



Families, Deception, and Drama (Part 4)

Choose Healing, not Revenge.

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Some of you are hitting us at the end of a series. We are finishing up this series called **Families, Deception, and Drama**, a light series for our September Fall kickoff.

We're dealing with some heavy topics. Today is Part 4. We're talking about choosing healing, Not revenge and how to heal from trauma. And what the family's role and responsibilities are in that.

Today, we are in Genesis 34, and we are looking at a repulsive part of Jacob's story. It will turn your stomach. It's hard to read. There is no sugarcoating Genesis 34. There's nothing pretty about it. In Genesis 24, this story that we are going to look at today, includes deceit, rape, revenge, greed, murder, and genocide. It will leave you feeling outraged, or at least it should. This story teaches us what not to do when someone you love is hurt, mistreated, molested, sexually abused, violated, raped, or suffers trauma in another way.

Just to be clear, when we read the Bible, we have descriptive passages and prescriptive passages. Genesis 34 is a descriptive passage. It's telling us that a story in the Bible does not always speak in every story to the morality of the history that it is sharing. But today, we are going to learn what not to do when someone that we love is raped or sexually abused.

Across campus and across all of our gatherings here are seniors. You are from a generation that responded to this sort of trauma with silence "Just don't talk about it."

I spoke to victims in our church who were raped, violated as teenagers and they never shared it with their parents because they knew what their parent's response would be passivity, silence. For some of you, that's your story today. You've carried it with you for

decades. Parents did nothing, grandparents did nothing. In some cases, it was “Keep this quiet because we don’t want the brother or the cousin, the uncle, or the grandpa, or dad to go to prison.” Some of you in here today have a family member that should not be free, that should be in prison, but because of passivity and silence, you’ve carried this on your own.

Now, in today’s terms, we’ve moved from passivity to another extreme called scorched earth. It’s definitely not silence, it’s not passivity. If it’s an organization, a ministry, a church, a denomination, that has any sort of sexual abuse going on, burn it to the ground, and anyone associated with it. Not just people directly involved, but anybody who has ever been associated with it, burn them to the ground too.

Today we want to see a better path forward for helping those who have suffered sexual abuse. Not silence, not passivity, and not scorched earth.

Begin reading with me in Genesis 34 - **34. Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. ² When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and raped her. ³ His heart was drawn to Dinah, daughter of Jacob; he loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴ And Shechem said to his father Hamor, “Get me this girl as my wife.”**

And now we are going to see the response. And we are going to see the two extremes I just mentioned in Genesis 34.

⁵ When Jacob heard that his daughter Dinah had been defiled, his sons were in the fields with his livestock; so, he did nothing about it until they came home.

He went passive. The story goes on...

⁶ Then Shechem’s father, Hamor went out to talk with Jacob. ⁷ Meanwhile, Jacob’s sons had come in from the fields as soon as they heard... This is appropriate right here. This is immediate response. Drop everything, deal with what’s in front of us.

They came in from the field as soon as they heard what had happened. They were shocked and furious... Appropriate emotion. So, immediate action, appropriate emotion. When you get this type of news, you should be mad. It’s an initial response, Shocked and because Shechem had done an outrageous thing. **Third thing here. Call it what it is: Immediate action, appropriate emotion, calling the offense out. Shechem had done an**

outrageous thing in Israel by sleeping with Jacob's daughter, a thing that should not be done.

So, a proposal is made. I'm going to have to summarize some of this passage because it's along chapter, but a proposal is made.

Hamor asked for Dinah to be given to his son, Shechem. And he says, "Settle among our people, intermarry with us, trade, acquire property. Become one with our people."

After that proposal, Verse 13 - ***their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob's sons replied deceitfully ...*** So, they went from an initial good response to now they are going to move toward scorched earth. ***Jacob's sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor.*** And They give a counter proposal to what Hamor had asked for.

The counter proposal was simple. "We can't settle among you, we can't intermarry with you because your men are not circumcised. If this is going to work... and keep this in mind. It says that Jacob's sons replied deceitfully. So, they say... again summarizing the text, that all the men of the city would need to be circumcised in order for this to happen. So, Shechem takes this news back to the men at the city gate, which I still can't, for the life of me, figure out how that conversation went down. "Hey guys, I need to tell you something. I need you all to get circumcised." And what happens? They all do. The bible says that they all get circumcised.

