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## FAMILIES ARE LIKE FUDGE

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**One of the magnets on our fridge has a message about families.**

**Families are like fudge. Mostly sweet, with a few nuts.**

**Families are places where we can experience the best of what it means to be a human being. In our families we can experience love, acceptance, fun and opportunities to grow and learn about life and the world and people. Families can be sweet places. Families can also be nutty places. Families are places where we learn to deal with difference and how to accept or tolerate the annoying habits and human failings that we all have. I sometimes wonder if I'm one of the nuts in my family!**

Sadly, families can also be a place where some people experience the worst of life. Statistics tell us that children are more likely to be abused in their own home by a family member than out in the big wide world.

We are shocked when we hear of stories of betrayal in families. What makes those stories so shocking is that the family that should be providing safety turns out to be a most threatening place.

The whole world was shocked when the story of Joseph Fritzl came to light in 2008. It's one of those news stories that is hard to forget. Joseph Fritzl was an Austrian man who had kept his daughter prisoner in a cellar for 24 years. Over that time, she was repeatedly raped by him, and bore seven children to him, one who died in infancy. It's difficult for me to imagine the depth of abuse, betrayal and damage done to the young woman who survived that ordeal. It's an extreme case, but points to the reality that families are not always the loving, safe cocoons we wish they were.

Each of us brings our own personality and gifts to our families. We bring our hopes and dreams, our hurts and brokenness, our desire to love and be loved, and our selfishness. It seems to me that no family is perfect. No family has it all together.

You might expect that when you come across families in the Bible, they would be perfect and have it all together. Surely if God were to choose families to do his will, he would choose the best families with no issues or problems. Well, if you thought that, you would be wrong.

As I look at the families that are in the Bible, I see flawed families - families who don't have it all together - families who struggle with real issues.

The first family that we are told about in the Bible is Adam and Eve's family. This family struggled with responsibility and jealousy. When Adam and Eve sinned against God, they were not able to accept responsibility for their actions. Instead, they heaped blame elsewhere. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve wasn't about to stand for that, so she blamed the snake. No one wanted to take responsibility for their actions.

Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. When they made sacrifices to God, Cain gave the leftovers, but Abel gave the first fruits. The Bible tells us that God was pleased with Abel's sacrifice, but rejected Cain's. Cain became so jealous and bitter that he killed his brother in a fit of rage.

Later in the Bible we come across Isaac and Rebecca's family. They had two sons, twin boys, Esau and Jacob. Esau was a hunter, loved being outdoors - a man's man. Jacob was a quieter soul, who liked to stay at home. Esau was Isaac's favourite, and Jacob was Rebecca's favourite. Their whole family life was tainted by this favouritism that the parents had for their boys.

When Isaac was old and almost blind, Jacob and Rebecca tricked Isaac into blessing Jacob by pretending that he was actually Esau. In this way, Esau was cheated out of his birthright. As you can imagine, Esau is furious, and the family splinters.

Jacob flees in fear of his life to his Uncle Laban's place. There he falls in love with Laban's daughter Rachel, and agrees with Laban to work for seven years to be able to marry Rachel. At the end of seven years, Laban tricks Jacob, and gives him Leah as a wife, but agrees to also give him Rachel as a wife if he agrees to work another seven years. Through trickery and good management, Jacob uses the next seven years to get the better of Laban, He becomes wealthy by getting the best animals in the family herd for himself. Laban's other sons resent him for his wealth, and blame him for taking their father's wealth, so Jacob flees and Laban chases after him. Finally, Jacob makes a peace of sorts with Laban, and is reconciled to his brother.

The family saga continues. Jacob has twelve sons, but Joseph is Jacob's favourite. Jacob gives Joseph special treatment. The other sons don't like it - and they don't like Joseph especially when he acts and speaks as though he is more important than they are. The final straw is a gift for Joseph of a colourful coat with long sleeves - a gift that Jacob never gave to his other boys. It was a gift for a favourite son. Joseph's brothers seethe with jealousy. They are so jealous that they plan to kill him. His oldest brother suggests that instead of killing him, they should sell him into slavery. So that's what they did.

What a family! Favouritism, subterfuge, mistrust, jealousy, slavery, even murder.

What's most amazing to me about all this is that God uses this imperfect, flawed family to do his will. He uses a family that has very human weaknesses of jealousy, selfishness and greed to work out his plan to bring blessing to the nations of the earth.

It is a plan that is finally fulfilled in Jesus. In him the nations of the earth are blessed with God's love and forgiveness.

It's incredible that God used such flawed and imperfect people and families to do his will. It's amazing that God worked with such families to bring his plans to fruition.

I wonder - If God chose a family like Adam and Eves', or Jacob and Rebecca's - could he choose a family like mine?

If God can use a family like Adam and Eves', or Jacob and Rebecca's - could he use a family like mine?

I wonder if God has a plan for your family. I believe he does.

Your family might be like fudge - mostly sweet with a few nuts. Your family might be struggling with issues of jealousy, favouritism, mistrust or whatever, but if God can bring blessing to the world through those dysfunctional families in the Bible, maybe he can do great things for your family, and through your family.

After all, it's all about the goodness of God and the grace of God to flawed people and flawed families. God can take our flawed families and use them as instruments of his grace.

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