

GOOD FOR THE SOUL

February 24, 2019

Epiphany 7

[Genesis 45:1-4,12-15](#)

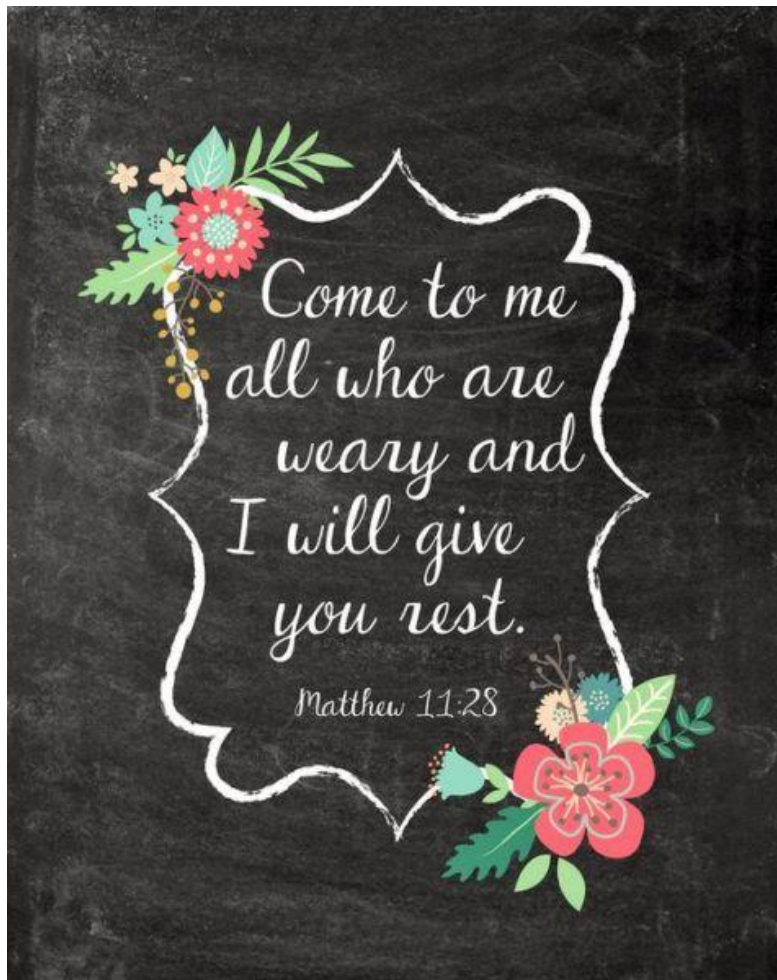
[Luke 6:27-38](#)

(prayer)

Jesus once said: “*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*”

The gospel of Matthew includes these inspiring words as a standalone teaching. The gospel writer does not give us any context of where or when Jesus might have said this or to whom. From a bible study perspective, this implies to me that the saying was quite memorable among the followers of Jesus and was probably shared over and over again in many different places and times.

If there had been social media in the first century, Matthew 11:28 would have made a perfect meme.



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Personally, I know what it feels like to be weighed down: to know the pressure of obligations, of worry, of strained relations, of regret and disappointment.

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

I suspect that each of us have times when being reminded of Jesus' offer to share the burden is good to hear.

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The first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis can be described as *pre-history* within the biblical narrative. These chapters include a number of grand stories that seek to explain the nature of the known world and the nature of humanity's relationship with each other and with their creator.

Beginning in the twelfth chapter, through to the fiftieth and final chapter, a new story begins.

Although the events of the first eleven chapters are difficult to fit into a specific historical period (reading more like timeless myths or legends), the account of the family of Terah of Ur are often thought to relate to the early 1800s BCE. Beyond the ancient Hebrew traditions (likely not written down until the 6 or 500s), there is no archeological evidence to support that the *so-called* patriarchs were actual historical figures.

Chapters 12 to 50 in Genesis focus primarily of four generations of Terah's family: beginning with Terah's son, Abram (later revered to as Abraham).

The Terah family story is one of prosperity, trust and promise. *The LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ... And - in you - all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'* (Gen12:1-3)

Abram's story is one of a fresh start: the promise of something new: not just a the journey to a new home, but of a special relationship between creator-God and future generations.

