

the siblings will go to great lengths to excel in opposite directions. One will excel in academics and the other in fringe group partying. Many black sheep live in the shadows of a high achieving brother or sister who seems impossible to compete with. Each child strives to find their own niche and identity. The marriages in families with black sheep can be very dysfunctional, which forces the children to do what they can to survive the threats of divorce, insecurities, trauma, and constant strife. The black sheep may bury himself in bizarre music, dress, and peer groups in protest against his family instability, through defiance and shifting the focus away from his parents onto himself. Fathers can do a lot of damage when they hurt their children emotionally through neglect, harsh criticism and discipline, verbal or physical abuse, and poor or conflicted relationships with their children. Many black sheep are driven by their own father wounds to engage in behaviors that are unproductive, damaging, and self-destructive. They get back at dad by being different and defiant. Unreasonably strict discipline can push some children toward the edge. Those kids who are already stubborn and strong willed may be predisposed to go the opposite direction under very strict parenting. They go to extremes in asserting themselves through flaunting outrageous hairstyles, clothing, and activities that defy society and their parents. It is important to note that black sheep can come from families with minimal problems and conflicts but usually there are issues, precipitating factors, and significant pressures. The more radical black sheep tend to come from high conflict families. Family tension can also be just below the surface. Family members will nag, pick at, or put one another down in ways that don't involve escalations. Parents feud with each other over a variety of issues such as child rearing. Children sense the marital tension and have to deal with the insecurity they feel as a result. The child on the edge can have a harder time dealing with the uneasiness caused by his parents. It is important to keep in mind that many factors can contribute to one becoming the family's black sheep. A combination of factors such as the black sheep's personality, family issues, and family dynamics impact the results. There are times when a child is really just different, does not

cause trouble, and the family labels him or her the black sheep. This is not the black sheep's fault. Family prejudices against a member because they don't look like the rest of them, can lead to the black sheep label and maltreatment. This can be very sad and disastrous when it persists. The problem is caused by the family, not the child labeled the black sheep. The child can grow up with a variety of mental health problems unless they are healed and some form of family reconciliation takes place.

## Reconciliation

Hard feelings don't have to linger. The black sheep dilemma is a family problem which should be addressed by the whole family. Confusion, rivalries, jealousies, and resentments can persist over a lifetime in families who have an identified black sheep. The family is off balance. Battle lines are drawn and family members act accordingly in relating to and dealing with their own black sheep. Sometimes hard boundaries have to be set by family members to prevent manipulative unrepentant black sheep from repeatedly taking advantage of them and causing endless grief. Keep your boundaries. Pray for the black sheep to allow God into his life and change. Forgive them and love them but don't let them abuse you. Very few families accept and tolerate their black sheep as just eccentric and a little different from the rest. Families need to understand how their own member became a black sheep. What happened with that individual that led them to rebel and behave so differently? Proper understanding will lead to identifying the cause and enable family members to examine their role in creating the problem. It can lead to compassion and move families to reconcile. Pick up that phone and call your "black sheep" brother or sister especially when you know you offended them and caused them pain and suffering long ago. Tell them you are sorry. Ask them to forgive you. A father may come forth and speak to the black sheep alone, each member alone, or with the whole group about his angry, critical behavior which impacted everyone. He can ask for forgiveness. He can do what ever it takes to own his part of the problem and show the others that he was at fault for alienating the black sheep and causing pain to the whole family. He

becomes part of the solution and the reconciliation process begins. Each family member should come forth and admit their part in distancing themselves from the black sheep. They know they could have been more supportive toward the black sheep even if meant confronting them in love. All grievances surrounding the identifying, rejecting, and alienating the black sheep can be addressed. Siblings and parents can be transparent when they allow God to guide them. Our God is a God of reconciliation! Look what He did with Joseph who was favored by his father but rejected by his brothers and sold into slavery. God reconciled Joseph's family and saved this family that would become the entire Jewish nation! (Genesis 37:28; 50:20). Christ wants families healed and reconciled! Black sheep must also examine themselves. They should ask forgiveness for all the heartache, embarrassment, and conflict they generated all those years regardless of what caused their rebellion. They choose to be different. Sometimes the black sheep was mean, angry, and belligerent with his siblings and parents when they did not provoke him. Reconciliation in this situation comes when black sheep resolve this matter with God through confession and repentance, and address it with their family by genuinely apologizing and asking for their forgiveness. God honors this move and He supplies the power to do it. Reconciliation can be very hard work, especially when certain family members refuse to cooperate and they struggle with forgiving. Pray for them. Reconciliation is a process which takes God, work and time. Be patient, years may have elapsed since you left home and your parents and siblings may not be as far along in the healing process as you are.



You may be returning like the prodigal son and are welcomed with open arms. That's great! Don't give up, keep seeking Christ, allow Him to minister to you and heal you of your past and make you brand new. Everyone makes

mistakes; learn from your blunders and become the person God wants you to be, Christ like, growing and maturing in your Christian walk. Glorify Him with your life!

## From Black Sheep to God's White Sheep

Black sheep don't have to live in the shadows of their past; they don't have to be doomed by their family, mistakes, or themselves. They can and do change. You have undoubtedly heard stories where people were labeled by their families as black sheep and went on to become great people. They went on to fulfill God's destiny for them. Regardless of the way they became black sheep, they can be restored. God uses people who were black sheep. Samson was a type of black sheep by disobeying his parents and God. (Judges 14:3, 14:7, 16:1, 16:30). I mentioned Joseph earlier who was another Biblical "black sheep" who God used mightily.

Remember Aunt Susie? She eventually went to college and graduated with honors from medical school after a series of bad choices and relationships, and became a very successful heart surgeon. Susie made peace with her family one by one over the years. She found Christ and He helped her turn her life completely around. God used her to reconcile her family and ease the suffering of countless others through her medical career. God loves black sheep. They don't have to completely fit in mainstream society or lose their individuality to be the sheep of His pasture. They do have to surrender their will to Him. They belong to Him.

The term white sheep here denotes the absence of being a tormented outcast and the transformation into someone much better, accepted especially in God's sight. God transforms black sheep outcasts into white sheep. They become His sheep.



Their past is forgiven and those who inflicted misery on the black sheep are offered the same opportunity to be

healed and reconciled to Him. People can use their story to inspire others to press on and fight the good fight and win. God can work with difficult families and their black sheep. Their issues and struggles are not too difficult for Him. Those surrendered to Christ will testify to His amazing power and love when it comes to changing them. The journey may be long and arduous but well worth it. Perhaps you were labeled the black sheep of your family growing up and you are not proud of what you did back then. Maybe your family was completely at fault in the way they handled you and caused you much suffering over the years. You don't have to bear this any more. Take the first step: approach God and ask Him to heal and direct you in this matter. You don't have to carry the baggage as the black sheep of your family the rest of your life, and you don't have to repeatedly engage in self destructive behaviors to maintain your black sheep image. God can do a lot with you. He can restore the years the locust has eaten. (Joel 2:25) Let Him. Step out in obedient faith!

**F.Y.I.**



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