

Children’s Moment

Good morning, girls and boys. I’m so glad you made time to be with us today. Esperanza and I pray for you and your family every week.

I want to share a story with you today and it comes with a craft.

Jeanette Levellie shares a story about her son, Ron.

“... due to the pandemic, Ron has extra time at home to draw. Last month, he [drew a] bird with a block letter A and the saying, ‘All is Well.’ So many people liked it he continued drawing the ABCs of encouraging sayings. ‘Bob Monster wants you to appreciate yourself.’ ‘Corn Monster says it’s okay to admit you’re having a rough time.’

Besides being fun and uplifting in this distressing time, Ron’s alphabet of hope has proven especially surprising to me. Our son has always been a very shy, reserved and private person, a listener who rarely reveals much of himself. Although unfailingly kind and loving, I’ve never known him to reach out like this to others in such a public way.

‘I didn’t even plan to do it,’ Ron said. ‘It just happened.’ His Mom is very grateful for this unexpected peek into a bright new corner of her son’s soul.”¹

Ron is a person who has found a wonderful way to fill our buckets. Encouraging other people is a great way to show God’s love and help people to heal.

Ron’s story made an impact on me. It made me wonder, “What could I draw to encourage other people?” So I decided to draw a picture using the first letter of my name, “E” for Eric. I thought about an encouraging thing I wanted to say. Then I got paper and some pens and went to work. Here’s what I came up with ...

Why don’t you do the same? Take the first letter of your name, think about something encouraging and draw a picture. Then have your Mom or Dad scan it and send it to me. We’ll take all of your pictures and share them next Sunday online.

That way, we’ll all be encouraged by the way God loves you. That will make us feel better. *Will you pray with me?*

¹ <https://www.guideposts.org/friends-and-family/family/blended-families/unexpected-blessings-reconnecting-with-family> (modified)

Message: “Healing Your Household”

How do you heal a household? Here’s one narrative that gives hope. “It’s been three years since Christian artist Meredith Andrews has put out new music but her latest album may be her most personal.

That’s because the award winning singer was writing while in the trenches of one of the most difficult seasons of her eight-year marriage to husband Jacob. The pair, who have three children and teamed up to write, found themselves at a crossroads in their relationship.

Stress from adding two babies to their family, moving from Chicago to Nashville and the demands of career had the couple questioning whether they’d actually be able to make ‘happily ever after’ work.

‘There were days when I was like “I don’t even know who you are” and he would say the same thing about me,’ Meredith shares. ‘There was some brokenness and hurt in our past that we never really dealt with.’

They reached their breaking point just a few days before Valentine’s Day. Contemplating spending time apart and fresh from a fight that morning, Meredith received a call from her husband, asking her to meet him for a lunch date. She was greeted with flowers and a proposition – a weekend getaway to reconnect as a family. Jacob planned everything, booking a cabin and canceling her scheduled talk in Chicago.

‘He looked at me with tears in his eyes and said, “I’m not going to lose my family,”’ Meredith recalls. ‘He was like, “let’s just go away and remember why we are family and why we love each other.” That was the turning point.’

Old wounds didn’t miraculously heal over night. Meredith says the couple had to unlearn how they treated each other in the past.

They leaned on friends and family for support, speaking with leaders in their church and eventually making the decision to go to counseling, something Meredith admits they should’ve done much earlier.

‘Going to counseling was just like hitting the reset button for us,’ Meredith says. She thinks it’s something every married couple should do, whether you’re going through a rough patch or not.

‘The thing is, we waited until we were on life support to go to counseling. We should have gone to counseling when everything was fine,’ she says. ‘Granted, the Lord used everything we walked through but for anybody else, save yourself some heartache and just go to counseling as a preventative measure.’

She also wants couples to know that the idea of a ‘perfect marriage’ is just another harmful image fed to us by our culture.

‘The picture we get from our culture is not a picture of real love,’ Meredith says. ‘It’s “infatuation” or it’s “you make me happy” when in reality, relationships are meant to make us holy. They pull out the best and the worst in us.’

She’s also learned that saying ‘no’ is sometimes the best thing she can do for her family.

‘I was wrestling with something inside of me that felt the need to say yes to everything,’ Meredith says. ‘Whatever I’m giving my “yes” to, I’m giving my “no” to my family. The last three years especially the Lord has been showing me what it means to be healthy and be able to say “no” when I need to say no so I that I can give my best yes, my sacred yes [to my family].’²

The path to healing may be long, but the decision to walk that path can happen in an instant. That’s true for relationships in all types of households. Whether you’re part of a classical nuclear family, a blended family, empty nesters, a single adult or living with roommates, relationships matter. Households can heal.

You know your household is under stress. There’s the stress brought on by COVID-19, which affects our health, security and well-being. There’s the stress of politics and the election. There’s the stress of isolation. For some of you, there’s the stress of having more people under your roof than before. We may be relearning social skills. You may be dealing with arguments. You’re certainly trying to navigate different opinions and beliefs.

² <https://www.guideposts.org/tell-your-story/readers-favorite-stories/how-counseling-and-faith-helped-heal-meredith-andrews-marriage>

These kinds of stress can damage or break a relationship. My family is an example. My mother and her brother disagreed so strongly they haven’t spoken to each other for most of thirty years. That’s the legacy they passed down to us, their children. Our learned response is separation and silence, rather than admitting our part and forgiving.

Healing a damaged or broken relationship isn’t easy. Learning to ignore the unhealthy narrative in our heads takes time. You can’t do it alone. I invite you to talk to me, one of our Member Care team members or find a confidante you can share with. I do recommend counseling.

Why is healing so difficult? I think one of the reasons is we don’t like to admit we make mistakes. We do wrong. Admitting it means we have to take responsibility for what we do – intentionally and unintentionally.

“So why don’t we confess our mistakes?” First, we often don’t see our actions as being wrong in the way others do, especially those who are affected by them. Second, our ego gets in the way. Rather than holding onto our pride, it takes humility to admit when we fail and let others down. Third, we’re afraid of the consequences that come from taking responsibility for our bad choices.

Lastly, we feel ashamed and don’t know how to come to terms with our past in a positive way. As author Brené Brown states, ‘Shame corrodes the very part of us that believes we are capable of change.’

Taking responsibility for our actions requires courage and honesty. Regardless of how long it takes, it’s worth the effort, struggle, pain and humility. When we finally confess our wrongs and come to peace with them, we can experience freedom and joy.”³

Our scripture lessons for today show us two examples of healing. The first comes from the family of Isaac and Rebekah. That’s Abraham and Sarah’s son, the one who God made the covenant with. Isaac and Rebekah had a difficult life at home. Their sons Jacob and Esau didn’t get along, even before they were born.

³ <https://www.guideposts.org/better-living/life-advice/the-healing-power-of-owning-our-mistakes>

Today’s reading touches on portions of the story of Jacob and Esau over more than twenty years. It began with Jacob’s deceit, aided by his mother, who was playing favorites. Jacob deceived Isaac into giving him the blessing that should have been Esau’s.

This broke Esau’s heart. He became angry, so angry he wanted to kill his brother Jacob. Rebekah, their mother, sent Jacob away to live with her brother, his uncle Laban. That was the only way to prevent violence and keep the peace in their household.

Jacob and Esau were successful in their own ways. But life wasn’t easy. Laban was also a deceiver, as Jacob learned in a hard way. Jacob’s home life wasn’t easy. He favored one relationship over another. That led to great stress and strain.

More than twenty years later, Jacob needed to return home. He felt trapped and terrified where he was. But going home gave him great fear. Jacob knew he had done his brother wrong. But he had the courage to admit it and face it.

Most importantly, Jacob listened to God. And God told him to go home and be with his relatives, all would be well (Genesis 32:9). Jacob was smart. He took precautions. Jacob sent messages and gifts ahead. He didn’t just show up. Jacob divided his family into groups, so that if one was attacked, the other could escape. When he saw his brother Esau, Jacob humbly bowed before him. Jacob was truly sorry.

Esau’s response is heart-warming: *“Esau ran to meet him, threw his arms around his neck, kissed him, and they wept. Esau looked up and saw the women and children and said, ‘Who are they?’ Jacob said, ‘The children God generously gave your servant’* (Genesis 33:4-5).

