - Jacob is a key player in the Bible principally because he is in the lineage of Jesus.

A. If you read the Old Testament over several times. a few big ideas emerge: 1) you realize how amazing God is; 2) you realize how broken people are, 3) you realize how important sacrifices are, because sin is a capital offense and the only way a guilty party can go free is if an innocent third party dies in his or her place; and 4) you realize that this is all a big set up for Christ.

B. If you read the Bible enough – not just tiny sections, but some big swaths at a time so you see the story – you realize that much of the Old Testament is a set up for Jesus.

1. The Old Testament is full of prophets, priests and kings – well, Jesus is the perfect prophet – the one who speaks perfectly for His father. He is also our High Priest who even now makes intercession for us; and He is the King of Kings.

2. Much of the Old Testament is about the Jews – that the nation of Israel was the people of God. Well, in the New Testament, we realize that Jesus is the new and perfect Israel.

3. Much of the Old Testament centers around the Temple – where God and man could meet. In the New Testament we see that Jesus is the new and perfect Temple.

4. For that matter, Jesus is the new and perfect Job. He is the new and perfect Jonah. He is the wisdom of Proverbs. He is the sacrifice that all of the sacrifices point to. Indeed, Jesus is the true and perfect Passover Lamb.

C. Many miss this – do not be one of them. All roads lead to Christ. He is the fulfillment. We find our life in Him. We need to keep the main thing the main thing, and seeing the story helps us do that by pointing to Jesus.

D. I will keep highlighting the fact that Jacob’s key role is to part of the path that leads to Christ, because it’s primary. But that does not mean there are not other things to see along the way. And one we get from Jacob. We see how Blind Spots play out over time. We see how much harder we can make our own lives when we do not make peace with our past. Celebrate the good and forgive the bad and process it all and move on.

E. Jacob is an example of a guy who does not do this. He emerges as a guy without a lot of self-awareness. He is hurt and he hurts others and he makes his own life a mess. This series is based on the idea that we are often a lot like Jacob: blind to our blind spots.

VII. Jacob has a lot of baggage. Genesis 25:28 suggests some of his issues were caused by his parents. There are not many words there, but sometimes you do not need many.

A. According to folklore, Ernest Hemingway once wrote a six-word novel. It was in response to \$10 bet that he couldn’t do it. He took a napkin and scribbled: For sale. Baby shoes. Never worn.” Those six words get your mind racing. A few words suggest a lot.

B. Well, in Genesis 25:28 we get 13 words: **Isaac loved Esau, because he ate of his game. But Rebekah loved Jacob.** What kind of Dad would be described that way? “Bob had two boys. He liked the one who was good at sports. His wife liked the other one best.”

C. You can guess that this isn’t going to end well. That these boys are going to have issues. And they do.

VIII. At the opening of this sermon I noted that there have been a few moments in my life when I have realized how critical (how formative) families are: I saw this when I went to college, writing a paper. I realized it in a new way after getting married. Another time when things came into greater focus for me was when we first offered Men’s Fraternity back in the mid 90s.

A. The premise of year one of Men’s Fraternity is that there are a lot of 40 and 50-year-old boys walking around because: 1) either no one has told them what it means to be a man; or 2) because they got deeply hurt as boys and stopped growing.

B. Now anyone who’s passed Intro to Psych – to say nothing of those of you with a PhD in counseling – will be a bit nervous about how freely some big ideas get bantered about in the talks in Men’s Fraternity. It often felt like we were ripping off bandages from old wounds without a lot of medical training.

C. But that is what we did – and we will do it again in about a year. And one of the ways we did it was to talk about some of the most common ways boys might have been wounded.

1. One talk was about the ways Dad's hurt their sons by pushing too hard. It is based on the idea that there is a hunger inside boys to want their father's love.

2. One talk is on the ways that some Mom's mess up their sons by not allowing their boys to grow up. Like the video we saw with Pat.

3. Both of these are done from love – done with good intentions. There are other talks on other wounds – such as men who do not have friends and the like.

D. When I was first reading the background material from Men's Fraternity, I was skittish. And then two things happened: first, it worked on me.