Verse 25 – ***Three days later while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. Scorched earth. Just living in proximity to it, take them out. They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword, they took Dinah back home. They seized their flocks and herds. Plundered all of their wealth and carried off their women and children.*** It doesn't get any more scorched earth than that.

So what are we to take from this story? I want to share with you four ways that we can respond when a family member is raped, sexually abused, violated, molested, or suffers trauma.

The first one is simply this. *Prioritize your family member, not your family's reputation.* Victim in mind. This is happening too often today. A lot of that passivity and silence that you experience in your family after something traumatic happened to you is because they didn't want word to get out. They didn't want people to go to prison, so the silence set in.

You weren't asked, you didn't participate in this, it was just placed on you – "Carry this alone. We are not helping" "We are not going to do any thing."

Let's finish Chapter 34. Verse 30: ***Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me obnoxious to the Canaanites and the parasites, the people living in this land. We are few in number and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed.*** And you're like, "Jacob, can we talk about Dinah? Can we talk about Dinah, the one who was raped."

Verse 31 - the brothers replied, ***"Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?"*** Dad, what would you have us do?"

Diane Langberg was chairman of the board at the American Association of Christian counselors... I get to serve on that board now. Dian has since stepped off, but she's made it her mission in life and her passions to help victims and to help organizations ministries, denominations, and churches do better at handling sexual abuse, and no longer going passive, no longer being silent, no longer being quiet, but to stand up and to speak up.

Dian says this: *"Every time we treat someone with dignity rather than shame, respect rather than disregard, concern, rather than exploitation, kindness rather than brutality, and careful attention rather than turning away, we are doing things that are the reverse of trauma and evil. If you want the survivor to grasp the faithfulness of God, then be faithful to them. Don't go passive. Don't go silent. And don't go scorched earth. Don't focus on your reputation or how it's going to affect you or your family. Keep the focus on the victim. Help the victim, Provide care for the victim.*

And for some today, this has been a very emotional morning already with just one gathering on campus. This is the second gathering. Before even the first gathering, I just shared this with a couple of people and the first person I shared it with tells me a horrific story from her teenage years and not sharing it with parents.

So, for some of you today, this is going to be the first time you feel seen and heard. You're like, Well, what do we do moving forward?" Well, the path for you... We want a path of healing for you. We're not going to be silent, we are not going to be passive, but we are not going scorched earth.

The second – If someone in your family has been violated, soothe before you solve. This has been one of the best things ever taught to me by a pastor friend in California.

He says, *“We already know how to do this with physical pain, but we are terrible at doing this with emotional pain. We get the physical pain part. Your child comes in from outside bleeding. Most parents would start with band aids, cleaning the wound, tending to the wound. You don’t start with, “What happened?! We’ll figure out what happened and how to prevent it in the future, but right now, let’s tend to the wound.”*

Last Sunday, I was preaching at Eagle Brook Church In Minnesota. Coming out of two very emotional weeks, for me, for you, for our country.

My son listened to Charlie Kirk every day. I didn’t have to listen to Charlie Kirk because my son did, and I heard everything. I always got the updates. So, in many ways, in our family, I remember Carson was the first one I checked on when I heard. He came home that night... and Carson has never been a super emotional one. I carry that for our whole family. But he was numb. He did say “It feels like losing a member of the family.”

So, I ended last week’s message at Eagle Brook, the large church in Minnesota with campus all over the state. I ended with “One day, you are going to read online that Ted Cunngham is dead. Don’t believe a word of it, for at that moment, I’ve never been more alive.

I did that at the Saturday and the Sunday morning service. At the end of the 11:00 on Sunday, I was able to get to the car, and I had to go to the hotel to pick up Carson for an event in Duluth Minnesota that night. I’m about a mile from the church when I’m hit head on in my rental car. It totals both cars, spins me around, I braced for it. Honestly, this is horrible, but my very first thought is, *“Wow are they going to have a great clip to use next week at Eagle brook.* I’m okay with that. You all, listen, I live with the tension Paul lived. I have an eye on heaven and an eye on earth. It’s good for all of us to be here, but I long for it. And you, as a follower of Jesus, should be longing for it... Not to the point you are no earthy good.