Things could have gone very differently and very badly. Sometimes they do. But if you look at the way Jacob approached the situation, there are important things to see. Jacob didn’t approach his brother as though nothing was wrong. He didn’t show off his wealth or the blessings of his household, his family. Jacob asked permission in advance. Jacob came with the blessing of God, with courage and humility, and with authenticity. Jacob admitted to doing wrong. Jacob acknowledged Esau’s rights, position and point of view.

What lessons do we take away from this for today? First and foremost, our faith is important. Jacob went to God and listened. He trusted God, even when things seemed at their worst. And God gave him the courage and strength to admit his wrongdoing, his part in the conflict, and approach his brother with humility. Rather than seeing the worst in each other, the two brothers saw the best in each other. They were blessed with a restored household.

We can do the same. This lesson is spiritual and practical at the same time. That’s the true nature of faith. It helps us to live the way God made us to live, restoring broken relationships. I learned a lesson on how to do this during our weekly Bible study on Wednesday morning. Here’s a short video clip by Karen Eagans, where she talks about how her household has transformed conflict. [*See online service*]

Thank you, Karen. I hope you apply this practical and loving tip in your household. There’s one other point to consider in our reflection for today. It comes from the narrative about the lives of Paul and Silas. It was our second scripture reading today, from Acts 16.

Paul and Silas were unfairly arrested, beaten and thrown in prison after an altercation in the marketplace. This was mob violence at its worst. What’s amazing is they were singing songs - praising God at midnight, even in the desperate situation they were in. God responded by sending an earthquake to break open the doors to their cells.

This is where the narrative takes an interesting turn. Jails were most likely run by a family under contract. It was their responsibility. After the earthquake, the jailer wakes to find the building dark and all the doors open. Failing to keep prisoners from escaping is a death sentence under Roman law. The jailer pulls out his sword, intending to commit suicide, preferring a quick death to what the Romans would do.

Paul knows what’s up. He shouts, “*Don’t hurt yourself! We’re all still here!*” (Acts 16:28, my translation). Sure enough. Not only were Paul and Silas there, but all of the prisoners were still in their cells. What an amazing thing! God touched many lives in a meaningful way.

The jailer grabs a torch, rushes in and finds what Paul said to be true. He falls down trembling in front of them.

His response? The jailer takes Paul and Silas out of prison and says, “*What must I do to be rescued?*” (v29, CEB). The word rescued can also mean healed, to be made well or saved.

Paul takes it to another level. He says, “*Put your entire trust in the Jesus. Then you’ll live as you were meant to live - and everyone in your house included!*” (v30, MSG). Not just the jailer, the jailer’s household. This had implications for their whole life.

You know what happened next. I love the way The Message translates the narrative, “*[Paul and Silas] went on to spell out in detail the story of [Jesus]- the entire family got in on this part. They never did get to bed that night. The jailer made them feel at home, dressed their wounds, and then - he couldn’t wait till morning! - was baptized, he and everyone in his family. There in his home, he had food set out for a festive meal. It was a night to remember: He and his entire family had put their trust in God; everyone in the house was in on the celebration.*” (vv32-34).

How do you heal your household? You start by putting your trust in God. Listening to God is key. Finding the courage to admit you’re part of the problem, no matter which side of the conflict you’re on, is crucial. Honesty is the best antidote for our fears, flaws and hurt feelings. Be honest with yourself. Be honest with God. Be honest with the members of your household. Celebrate what happens together with joy!

Healing and humility go hand-in-hand. We heard about that last week in the narratives of two people healed by God. That’s true for each of you as a person. It’s also true for your family. Humility isn’t weakness. Humility isn’t being timid. Humility is being vulnerable, admitting your faults and being open and ready to see the good in others, listen without speaking, and forgive. This is the path to healthy, whole relationships.

One, final note: some hurts go very deep. Some hurts came with violence and abuse. Even though you may be ready to reconcile, the offended party may not be. These situations take time. Counseling will help. Be patient. Trust God and wait for the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Have courage. Nothing is impossible for God.