1. I remember working through the material on the Dad wound – the premise being that a lot of Dad's push too hard, and as a result, their sons grow up feeling like they were ever good enough. And as I was reading over this, I started to cry. This was clearly my story.

2. My Dad – who passed away a few years ago – had one of the best fourth quarters of anyone I know. He came to faith later in life and changed a lot. And we had some great talks before he died in which he apologized and told me that he loved me and was proud of me. And I came to understand him a lot better – to appreciate that he had done what he thought was best. To see my part in all of this. But if you asked me what I thought about myself growing up, it was that nothing I did was ever good enough.

3. Now, I was fortunate in that my response to this was to try to prove him wrong. And that means I worked really hard – and there are upsides to that. Working too hard – or working too much - is an acceptable vice. (It causes problems and I have regrets. But working hard has advantages that drinking or other forms of rebellion do not).

E. But as I was working through the material, I began to see things I had not seen before. To understand myself a bit better – to see some of my blind spots.

1. Let me be clear, discovering these things is not generally a fun process. It's a bit unsettling.

2. And discovering them is only part of the work. But it does help you start to make sense of some things.

3. One small example. My Dad had called me one day and left a message. This in and of itself was odd. Before I was 35, I bet he had only ever called me on the phone once or twice. And when I'd call home, if he answered, he would almost immediately hand the phone to my Mom. He might get back on the phone later on, but that was generally to ask me some questions that felt like I was reporting in. Was I hitting deadlines? How many billable hours did I have last week? Had I finished this project. Whatever. In hindsight, I realize how odd these calls were, but they didn't feel odd to me because it was what I knew.

- a) And just to be clear, there are upsides to this. He was doing what he did to help me. And he was very responsible and worked hard to provide. I'd take my childhood over his 100 times out of 100.

4. Anyway, after my Dad came to faith, and was going through his own growth, he left a message on our phone. This would have been mid to late 90s. The fact that he called was mind-blowing enough. At the end of the message he said, “That’s it. Have a great week. I love you and I am proud of you.”
5. So, those things were very seldom said, and never without a qualifier – that is why I am telling you, you need to... try harder, jump higher, whatever. But there was no qualifier.
6. I listened over and over and I thought, this was not casually done. He was told to do this. Somehow – through a book or his small group or something – the Spirit of God is moving in his life. This wasn’t his idea. And I wasn’t completely willing to believe it or trust it.
7. But I saved the message. And at the time you had to go out of your way to save messages that were more than 90 days old. And I did it over and over. And I would call in to listen to it. And then one day, Sheri called me said, “I know you have been saving some message for ever. It’s about to be dropped again. Did you want to save it still or have you dealt with it.”
8. And I wondered, “Have I dealt with it? That is the question.” And I started trying to tell her about it, and I started crying. Which led me to believe, apparently I haven’t completely dealt with it. But I remember saying to her, “I am mystified at the power of that message over me. I don’t really get it. Why does that mean so much to me? For years, I didn’t like the guy. But there was no escaping him. Why is it so important to me to hear my Dad say, I love you and I am proud of you.”
9. I can only say, it is. And point out that in ?, that is exactly what the Father says about Jesus.
10. Dads, those words are powerful. They are enormously important – to boys of all ages. Perhaps especially to young boys, but to boys of all ages.

IX. Which brings me to my second observation. I said, I was a bit skittish about the Men’s Fraternity curriculum because it felt a bit to me like handing a lot of people with no medical training a scalpel and a booklet titled, Spinal surgery for Dummies.” I was a bit leery of pointing out men’s wounds, but first it helped me. And second, I watched it help others.

A. I remember a conversation with a man in his 70s in the lobby after church one day. He said, “I see you have a program that starts at 6 AM. Are you kidding me? I am not getting up that early to come to some program. It is inconsiderate of you to expect me to do that. What are you going to talk about anyway?”

B. And I shared a brief bit about what we were going to look at, and I said, “By way of example, one of the things suggested in one of the talks is that there are some grown men who still desperately long to hear their Dads say, “I love you and I am proud of you.” And he looked at me for about five seconds and then he broke out sobbing. And he was inconsolable. And after a minute or so, his wife came over. And she looked at me like, “What did you say?” And I told her, and she gave him a hug. And we stood there for another minute and finally she said, “I’m just going to take him home.” And he looks at me and mouths, “I’ll be there.”

