

“A Smart Home...with In-Laws?”

Genesis 28-31

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connect groups

PATH

Every wedding creates a blended family. Marriage not only joins a man and a woman, it blends the extended family of mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, sisters-in-law, and brothers-in-law. The odds for dysfunction run pretty high. Let's consider the roles of God, parents, in-laws, and married children doing life together. How can in-laws be prevented from becoming *outlaws*? Four principles apply:

I. Parents Must *Release* Their Children (28:1-5)

II. God Can *Rule* Their Children (28:10-15)

III. In-Laws Should *Reinforce* Their Children (29:18-28)

IV. Children Should *Respect* Their Parents (31:2-7)

POINTS

Parents Must *Release* Their Children

- Scripture shows us examples of healthy in-law relationships: Moses and Jethro, Ruth and Naomi, and Peter and his mother-in-law.
- One narrative shows a more complex relationship with good and not-so-good elements: Jacob and his father-in-law Laban.
- In Genesis 28, Isaac did what all parents should do: he released his son, Jacob, to find a wife. One of the greatest gifts parents can give to their kids is to prepare them to leave home and stand on their own.
- Children are not their parents' property. As parents, children are lent to us by God to raise. We are temporary stewards of our children. Parents must remind themselves that they are preparing their children for release.
- When parents release their children, they shift their allegiance from providing to helping develop the new relationship. When children are released, there is a necessary allegiance shift—for daughters, from father to husband and for sons, from mother to wife.
- An empty nest can produce a full heart if the release is done right.
- Children should note that leaving home is more than physically moving out. It means no longer relying on parents for basic needs. A newly married couple affirms leaving and cleaving by supporting each other in front of their parents.

God Can *Rule* Their Children

- Parents can confidently release their children into God's care. God can handle them. He can manage and rule their lives.
- Jacob left his home, his parents, and his

security. When Jacob's father said *Go*, his Heavenly Father said *Come* (see Psalm 27:10).

- Parents, if you're worried about your child's choices, release them, but release them to God.
- God affirmed His will for Jacob to marry and have a family by promising him descendants (see vv. 13-14). God established a priority grid for Jacob: God first, marriage second, children third, and work fourth.
- Ephesians outlines these same priorities. Chapters 1-3 discuss our relationship to God; chapters 4-6 discuss our relationship to other people; chapter 5 gives guidelines to husbands and wives, then parents and children, and finally employers and employees.
- This is God's pattern for successful relationships. If people don't adhere to this pattern, work can become the priority over family, or children over spouse, or even spouse over God.
- Pursuing God is the best gift you can give your spouse. Pursuing your spouse is the best gift you can give your children.

In-Laws Should *Reinforce* Their Children

- In-laws should be supportive of a godly relationship. Instead, Laban was divisive and manipulative. Laban had no regard for his daughters or his son-in-law (their future husband), but only for his own financial benefit.
- Life is too short to live with broken relationships. We should do everything we can to mend broken relationships.
- We don't have to agree with our in-laws, but we do have to love them.
- In the text, Laban was unwise and unfair.

Laban refused to reinforce the daughter and son-in-law relationship. He failed to see that the husband/wife relationship supersedes that of the parent/child.

- Parents must accept their child's spouse as their own child. Their child and his or her spouse are one flesh. Reinforce your children and their choices.

Children Should *Respect* Their Parents

- With family tension so high, Jacob summoned his wives to hear his plan: they would follow God's command to return to Jacob's homeland.
- Jacob chose to focus on God's faithfulness rather than Laban's hurtfulness, which was more honoring to Jacob's father-in-law. We can choose to focus on God's faithfulness instead of on failure.
- Honoring one's parents—including in-laws—is one of the Ten Commandments. It has never been rescinded or amended. It's still in place in the New Testament; Paul repeats it in Ephesians 6:2-3.
- Accept your in-laws just as they are; it's not your job to change them. If your parents' or in-laws' actions are not worthy of honor, entrust them to God. Pray for them, love them, and respect them (see 1 Timothy 5:1).
- Follow the example of Peter in Luke 4. When his mother-in-law was sick, he brought Jesus to her to heal her. Bring Jesus to all your relationships.

PRACTICE

Connect Up: As our Heavenly Father demonstrates, what characteristics should parents and in-laws strive toward? Use Psalm 103:1-10 as a starting place for discussion: forgiving (v. 3); healing (v. 3); loving and tender (v. 4); provider (v. 5); seeks righteousness and justice (v. 6); merciful (v. 8); slow to anger (vv. 8-9); compassionate (v. 10). What other qualities and characteristics can you think of?

Connect In: People within the church may struggle with in-laws as they do in other relationships. If you are married, what advice would you give a newlywed couple concerning in-laws? If you are in-laws, what insight can you share? What have been some good or difficult lessons learned?

Connect Out: What advice would you give to someone struggling with their in-laws? Do you agree with what Focus on the Family advises below?¹

1. If you're a Christian, your behavior toward your in-laws should be consistently Christian in character.
2. If you have disagreements with your in-laws, your spouse may feel caught in the middle between his or her parents and you. Meanwhile, you have obligations to your in-laws, your spouse, and your children.
3. If you feel your in-laws are intruding into your married life, the old saying *Good fences make good neighbors* may apply. Together with your mate, set reasonable boundaries; ask that he or she firmly and

kindly insist that your in-laws respect them.

4. When you marry, you became part of another family with its own set of expectations. You need to recognize and respect those—within limits. Honoring your in-laws does *not* mean:

- Submerging all your own feelings, desires, preferences, and needs in the name of *doing things their way*
- Permitting them to disrespect, control, or manipulate you for their own selfish ends
- *Obeying* all their *parental* requests or requirements

¹ Phillip J. Swihart, "In-Law Relationships," www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/communication-and-conflict/inlaw-relationships/what-do-i-owe-my-inlaws, accessed 10/8/18.