I get out of the car and it’s two older gentlemen in a little sports car. A guy yells at me about these guys. The dust hasn’t settled from the airbags, and the driver pulls out his wallet and starts getting me his insurance card. I’m like, “None of that matters right now. How this happened doesn’t matter, insurance doesn’t matter. Are you okay?” That’s all that needed to be dealt with. All three of us walked away from this accident. No problems. I mean the cars are gone. I had to go back to Enterprise. I buy that \$30.00 collision damage waiver even though my insurance will cover it, but I like to be able to

drop off cars that have been damaged and no questions asked. You can get that for \$30.00 a day.

But this was the very first time I walked in and said, “Hey, I totaled your car, you ain’t getting it back. Can I get another one? Ten minutes later, I was driving down the road in a brand-new Ultima.

The point is... This is the hardest part for me. That morning, I backed up a thousand cars back to the church. Every person driving by... Many of them turned to come back around to ask if I was okay or if I needed a ride. I think this is in us. We can help in emergencies like this. All I’m saying with *soothe before you solve* is let’s do this with emotional pain too. Emotional trauma. We soothe physical pain, but let’s get good at soothing emotional pain. That many will carry with them for a lifetime.

The third one – Let them share without controlling the narrative. And here’s what happens. Did that really happen that way? Are you sure? And what a family member might try to do is get you in on the deception and just be like, Let’s not paint it like that. Let’s say it with this. It did really happen that way.”

Let them share and keep your mouth shut. Your response to another’s pain or trauma could be one of the most important moments in their life.

My friend, Doug Fields says, *“It could be some of the most important 15 seconds of their life how you respond when someone shares their story with you.”* Our response is so important.

If you have experienced trauma... I don’t want to just talk about how family members respond to trauma, but to the one on our campus today or watching online today who has been raped, who has been sexually abused, I need you to know this. Not everyone in your family will understand. But you keep trying. Don’t keep going toward that family member. Not everyone in your family will fight for you and try to help you. Well intentioned family members may listen to your story, but they may even add to our hurt, pain, or trauma by going passive, silent. They love you, they care for you, but they just want to keep it silent. Or they go scorched earth, neither way is good.

So, I just want to encourage you if you are the victim, share your story with safe people. Not everyone who wants you to share your story is going to be a safe person. Not

everyone who wants you to share your story online is safe. You need to share with someone, but you don't have to share with everyone.

You've heard it said, Facebook is a terrible therapist, and the internet is a terrible place to heal.

I know it sounds like it's helping at first... I'm just going to say this. Even outside of sexual abuse and sexual trauma, there are so many people in our church... I'm just going to tell you that you way, way overshare online. We talk about you. Not mean, but sad, going all they are doing is making it worse for them. You're seeking validation. You post on Facebook... There will be people you love and care for who will never see it because the algorithm doesn't put it in their feed. And you are going to sit around mad. "I was just with them last week after I posted and they didn't say anything." They didn't say anything because they didn't see anything. So, you're frustrated with them.

There are those who will see it and they don't care. Can we be honest about what happens online? Your post sharing your deepest pain in life is sandwiched between their favorite sports player being traded and some goofy meme.

There are those who will see it. They care. They don't know what to say, they don't know what to do. And there will be those who care and speak life over you and they want to help you heal. I have found it's those people that contact you offline, but they don't hit the like button, or they don't make a comment, but they will reach out to you.

Share your story with safe people.

And finally Choose healing, not revenge. We have victims in our church that are listening to people who feed your bitterness, your resentment, and they want you to go scorched earth. Those people are not helping you heal. They have a *burn it to the ground, tear it down*, mentality. And you've heard it said – hurt people hurt people. We want you to heal. If you never heal from what hurt you... I heard one person say you'll bleed on people who didn't cut you.

You may be zero percent to blame for what happened to you, but you are 100 percent responsible for your healing and your treatment of others.

Let's just be honest. Have you ever wanted someone to hurt for hurting you or someone you love? I have. Have you ever wanted to hurt someone? Not just wanting them to hurt, but you be the one that inflicts the pain for hurting you or someone you love?

If you've been taken advantage of by someone, if you've been mistreated, cheated, abused, if you've been hurt in any way, you have a decision to make. You will choose the path of revenge or you will choose the path of healing. And this church wants to be a place where you can find healing. You can choose revenge, retaliation, bitterness, or resentment. Or you can choose healing, moving forward with your life, getting healthy and giving your energy to what matters most.