C. I also remember giving a talk challenging those men whose fathers were still alive but who had not told them they loved them, to go ask their fathers to tell them just that. Or to grieve the fact that was a big loss in their life. I encouraged them to take that risk.

D. And one guy in the lobby after the talk said, “I’ve already cancelled all of my meetings for today. I am heading from here to O’Hare. I’m flying to see my Dad, who I haven’t talked to in ten years. And I am going to ask him if he loves me.”

X. I do not want to suggest that this is the only wound, nor do I want to suggest that working through these things is easy or that they all have happy endings. But I do want to say – like Jacob – some of us have been shaped by our childhood. And it has created some Blind Spots. We do not fully understand why we think or act the way we do.

XI. What is your story?

A. How has your family shaped you? In what ways – good and bad – has your personality and outlook, been molded?

B. In what ways are you being held back today by blind spots from your past? What baggage have you failed to unpack? Do you “know yourself?”

XII. I want to play a video here of one man processing his Father Wound. It’s Will Smith in Fresh Prince from Bel Aire. I never saw the show. I called Robert Lewis trying to track down a video of him telling his story.

A. His father fell into alcoholism. It was bad. Lewis grew up mad, which helped him excel in football. And it led him to have a huge need to succeed to overcome the shame he felt. In his late twenties, he is married, working two full time jobs while enrolled in three different masters degrees. (As he said, I was blind to my need to prove my worth).

B. He was also very mad. His anger was explosive and one day his wife had pleaded with him to figure out what was wrong. And he went out the door and started walking and he ended up at a park, and over the course of a few hours he raged and prayed and eventually named his issue – his anger at his Dad – and started to heal.

XIII. I called Lewis looking for a video of him telling that story. He directed me to this video instead. You can pretty quickly figure out what is going on. A man – who has been a delinquent father – has suddenly shown up for his son. And made some promises to him. But he is about to break the promises he made and sneak away. And the son – Will Smith – has to face some very hurtful things.

A. When this video is over, the campus pastors will be stepping forward to finish the sermon.

B. Video

XIV. Campus pastors

A. As you can imagine, there are lots of different ways blind spots can develop. They are not all between fathers and sons, nor are they all about parents. Mike drilled home on that one because he realized this was part of his story, and because it sure seems to be part of Jacob’s story, and it’s not uncommon among others.

- B. It might not be yours. The goal today is to note that there may be things in our past that are still affecting us today. Perhaps holding us back. Creating blind spots.
- C. If any of this is sticking – perhaps hitting too close to home - there are two things we want you to hear:
- D. The first is that you may need to take some next steps. You may need to talk with someone. Great friends can be a great help. Perhaps you can unpack some of your story in your small group. I want to say, if I – or someone else on staff - can help, please let us know.
- E. The second thing you need to hear is, the Gospel. It is the way forward.
1. Mike ended with this last week. The fact is, until we know how safe we are in God’s love, some of us cannot face painful truths about ourselves. We may not only be lying to others, we may be lying to ourselves.
  2. And while I am here, let me frame it this way. Everyone of us is unique. We are all different in different ways. But we are all alike in this way: we all have a heart wound. We are all broken by sin. And that sin keeps us estranged from the love of God. The first step towards the life you want is to enter into a relationship with your loving heavenly father.
  3. Some of you have done that but not rested deeply in that love. The deeper we embrace the Gospel the freer we become to see ourselves clearly.
  4. Some of you need to drink more deeply of the Gospel you have embraced.
  5. Some of you need to reach out to God for the first time. And that is done by asking. You do not have to get on a plane and fly somewhere, like the guy Mike talked about. We can draw into the presence of our heavenly father through prayer.
  6. And there will be people up front today who would love to talk to you about this as our service ends.
- F. Do not be blind to your Blindspots. Lean into the love of God.

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<sup>1</sup> In hindsight, some *were* comical. From my Mom I thought there was more vitamins in the crust of bread. *And* some were not as comical – and you realize you do not agree with them. For instance, from my Dad disliked art and I had this idea that interest in art was foolish.

<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This idea keeps the nature side of the nature / nurture debate alive.