Even before Sarai and Abram had any children, the LORD said to Abram *'I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.'*

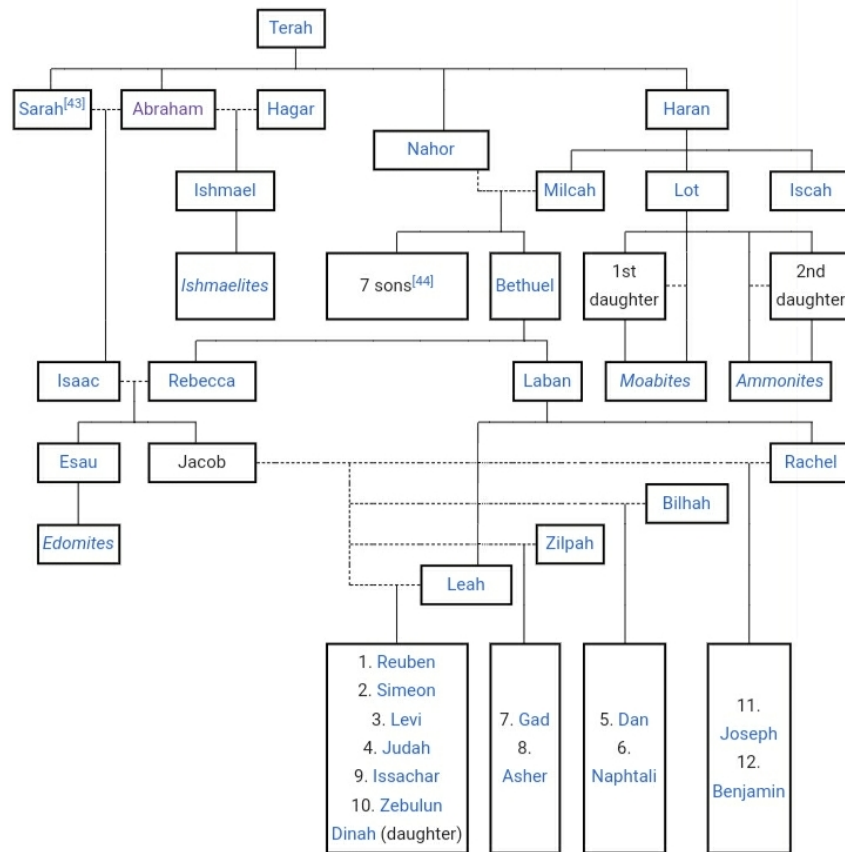
The story of the next generation begins in chapter 21, with the birth of Isaac.

The story of the third generation begins in chapter 25 when Jacob is born.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are referred to as the patriarchs of the Hebrew people. But the story of these three generations only take us up to chapter 30. The final twenty chapters of Genesis focus on the children of Jacob. The bible mentions that he had at least 13 children (with four different women): 12 sons and one daughter.

The story line that dominates the final chapters of Genesis focuses on Jacob's second youngest son, Joseph - his first child with his favorite wife, Rachel.

Family tree



Joseph's story is an intriguing one of jealousy, violence, sex, natural disasters, mysticism, second chances, fear, regret, and ultimately reconciliation. It actually has the makings of a good plot for [musical theatre](#). Maybe Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber should look into that.

Jacob gifted Joseph with a fancy coat, which was symbolic of a divide between and his brothers. The sibling rivalry was solidified after Joseph told them that he dreamed about a time when his brothers would bow down before him.

One day, they sold him off as a slave and faked his death to explain his death to their father. Joseph ended up in Egypt, where through a series of events was able to convince the pharaoh to store up grain in preparation for a coming drought. The pharaoh gave Joseph a high-ranking position within the Egyptian government to coordinate the project of food storage and distribution.

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During the drought, ten of the sons of Jacob came to Egypt to buy grain. They had no idea that years earlier the Ishmaelite traders to whom they had sold Joseph eventually resold him to the service of Potiphar in Egypt. And so, they can be excused for not recognizing their brother when they were negotiating their purchase. But Joseph knew who they were. And clearly, Rachel's son still held a grudge.

