



Session 3: Going Back in Order to Go Forward

Introduction

Be open to yourself, to God, and to the people in your group. It is ok if you feel a little bit uncomfortable. Just know you are invited to be as vulnerable as you would like to be.

As a group let's remind ourselves of these guidelines:

1. Speak only for yourself, use "I" statements
2. Keep your sharing to 2-3 minutes, give room for others to share
3. No fixing, saving, or setting other people straight
4. Trust and learn from silence, there is no pressure to share
5. Observe confidentiality

Emotionally healthy spirituality involves embracing God's choice to birth us into a particular family, in a particular place, at a particular moment in history. That choice to embrace our past grants us certain opportunities and gifts. It also hands us a certain amount of "emotional baggage" for our journey through life. For some of us this load is minimal; for others, it is a heavy burden to carry.

True spirituality frees us to live joyfully in the present. Living joyfully, however, requires going back in order to go forward. This process takes us to the very heart of spirituality and discipleship in the family of God, breaking free from the destructive sinful patterns of our past in order to live the life of love that God intends.

For starters

- 1) How would you describe the family atmosphere you grew up in? Try using one or two words. (For example: *affirming, complaining, critical, approachable, angry, tense, cooperative, competitive, close, distant, fun, serious, loving, warm*)
- 2) Our need to go back in order to go forward can be summed up in two essential biblical truths:
 - The blessings and sins of our families going back two to three generations profoundly impact who we are today.
 - Discipleship requires putting off the sinful patterns of our family of origin and relearning how to do life God's way in God's family.

What concerns or fears might you have in looking back at your family of origin to discern unhealthy patterns and themes? Explain.

Scripture: Genesis 50:15-21

Your family's story and your individual story cannot be separated. Joseph is an excellent example of that reality. He was born into a complex, blended family where his father Jacob, Jacob's two wives, and their children all lived under one roof. Joseph was Jacob's favorite son. As a result, his brothers grew jealous, leading them to sell Joseph to a merchant who took him to Egypt. The brothers never expected to hear from Joseph again. After he was sold, Joseph's life became very difficult. For the next ten to thirteen years, Joseph lived first as a slave, and later, as a prisoner falsely accused of rape.

Through God's miraculous intervention, Joseph was pulled from the pit of prison and made the second most powerful person in Egypt. Later, when his brothers came to Egypt for food during a famine in Israel, Joseph invited them to return for their father and live in Egypt, which they gladly did. But after Jacob died, the brothers began to worry. As you listen to this story, pay attention to the emotions at play just under the surface.

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." 16 So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: 17 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. 21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

1. Why do you think Joseph weeps (v.17)?
2. Joseph choose to break the "normal" way his family deals with hurt feelings and conflict by forgiving his brothers. How might you have responded if you were in Joseph's position assuming you knew nothing about Jesus and the way of forgiveness?
3. Reread verses 19-21. Here we see Joseph's response to the enormous losses he experienced in his life. As you think about your own life story, which one speaks the most to you and why?
 - a. Do not fear.
 - b. Am I in the place of God?
 - c. You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.
4. Joseph had a rich sense of being part of his family of origin and how it had shaped his life, both good and bad. We must honestly face the truth about our family as well. We often receive new insights when we ponder and reflect on our family's impact on us at different times. Take some time to complete the chart on the next page.

First, list the life messages you received from each of your parents or guardians (For example: *Don't be weak. Education is everything. You must achieve to be loved. Don't be sad; things could be worse. Make a lot of money. Don't trust people, etc.*)

Next, list any earthquake events in your family (For example: *abuse, sudden death, divorce, etc.*)

Finally, summarize the messages you internalized based on these three boxes.

Messages from my Father:	Messages from my Mother:	Earthquake events:
Top three messages I internalized: 1. 2. 3.		

5. How do these messages differ from the message we get from Jesus? (i.e. *You are loved. You are good enough. You are a joy. You have nothing to prove. You are allowed to make mistakes. You are forgiven.*)

6. What might be on specific message from your family of origin that God has revealed to you today that you want change as part of your "hard work of discipleship"?