How do you heal a household? With faith and love.

Genesis 27:35-38, 41-45; 32:1-12; 33:1-7 (CEB)

³⁵ Isaac said, "Your brother has already come deceitfully and has taken your blessing."

³⁶ Esau said, "Isn't this why he's called Jacob? He's taken me twice now: he took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing." He continued, "Haven't you saved a blessing for me?"

³⁷ Isaac replied to Esau, "I've already made him more powerful than you, and I've made all of his brothers his servants. I've made him strong with grain and wine. What can I do for you, my son?"

³⁸ Esau said to his father, "Do you really have only one blessing, Father? Bless me too, my father!" And Esau wept loudly.

⁴¹ Esau was furious at Jacob because his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "When the period of mourning for the death of my father is over, I will kill my brother."

⁴² Rebekah was told what her older son Esau was planning, so she summoned her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Esau your brother is planning revenge. He plans to kill you. ⁴³ So now, my son, listen to me: Get up and escape to my brother Laban in Haran. ⁴⁴ Live with him for a short while until your brother's rage subsides, ⁴⁵ until your brother's anger at you goes away and he forgets what you did to him. Then I will send for you and bring you back from there. Why should I suffer the loss of both of you on one day?"

Jacob went on his way, and God's messengers approached him. ² When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is God's camp," and he named that sacred place Mahanaim. ³ Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau, toward the land of Seir, the open country of Edom. ⁴ He gave them these orders: "Say this to my master Esau. This is the message of your servant Jacob: 'I've lived as an immigrant with Laban, where I've stayed till now. ⁵ I own cattle, donkeys, flocks, men servants, and women servants. I'm sending this message to my master now to ask that he be kind.'"

⁶ The messengers returned to Jacob and said, "We went out to your brother Esau, and he's coming to meet you with four hundred men."

⁷ Jacob was terrified and felt trapped, so he divided the people with him, and the flocks, cattle, and camels, into two camps. ⁸ He thought, If Esau meets the first camp and attacks it, at least one camp will be left to escape.

⁹ Jacob said, “Lord, God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I’ll make sure things go well for you,’ ¹⁰ I don’t deserve how loyal and truthful you’ve been to your servant. I went away across the Jordan with just my staff, but now I’ve become two camps. ¹¹ Save me from my brother Esau! I’m afraid he will come and kill me, the mothers, and their children. ¹² You were the one who told me, ‘I will make sure things go well for you, and I will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, so many you won’t be able to count them.’”

Jacob looked up and saw Esau approaching with four hundred men. Jacob divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two women servants. ² He put the servants and their children first, Leah and her children after them, and Rachel and Joseph last. ³ He himself went in front of them and bowed to the ground seven times as he was approaching his brother. ⁴ But Esau ran to meet him, threw his arms around his neck, kissed him, and they wept. ⁵ Esau looked up and saw the women and children and said, “Who are these with you?”

Jacob said, “The children that God generously gave your servant.” ⁶ The women servants and their children came forward and bowed down. ⁷ Then Leah and her servants also came forward and bowed, and afterward Joseph and Rachel came forward and bowed.

Acts 16:22-34 (CEB)

²² The crowd joined in the attacks against Paul and Silas, so the authorities ordered that they be stripped of their clothes and beaten with a rod. ²³ When Paul and Silas had been severely beaten, the authorities threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to secure them with great care. ²⁴ When he received these instructions, he threw them into the innermost cell and secured their feet in stocks.

²⁵ Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ All at once there was such a violent earthquake that it shook the prison's foundations. The doors flew open and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ When the jailer awoke and saw the open doors of the prison, he thought the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. ²⁸ But Paul shouted loudly, "Don't harm yourself! We're all here!"

²⁹ The jailer called for some lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He led them outside and asked, "Honorable masters, what must I do to be rescued?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your entire household." ³² They spoke the Lord's word to him and everyone else in his house. ³³ Right then, in the middle of the night, the jailer welcomed them and washed their wounds. He and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. ³⁴ He brought them into his home and gave them a meal. He was overjoyed because he and everyone in his household had come to believe in God.