I spent the last week with friends at our conference in Nashville with the American Association of Christian Counselors. I started reading one of the books I brought home. Shaunty Feldheim, who has been at our church and James cells from Regent university. Just came out with *When hurting people come to church.*"

I started reading it... I actually went straight to the trauma section of the book to learn how we do better as a church with trauma care.

Here's what they say: *The purpose of care in the aftermath of trauma or grief is reorientation. People tend to mark and define their existence by major events, just as cultures and generations do. For example, the greatest generation might ask, "Where were you when you learned about the Pearl Harbor attack?" The boomers may ask where were you when you got news of JFK's assassination? or Martin Luther King Jr's assassination. Most today would say, "Where were you, what were you doing when the planes hit the towers on 9/11?"* These events are what we call social traumas. In a similar way, individual trauma and grief are seared into our memory. We use them to mark time. Life can be defined by these points on the calendar before and after these traumatic moments. And we easily define ourselves through these events as well.

So, what is the purpose of care and how do we do care better? I love what they say in the very next paragraph.

"Healing from trauma or grief means developing the ability to carry the events of the past and to bear the weight of the loss without experiencing despair or imprisonment."

And I'm telling you. I've seen this for thirty plus years now in ministry. It's only because of one name and that name is Jesus. That people can find full and complete healing. And if people are not directing you toward that in your life, find those that will help you heal,

not feed your bitterness, feed your resentment, join the outrage online, scorched earth approach.. no. The Bible says in Romans 12: 19, ***Do not take revenge my dear friends, but; leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, it is mine to avenge. I will repay the says the Lord.***

Diane Langbird says, "Whenever God's people fail to speak truth, expose the deeds of darkness, to light, function as a refuge for the abused, afflicted, and needy, they not only have failed you, but have failed our God as well for they look nothing like him.

This church carries a sacred trust. We are called to help people heal in all different seasons and stages of life. And today, specifically speaking of rape and sexual abuse. We help people heal from this loss, this trauma, and this grief.

Here's a prayer that I've been praying. You can put it in your own words and pray on your own.

Lord, please let our church be the safest place on earth for children, victims, and survivors. Where we need to do better, convict us. And this is where I step in in recent years and just go, the scorched earth, burn it to the ground.. no. Many of you come from a generation you were never taught how to be trauma informed or care for people. We want to do better; we want to get better. So, in other words, Lord, where we need training, send people to equip us. Send people who put scripture in the driver's seat, research in the passenger seat, experience, and emotion in the seats behind them.

But Lord, help us get better tat this. As denominations have wrestled with this topic, there are those online in the outrage who say they are helping victims, but I think they are only leading to more resentment and bitterness. No, let's get better. Let's learn, let's grow, let those like Diane Langberg teach us, help us as a church as ministries, as organizations and denominations, get better. Lord, let people find healing in our church. Let them find healing in the name of Jesus. The way we help people heal from trauma wounds of the heart speaks directly to the heart and character of God.

I want to end today by speaking to the Dinahs in the room. I have no idea how the Lord's going to use this message and how people will find healing, and I know there are tears throughout the campus as you wrestle with what has happened to you. Some of you right now are in the middle of this, afraid to say something for fear of a family member going to prison. It's time to speak up.

If you are the one inflicting the abuse, it's time to repent, first and foremost before a holy God. Knock it off, repent, turn yourself in.

But I talk to those in the room or online walking out a similar story to Dinah. You've been hurt, abused, neglected, violated, or raped. You don't feel heard; your family has not helped. They've only added to your pain, and it feels like healing is impossible. Healing when you don't feel heard or cared for is hard. And that's the story of many in our church. Someone hurt you and no one heard you or helped you. I'm here to tell you that Jesus can heal you. You can find freedom taking personal responsibility for your life moving forward. This story will be a memory in your life. What happened to you will be a memory, but you can move through it without imprisonment or despair.

Father, use today as just a moment in the life of our church and community. And as we seek to be trained and equipped on how to handle this well, we don't want to go with either extreme that we've seen today. We don't want to be passive or silent and we don't want scorched earth. But that in the name of Jesus, people can be healed.

And all across our campus that the holy Spirit would be calling people by name.

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus that today would the day of their salvation. That they would declare with their mouth that Jesus is Lord, believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead that they would be saved.

We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.