He accused them of spying and held one of them in custody while the other nine travelled home and returned with the youngest brother. You see, Jacob had insisted that Benjamin not make the initial journey with the others. Benjamin was Jacob and Rachel's only other son. She had died in childbirth. After Joseph's "death", Jacob was very protective of the baby of the family and last living

reminder of his beloved Rachel. Jacob was apparently prepared to live without the imprisoned son in Egypt to protect Benjamin. *If harm shall come to him, you will bring my gray hairs down with sorrow to Sheol.*

But the drought continued. After the purchased grain ran out, Jacob very reluctantly allowed Benjamin to return with the others to free the Simeon and buy more food from the Egyptians.

#fatheroftheyear

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After they came back to Egypt, Joseph's anger towards his brothers moved up another notch when he framed Benjamin for robbery. The brothers knew that it would kill their father, Jacob, if they returned without the youngest, so they begged for his life. Joseph was unmoved - content with the suffering he was inflicting on his brothers, until... he learned that their father was still alive.

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That is where we picked up the story (from chapter 45) today. Joseph broke into tears and revealed his true identity to his brothers.

My father is still alive?

The text doesn't explain the nature of Joseph's tears. Was it...

- Joy over news of Jacob.
- Regret for the broken relationships and the vindictive behaviour on all sides.
- Relief over the release of pent up anger and resentment.

I like to imagine that it was a bit of everything.

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The love that Joseph still had for Jacob swelled bigger than the harboured resentment he had for his brothers when he realized that he might be able to embrace his father again after all of these years.

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The old grudge did not serve Joseph anymore.

Reconciliation held much more promise...

and the tears flowed.

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Eventually, Jacob and the rest of the family were moved to Egypt.

New generations of Hebrews in Egypt over hundreds of years remembered their family's origins and called themselves *the People of Jacob* or the *People of Israel* (after a nickname Jacob picked up years earlier after wrestling an angel).

The Israelites flourished in Egypt, until "*a new king arose over Egypt who did not [remember] Joseph*" (Ex1:8) but that is a story for another day.

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A significant aspect of human nature common to virtually everyone is the draw to feel like we have a place and purpose in the world.

We long to belong.

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There are few things that have a negative impact on the psyche than the strain of a relationship that once was held the promise of being life giving.

Now, I get that there are times when accepting the reality of a broken relationship is the healthiest path forward.

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

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Even so, in my nearly 30 years of conducting funerals and meeting with families experiencing fresh grief, I have seen far too many people struggle with regret caused by unresolved relationship conflicts. So often, people have expressed that they really had longed for reconciliation, but the pain of the conflict was too strong or had become so ingrained that it was hard to reverse.

On the other hand, I also have seen shared grief melt away years of estrangement.

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We long to belong.

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And yet, sometimes, we feel that too much water has gone under the bridge or our chances have passed. And so, we get stuck in a place where our natural longing goes unfulfilled.

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If the Joseph story can teach us anything is that it is never too late to claim our place and to seek reconciliation. Especially when that renewal will warm up the dormant seeds of hope deep within us.

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Here at the end of February, on the tail end of the coldest snap of this winter, we might feel resigned to the fact that the lifeless appearance to our landscape will not end.

And yet, there is a reliable history that promises of a spring that waits to be. Yesterday, at Joyce Carson's memorial service, we sang "In the Bulb There is a Flower" - Natalie Sleeth's marvelous hymn about God's ability to renew and restore.

Our land is not dead. It is resting... waiting for a fresh warmth to spark exponential growth.

The hope and promise is that life will renew itself, once again... even out of the coldest winter.

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New life is always an option before us.

We can still choose the grudge, the anger, the resentment, if those feelings still serve us.

But, when regret outweighs any benefit that remains from past pain, joy can always still re-emerge!

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There may come a time for each of us, when the lure of a reconciled future is stronger than the pull of past wrongs.

Wanting reconciliation does not have to mean that all is forgiven. It does not erase the pain caused by our shared history. But it is an acceptance that we live for the joy that is still possible rather than resign ourselves to perpetual despair.

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We long to belong.

We are creatures endowed with the ability to be renewed. It was Jesus' central message: turn back towards God - and experience how near you are to the love which made you.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians: *in Christ, we are new creations* (2Cor5:17).

Enemies can still be loved.

Forgiveness and renewal are as sure as the promise of spring.

(prayer)

Merciful one, holy God, inspire us to warm the cold souls and not only to show your love, but to experience it for ourselves. Amen.

#602VU "Blest Be The Tie That Binds"

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg