

 JACOB

MINI-STUDY



Welcome to BSF's five-week study of Jacob!
We hope God speaks to you through His
Word and your group discussion.

Here's how the Bible study works:

- Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day.
- Discuss your answers with your small group at the end of the week.
- Listen to a podcast teaching on the week's passage.
- Read the notes with the passage's historical background and life application.
- Repeat!

We hope you enjoy using this four-fold approach to exploring God's Word in community with others.

Thanks for choosing to study Jacob with Bible Study Fellowship!

WEEK ONE

ISAAC: FAMILY DECEPTION, BLESSING AND CONSEQUENCES

GENESIS 27



Focus Verse

Isaac trembled violently and said, “Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me?
I ate it just before you came and I blessed him – and indeed he will be blessed!”

Genesis 27:33



Day 1

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. (How has He provided, answered, comforted, reconciled, guided, etc.?)

2. How did the week's verses, lecture, notes or discussion change or confirm your thoughts about God?

Day 2 – Genesis 27:1-13

Rebekah plotted with Jacob after Isaac plotted with Esau over the blessing.

3. What were the physical and spiritual priorities of Isaac, Rebekah, Esau and Jacob in these verses?

4. In what ways did the parents accept or disregard God's revealed promises and righteous ways? (See also Genesis 25:23.)

5. Name some "good reasons" and ways Christians use wrong methods today.

6. What could each of the four have done differently that you can remember and apply to your own situations?





12. When you have faced an outcome that could not be changed, what truth about God or specific promise from His Word challenged or encouraged you?

Day 5 – Genesis 27:42-46

Rebekah plotted with Jacob to avert Esau's murderous plans.

13. What did Esau have to gain by killing Jacob, and what did he have to lose?
14. a. How did God discipline Rebekah and Jacob? (Skim Genesis 29-35 and see Hebrews 12:6-11.)
- b. What truths about God can believers depend on when facing long-term consequences related to our sins?
15. What do you learn from this chapter about how God uses flawed sinners in His perfect plan, and why?

Day 6 – Genesis 27

16. How has this chapter impacted your trust in God's promises and plans?





Genesis 27

Focus Verse

“Isaac trembled violently and said, ‘Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him – and indeed he will be blessed!’ ” – Genesis 27:33

- Dysfunction and Deception Within the Family – Genesis 27:1-29
- Distress and Division Within the Family – Genesis 27:30-46

Engage

This week’s lesson reveals a profoundly dysfunctional family at the center of God’s plan to save the world. Does that surprise you? What do you expect from the people and plans of God? **Isaac’s family story is filled with deception, scheming and brokenness.** In the same way, people in our lives often disappoint or hurt us. Our families also have issues. If we are honest, our own weakness and sin can be very discouraging. How do you explain the gap between God’s standard and human reality? God chooses and uses flawed people in His perfect plan.

God’s plans cannot be thwarted by human failing, which is inevitable. No human plot or plan can overrule the sovereign purposes of God. What people intend for evil, God can use for good. Do you think your family or your life is beyond usefulness to God? Think again. We find hope knowing God’s purposes prevail despite opposition or complacency. **God’s perfect plan does not depend on your perfect obedience.** God accomplishes what we cannot. What messy situation in your life do you need to trust God to transform for His glory?



Dysfunction and Deception Within the Family –

Genesis 27:1-29

Isaac's Plot – 27:1-4

Abraham approached the end of his life well-prepared. He found a bride for Isaac and secured all his other children in lands far away. Perhaps his example motivated Isaac in Genesis 27, where we see Isaac as an old man. **Isaac believed his death was drawing near.** There is no indication that his death was imminent, but he stated, "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death." We know Isaac experienced some physical limitations of old age, including blindness. Life is finite, a fact most people try to ignore or avoid. Consciousness of the brevity of life sharpens life's priorities.

Isaac urgently sought to secure Esau as heir that day "before he died." Genesis 35:28 indicates Isaac lived to be 180, giving him decades to live with the consequences of his actions this day. His methods in this exchange raise questions. In that culture and time, fathers normally blessed their heirs with joyful, public celebrations such as Abraham held for Isaac.¹ **Instead, Isaac privately**

called on Esau to provide him a tasty meal of game, his favorite and Esau's specialty, as a condition to receiving his blessing. Isaac's motives and understanding are not clearly stated, but certainly questionable.

We assume Isaac knew of God's prophecy regarding his choice of Jacob, not Esau.² Isaac's manipulative plot started an ugly family battle. God's choice of Jacob, not Esau, was preeminent. Isaac ignored not only God's expressed will but also the different attitudes of his two sons toward God's promises and commands. Isaac's partiality and inaction contributed to the family's discord. Isaac decided to give Esau something God did not want him to have.

Although Esau previously decided the birthright was worth less to him than a bowl of stew, he now tried to get it back from Jacob through his father's scheme. Esau thought God's blessing could be sold, earned or stolen. **Esau's attitudes and actions indicated wrong thinking about God.**





Biblical Theme: A Father's Blessing

The Nuzi tablets, a collection of more than 5,000 legal and business documents from the second millennium B.C., show that a father's blessing was recognized culturally as a form of a last will and testament. Even though blessings were spoken and not written, they were legally binding.

The blessings of the patriarchs were also prophetic. God made a covenant with these men – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – to establish the nation of Israel. God the Holy Spirit spoke through the patriarchs and foretold future blessings. At times, the Holy Spirit overturned natural desires and customs to extend the patriarchal blessing as God ordained. Although a prophet personally wished to bless one person or nation, God's will prevailed.³

The apostle Peter explained that the prophets often did not fully understand these prophecies since they predicted future events. Yet God's faithfulness to fulfill the details of His promises supports the claim that these words were from God, not the desires or imaginations of people. "... no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Rebekah's Counterplot – 27:5-13

When Rebekah overheard Isaac speak to Esau about the blessing, she sprung to action. As soon as Esau headed out to hunt, she called Jacob and devised a plan of her own. Rebekah knew well God's prophecy that Jacob, not Esau, was God's choice. Esau's disobedient marriages to two Hittite wives caused her grief.⁴ She likely knew that Esau had sold Jacob his birthright. Jacob was her favorite.⁵ Whether or not she thought she was

upholding God's decreed will, Rebekah sought to undermine Isaac's plan with her own manipulative scheme. She was not trusting God to deliver what He had promised. **Rebekah sought to fulfill God's plan and her desires in her own way, rather than waiting on God.**

Rebekah plotted to deceive her husband and led Jacob into sin against God and his father, Isaac. Rebekah's plan was bold. She would prepare a meal like the one Esau had likely learned to cook from her. Jacob would impersonate Esau to serve the meal and snatch the blessing. Rebekah relied on sinful methods to seek the right thing. **Obedience to God never requires compromise with sin.** Because God is holy, God's people must be holy in motives and in methods.⁶

Jacob expressed fear of being caught and cursed, but he did not object to his mother's plan. How much sorrow was caused because Jacob did not say, "This is wrong. This is sin." Rebekah did not weigh her choices or the consequences for herself and her beloved son. Her reply, "My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say," reveals her casual attitude toward this serious offense. She told Jacob that Isaac would confer the blessing "in the presence of the LORD" (27:7), but she failed to see her actions within the view of Holy God. At this point, the four family members had this in common – they each valued their own will more than God's righteous character. **None were afraid to sin in the presence of the Lord to get what they wanted.**

Deceitful Plot Deployed – 27:14-29

Preparations to deceive – 27:14-17

Jacob expressed concern about his smooth skin (27:11-12). **Rebekah's plot required careful planning as the deception escalated.** In a somber reminder that she was harming both her children, she took "the best clothes of Esau her older son" and put them on "her younger son Jacob." She exploited Isaac's blindness to accomplish her plan. She covered Jacob with goatskins and prepared





him to take the substitute meal into his blind father. This ridiculous costume highlights the foolishness of sinners who attempt to hide from the God who sees and knows all. Isaac might have been fooled, but God was not.

Lies and more lies – 27:18-26

When Jacob brought the dish to his father, Isaac recognized Jacob did not sound like Esau. As always, lies require more lies to stay alive. **Truth does not change; lies must be maintained.**

- “I am Esau your firstborn.” – Jacob lied to answer Isaac’s question about his identity.
- “I have done as you told me.” – He lied using information from his mother to cause his father to believe.
- “The Lord your God gave me success.” – This lie invoked God’s name, giving God credit for the meal.
- “I am.” – Jacob lied again when Isaac felt his covered skin and asked, “Are you really my son Esau?”

Thoroughly deceived, Isaac ate and drank, then he called his son to come forward for the blessing.

Isaac blessed Jacob – 27:27-29

God overruled all the plotting and scheming to accomplish His determined will. When Isaac spoke, God’s fourfold prophecy filled his heart. Isaac believed these words were for Esau. Isaac must have imagined that he had, in fact, convinced God to change His mind. Yet God sovereignly overruled Isaac’s desires. God remained true to His Word with this chosen blessing for the nation that would rise through Jacob.

- **Fertile land** – The blessing includes phrases suggesting bountiful goodness, abundant provisions, joy and peace.
- **Ruling leadership** – Jacob’s son Joseph would rule from Egypt. Later Israel would rule over the Edomites. Ultimately, Jacob’s descendant, Jesus Christ, is exalted to rule over all.⁷
- **Family headship** – Isaac thought he made Esau “lord over” Jacob, but God accomplished His purpose.
- **Identification** – God would be so closely involved with Jacob that to curse or bless him would be as doing so to God.





The Doctrine of Works

Most people believe that if the “good” things they do outweigh the “bad,” all will be well with God for eternity. This thinking counts on the fact that there is enough good in you to make up for your failings. It is always wise and right to weigh the thinking of this world against the truth in God’s Word.

Important questions must be raised. **Can we, in our humanness, offer God anything that is purely and genuinely good?** All humanity is so ruined by sin that even our best attempts to do good rise from imperfect motives.⁸ Certainly, people do things that benefit others and promote good things like peace, love and justice. There is a brand of human virtue, but the best humans can offer on their own is not good enough. Our best cannot come close to the perfection God requires because our best is tainted with sin.⁹ **We cannot earn God’s favor by our own works.** Ephesians 2:8-9 says this clearly: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” God’s favor did not rest on Abraham, Isaac or Jacob because of their own merit. In fact, their imperfections only highlight God’s undeserved grace.

Human works do not contribute to salvation. The Holy Spirit awakens saving faith in an individual. By faith in the finished work of Christ, God transfers the perfect righteousness of His sinless Son to the believer. That process is called justification. This amazing gift of a goodness that is not our own only serves to glorify God. But another question emerges. **If human goodness or works cannot save me, are they important at all?** Ephesians 2:10 completes this thought and answers this question beautifully. “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” The Holy Spirit within the believer creates appetites, attitudes and actions that glorify God. True saving faith produces good works, providing evidence of the spiritual life within. A saved life is a changed life.¹⁰

Those who trust human works to earn God’s favor are left in a challenging position. No one can deny the internal struggle of the thought life, selfish motives and hurtful actions, despite our best efforts. And while you might end a day feeling reasonably good about what happened, you can never know if the good you did was enough. The best hope of feeling good about yourself is to compare yourself to someone you think is worse. None of these things bring lasting hope or confidence.

What is it like to know that the only good within you is not your own? How helpful is it to realize that when God looks at you, He does not see your faltering steps, flawed motives or outright failures? How wonderful is it to know that by God’s power alone you can overcome sin, die to yourself and obey God? Our only boast is Christ; there is no room for human pride. Because Jesus perfectly pleases God, God sees you as whole, not broken. **Because the Holy Spirit stimulates God-pleasing thoughts and actions within you, the good works God has prepared for you can be accomplished. But they are accomplished in His power alone.** At the end of the day, the high points and low points rest in the finished work of Christ. He has already paid the price for your failures. God gets the glory for what you did right, because He did it. Romans 11:35-36 offers God the glory due His name: “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them? For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”





Distress and Division Within the Family –

Genesis 27:30-46

Truth Revealed – 27:30-33

Isaac's full stomach and perceived victory offered only fleeting pleasure. As soon as Jacob left Isaac, Esau arrived armed with tasty game for his father. We cannot estimate the force of God's sovereignty thundering on Isaac when he heard Esau's voice and asked, "Who are you?" Before God and Esau, Isaac trembled violently. **A blessing once spoken could not be revoked.** Jacob's deceit did not change the outcome. God overruled human scheming and accomplished His determined will. God is never deceived, nor does He make mistakes or change His mind.¹¹

God overruled Isaac's self-serving plot and kept him from further sin. **Isaac accepted God's will and confessed God's blessing to Jacob would stand – "indeed he will be blessed."** The New Testament confirms Isaac's repentance and submission to God's will for both sons and commends Isaac's faithful blessing of Jacob and Esau.¹²

Esau's Response – 27:34-38

Esau cried loudly and bitterly when he heard the news, not in repentance, but because he lost what he wanted. Sin causes sorrow, but not all sorrow over sin is godly or productive. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." The just consequences of sin can lead to repentance or bitterness. **Esau's words and tears were for himself.** He pridefully sought status, rights and power apart from the living God. Esau refused personal responsibility for his problems. He blamed his brother for taking advantage of him twice and ignored the fact that he callously sold the birthright to Jacob for a small, temporary gain.

Birthrights and blessings for the firstborn included property and power. Isaac had intended to give this to Esau. Esau continued in a mournful demand that Isaac still could offer a blessing reserved for him – "Bless me – me too, my father!" **Isaac had nothing left to offer that would make Esau happy.**

Esau deliberately rejected God in exchange for passing pleasures. He valued the visible, immediately tangible delights of the flesh more than the invisible and eternal delights within God's promises. Hebrews 12:16-17 describes Esau as godless. He despised God, His gifts and His promises.





Esau's "Blessing" and Simmering Hatred – 27:39-41

God's blessing to Abraham transferred to Jacob, promising that those who cursed him would be cursed. Esau's hostility toward Jacob and rebellion against God put him in a dangerous position. **Isaac's prophetic words about Esau's future capture the hardships he and his descendants faced.** The consequences before him did not prompt repentance. Instead, Esau, like Cain, walked away from God and raised a nation to stand against Him.¹³

Esau's land would be dry and barren, in stark contrast to the fertile land promised to Jacob. Esau's nation, later known as Edom (which means "red"), was a mountainous stronghold with little rain and few fertile places. The phrases, "live by the sword," "serve your brother" and "throw his yoke" speak of the Edomites' constant battles against Israel and others.¹⁴

Sin and rebellion against God escalate when people refuse to repent. Esau did not recognize his own sin but continued to blame Jacob. God dealt with Jacob's sin, as we will see in upcoming chapters. But hatred ruled Esau's heart, and he wanted Jacob to suffer. His smoldering anger blossomed into a desire to kill Jacob, perhaps to

regain the birthright and blessing. With a calloused heart, he boasted of his murderous plan to others. Bitterness grows a deep root in a human heart and leads to greater sin.¹⁵

Rebekah's Scheme and Sorrow – 27:42-46

Rebekah heard of Esau's murderous threat against Jacob and quickly warned him. She took aggressive control of her son and told him again to "do what I say." She told Jacob that Esau wanted to kill him for "what you did to him." The Bible is silent about what Isaac or Esau knew about Rebekah's role in Jacob's deception. **Rebekah's sin and manipulation brought costly consequences.** She hoped Jacob would only have to flee until Esau's anger cooled, but she never saw her beloved son again.

Genesis 27 could be the story of a family united by love for God and love for one another. Instead, father, mother and sons tried to manipulate God and devalued His promises. They turned on each other and pursued selfish motives through deceitful means. They were not in control; God was in control. **No human plot or plan can overrule the sovereign purposes of God.** He rules and overrules to fulfill His perfect and holy will. God can use sinful people in His perfect plan because He redeems what sin destroys.





Take to Heart

Hold Fast

The Lord is sovereign. God has all power and authority to fully accomplish His perfect will. What God decrees and determines will come to pass despite human opposition or failures. God remains faithful to His character, His will and His Word in everything He accomplishes. God declared that Jacob, not Esau, would inherit the blessing and birthright. Their limited understanding, deceptive scheming and attempts to manipulate God did not change anything. God's eternal purposes stand firm. Believers find great comfort knowing God's eternal purposes cannot be shaken.

Isaac's lack of sensitivity and submission to God created a disturbing dynamic in his family. Though not outwardly assertive, Isaac was strong-willed. He disregarded Esau's irreverence for God. He loved food and comfort. Perhaps spiritual complacency blurred his spiritual discernment. His lack of spiritual leadership was likely a factor in the unhealthy dynamic within his own family. All four members of this family were involved in a web of deception and manipulation. God, however, cannot be deceived. God knows the secrets of every human heart.¹⁶

God overruled Isaac's intentions to accomplish His will. Isaac yielded to God when he realized that Jacob, not Esau, received God's blessing despite his scheming. Isaac trembled when he learned the truth and told Esau that their plot had failed. He said, "I blessed him – and indeed he will be blessed!" God demonstrates His love to His children by exposing their sin and calling them to repentance and obedience.

Esau blamed Jacob when he lost what he did not value. Pride leads people to take offense rather than recognize and confess sin. Refusing God's opportunities to repent represents a real danger. To walk away from God rather than





toward Him invites further trouble and deeper sin. Esau's grudge against his brother led him to harbor anger and boast about his desire to murder Jacob. Human pride blinds us from proper humility before God and others.

Apply It

Never underestimate the impact your choices have on others. Isaac and Rebekah influenced their sons in harmful ways. We like to believe our thought life and most of our choices are our own business. Your thoughts lead to actions. Your actions inevitably influence others. "Secret" sins cause more damage than we ever imagine. Parents influence their children, for good and for bad. Friends influence friends. Your words or actions toward a stranger can have impact you never imagine. Who are you influencing? Are you leading someone else to sin deliberately or by example? Who is looking to you and where are you leading them? Everyone leads someone. Who you are and what you do matters.

Sin presents itself as a worthwhile option. "Half-truths" and small compromises can seem like good solutions. Isaac and Esau, Rebekah and Jacob and all of us sometimes pick a short-term win over long-term victory. We try to do the right thing the wrong way. Most of the time, we severely underestimate the cost of sin. **Sin always promises more than it delivers and costs more than we imagine.** Sin escalates. Lies require more lies. Anger turns to hatred and bitterness. Sinful appetites, if indulged, blur spiritual vision. The account of this family raises the importance

of constant vigilance to seek God in daily life. Growing believers maintain a healthy distrust of themselves. They recognize their own capacity to sin and mature as they learn to trust God's grace and provision. Our sins are rooted in pride, selfishness and failure to believe God. What sin in your life do you tolerate and underestimate? Where are you particularly vulnerable to sin? What do you love more than obeying God? How has God used the consequences of sin to call you back to Himself?

Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." This passage certainly demonstrates that truth. The blessing went to Jacob no matter what the family tried to do. The concept of God's power and control over human affairs troubles some people. **For the believer, the certainty of God gives hope amid the uncertainty of life.** The perfection of God's ways and timing offer hope while we wait for Him to act. God will not allow your sin, this world's confusion or anything else to disrupt His plan. This truth provides comfort to those who trust Him. Do you find more peace thinking world history and daily life are random or by knowing God is in control? God's sovereign power incorporates His love, grace and compassion. In what specific situation do you need to trust God's loving care and surrender control? Will you trust Him, even if you cannot fully understand what He is doing? Will you surrender your own plans to the prevailing purposes of God, for your good and His glory?

Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1: Feast for Isaac: Genesis 21:8 | 8: The sinfulness of mankind: Romans 3:9-18 | 12: Isaac blesses sons: Hebrews 11:20 |
| 2: Prophecy regarding Jacob and Esau: Genesis 25:23 | 9: The insufficiency of human works: Isaiah 64:6; James 2:10 | 13: Cain's rebellion: Genesis 4 |
| 3: Prophetic blessings: Genesis 48:17-19; Numbers 22-24 | 10: Salvation produces God-pleasing works: Romans 11:6; Titus 3:4-8; James 2:14-18; 2 Peter 1:5-11 | 14: Edomites: 2 Samuel 8:14; 2 Kings 8:20-22; Obadiah 1:1-2, 10-15 |
| 4: Esau's marriages: Genesis 26:34-35; 27:46 | 11: God does not change His mind: Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7:21 | 15: Bitterness: Amos 5:7; Ephesians 4:31; Hebrews 12:15 |
| 5: Favoritism in Isaac's family: Genesis 25:27-28 | | 16: God knows human hearts: Psalms 44:21; 139:1-6; Hebrews 4:12-13 |
| 6: Holy God: Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16 | | |
| 7: Christ exalted: Philippians 2:10-11 | | |

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WEEK TWO

JACOB: GOD'S BLESSING AND COVENANT

GENESIS 28



Scripture Memory Verse

Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.

Genesis 28:14



Day 1

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. (How has He provided, answered, comforted, reconciled, guided, etc.?)

2. How did the week's verses, lecture, notes or discussion change or confirm your thoughts about God?

Day 2 – Genesis 28:1-9

Isaac and Rebekah blessed Jacob and his journey to find a wife.

3. What differences exist between this blessing from Isaac and the one Jacob received while disguised as his brother, Esau?

4. Why did Isaac encourage Jacob to flee to Paddan Aram?

5. When have you recently had the opportunity to redeem a circumstance or relationship through a deliberate choice to obey God's Word?

6. What did Esau do when he learned Isaac commanded Jacob not to marry a Canaanite woman? What wrong thinking does his choice reveal?





Day 3 – Genesis 28:10-11

Jacob stopped at night on his journey to Paddan Aram.

7. What kinds of discomfort, loneliness or loss did Jacob face in his travel to Paddan Aram?

8. a. When has God taken you out of your comfort zone or to obedience that seemed costly?

- b. What does pain in the process of spiritual growth reveal about the redemptive power of God? (Use James 1:2-8; 1 Peter 2:13-22; 3:13-22 to enrich your study and discussion.)

Day 4 – Genesis 28:12-15

God appeared to Jacob in a dream.

9. Describe Jacob's dream. How do Jesus' words to Nathanael in John 1:51 help you understand the symbolism Jacob would not have fully understood? (See also John 14:6 and Hebrews 10:19-20.)

10. Give God's personal promise to Jacob regarding:
 - a. Land

 - b. Descendants





c. Blessing

d. God's presence with him

11. The Bible contains God's personal promises and confirms His presence with believers. What promises of God could help or encourage you right now?

Day 5 – Genesis 28:16-22

Jacob worshipped God with a vow at Bethel.

12. What stands out to you about Jacob's response to the presence and promises of God?

13. How are you encountering God through your study of Genesis this year?

14. How is God calling you to commit to fully trusting Him? What is holding you back?

Day 6 – Genesis 28

15. How does this chapter enlarge your thinking about God? How are you personally encouraged to deeper faith in God?





Genesis 28

Focus Verse

“Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.” – Genesis 28:14

- Jacob's Departure – Genesis 28:1-9
- Jacob's Dream – Genesis 28:10-22

Engage

Jacob reaped painful consequences from his deceitful scheme to receive his father's blessing. He got the blessing he wanted but also a lot of hardship he did not want. Jacob was forced to flee from home because he feared that his brother, Esau, would pursue and murder him. However, the One who most intensely pursued Jacob was not Esau, but God. God did not pull away from Jacob because of his deception. **God sought fleeing Jacob; He drew near to the man who found himself far from everything secure.**

Sin brings consequences. The good news is that God meets us where we are and calls us forward. God extends grace to the undeserving. Jacob's failure was not final. God sought Jacob in ways that captured his heart. Perhaps the lonely and discouraging place where Jacob found himself prepared him to welcome and respond to God's nearness. God appeared to him, renewed His covenant and led him to worship. **God draws near and shows grace to undeserving sinners.** When you yield to Him, God works good through your difficulties, even messes of your own making. How has God pursued you, even when you faced the hard consequences of your choices? How is God drawing near in a personal way to invest in your spiritual growth?





Jacob's Departure – Genesis 28:1-9

Isaac Instructed Fleeing Jacob – 28:1-2

Isaac failed in his self-willed attempt to change God's plan and bless Esau, not Jacob. Through the turmoil of that scene, God awakened Isaac to His mercy, and Isaac submitted to God's will. Isaac knew God had chosen Jacob as the next heir of the covenant blessing. **From this point, Isaac exercised spiritual leadership and took responsibility for Jacob's welfare and future.** As Jacob prepared to flee, Isaac instructed him to seek a wife in Harran from among his mother's family. Jacob was not to marry a Canaanite woman.

Isaac Conferred God's Covenant to Jacob – 28:3-5

Isaac acknowledged Jacob's privileged place in God's promised plan. With great dignity, Isaac echoed the words of God's covenant blessing first given to Abraham, then to Isaac.¹ At last, Jacob

received the heart of the patriarchal blessing – the promise of a Messiah, the land and the glory of the people of Israel.

Esau's Response – 28:6-9

God continued to offer Esau opportunities to face his sin and turn to Him. Esau learned Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away from Canaan to find a wife from their family. Esau realized his two Canaanite wives displeased his parents. But rather than seeking their counsel or God's direction, he went to the family of Ishmael and married a third wife. Did he do this to seek his parents' approval or to spite them? **Whatever his motive, Esau's marriages reveal his lack of spiritual understanding.** Esau's behavior fulfilled God's prophecy, yet he was entirely responsible for rejecting God's grace and choosing his own way.

Two Brothers, Two Paths

Jacob and Esau were twins, born to the same parents on the same day, yet their destinies were incredibly different. God declared their separate futures before they were born.² God foretold a dramatic separation between the two boys who shared their mother's womb. He reversed human thinking to proclaim that the older would serve the younger. The course of their separate lives confirmed God's decree.

God did not base his choice of Jacob on his worthiness. Esau made wrong choices, but so did Jacob. Both had strengths; both had flaws. God's predetermined plan did not remove responsibility for their choices. What do we learn from the divergent paths of these two brothers? What made the difference in their response to God? Jacob ultimately faced his sin and yielded to God's discipline. Jacob surrendered to God's molding of his character. Esau persistently rebelled against God, choosing self-determination and self-will over surrender. **One brother turned to God; one brother turned away from God.**

What does daily life reveal about your response to God? Do you struggle against self-denial and surrender to God? Are you quick to humble yourself and yield to God? Luke 9:23 says, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." **When faced with a choice between self-reliance or surrendering to God, choose surrender.**





Jacob's Dream – Genesis 28:10-22

Jacob's Need – 28:10-11

Jacob's story connected with Moses' original audience who first read the account recorded here. The Israelite people experienced God's redemption from Egypt and understood the challenges of wandering in the wilderness. They recognized God's presence and provisions as they prepared to reenter the land He promised. God's promise of a homeland to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob gave them hope. The community of God's chosen people related to Jacob, who met the God who redeemed his past and restored him for a glorious future.

Jacob faced a difficult and dangerous journey. Almost 600 miles (about 950 kilometers) separated Beersheba from Rebekah's family in the city of Harran in Paddan Aram (Mesopotamia). Jacob would have known that his grandfather Abraham's

servant had traveled this route to find his mother as a bride for Isaac. Now, Jacob was alone in a foreign, desolate region when darkness and weariness led him to stop for the night.

Genesis 25:27 tells us Jacob loved the comforts of home. This man who enjoyed the familiarity of his people and surroundings, took a stone he found and, "put it under his head and lay down to sleep." With a stone for a pillow, he laid down to sleep under the vast expanse of the starry night. Did he feel small, weak, needy and vulnerable? He knew God had promised great things for him – a future nation and impactful life. God led Jacob to this exact place with complete knowledge of everything going on within him. **Though Jacob was far from his people, he was near to his God.** God met him at the point of his need. God often takes us to places where our only option is to depend on Him. When you come to the end of yourself, you stand ready to see God work.



Jacob's Covenant – 28:12-15

God does many things to draw people to Himself. He makes Himself evident in a variety of ways out of His kindness. Creation offers a wordless witness to His Person and provision. The sun rises everywhere and the rain falls on all people as a gracious provision of God.³ Here, God directly intervened to reveal Himself and show grace to undeserving Jacob. God took the initiative; Jacob was asleep! **God gave Jacob a dream that spoke deeply in both symbol and word.** Jacob saw what appeared as a physical stairway reaching from heaven to earth. God's angels were going up and down the stairway.

The term "angels of God" here refers to God's creatures. Angels are spiritual beings that influence and interact with people and creation. The Hebrew and Greek words translated "angel" can also mean "messenger."⁴



The Lord did not send a messenger, but personally delivered the covenant promises to Jacob. He communicated His certain promises of:

- Identity – “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.”
- Authority – “I will give you...” He had the power and right to confer His covenant to Jacob.
- Territory – He promised Jacob and his descendants the land on which he was lying.
- Progeny – He promised Jacob descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth, spread in every direction.
- Legacy – He promised Jacob “all peoples on earth” would be blessed through his offspring.
- Intimacy – He promised His personal presence and care. “I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go.”
- Security – He promised Jacob safe passage “back to this land.”
- Certainty – He would not leave Jacob until “I have done what I have promised you.”

God demonstrated His intimate knowledge and unconditional love for Jacob by speaking specific and timely encouragement to him. God pursued fleeing Jacob and spoke in an intensely personal way; God spoke “Jacob” to Jacob. The promises given to Abraham and Isaac became his own. As Jacob left a familiar past and moved toward an uncertain future, God offered His guiding presence and personal care. His needs were known to God. As he prepared to leave the promised land for Haran, God comforted Jacob with timely reassurance that he would return to the land God had promised. Jacob may have felt alone, but he was not alone.

God loves the whole world, but His love is extended to individuals. **God loves and reaches out to individuals in intimately personal ways.** He understands how to reach rebel hearts. Though God is exalted above us in every way, He deliberately comes near.⁵ Those who respond to His loving pursuit find in God a beautiful and safe refuge they will enjoy forever.

God's plan to bless the world moved forward by His command. The Lord chose Abraham first to receive His great promise. Abraham died, and God's promise passed to Isaac. Isaac's





story occupies only a few chapters of Genesis and provides many important lessons. God pronounced His choice of Isaac's son Jacob to carry on His promise before Isaac's twin sons were born. God confirmed His choice of Jacob by overruling Isaac's plans to bless Esau. God

Himself chose Jacob, an important Old Testament character, as the recipient of His blessings.

Through Jacob, God would continue the revelation of Himself to humanity. Jacob's story continues to the end of Genesis.

God's direct communication to Jacob prepared him for the future. **The New Testament adds insight to help us with the symbolism in Jacob's dream.** About 2,000 years later, Jesus spoke convincing proof that He was the Messiah to a skeptical potential disciple named Nathanael. In this encounter, Jesus identified Himself as the stairway from Jacob's dream. He told Nathanael he would see "the heavens opened and angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (John 1:45-51). Jacob could not understand the full meaning of his dream. We can now understand that Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, is the bridge between God and man illustrated in Jacob's dream.

Bethel in History

Bethel was originally the royal Canaanite city of Luz, about 10 miles north of Jerusalem. When Moses wrote Genesis, he identified this place with the name his audience knew – Bethel, meaning "house of God." **Abraham built an altar near Bethel when he entered Canaan.** There he "called on the name of the LORD." Likewise, Jacob encountered God there twice during his journeys. Jacob also built an altar, worshipped God and gave Bethel its name.⁶

Centuries after Jacob's journeys, Moses brought God's people to reenter the promised land. **The book of Judges records that the generations that followed sought God's counsel at times in Bethel.** Samuel, a prophet and judge, held his court of justice in Bethel.

However, 1 Kings 12 shows that after Solomon's kingdom was divided, Israel began to worship golden calves in Bethel. In time, God's prophet Hosea condemned these practices. He gave the place a new name, Beth-aven, meaning "house of wickedness, house of idols" (Hosea 4:15). God punished the people's idolatry through the king of Assyria – and then an act of redemption took place in Bethel. **Judah's faithful king Josiah cleansed Bethel of its idolatrous practices as recorded in 2 Kings.** God's people were free to fill Bethel with holy worship again. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah record that a faithful remnant from Bethel answered God's call to resettle Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple near the end of the biblical record of the history of God's people.⁷

Jacob's Response – 28:16-22

Fear of God – 28:16-17

People who rightly understand the majesty of God are not filled with pride, but humility and worship. A glimpse of God's glory reveals how small, frail and limited we are before Him.⁸ Those who know God as He truly is humbly bow before Him. Luke 18:9-14 describes the contrasting responses of two men (a Pharisee and a tax collector) who came to encounter God in the Jerusalem temple. Humility before God provides evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit.

The majestic and merciful God sought and spoke to Jacob. Jacob rightly responded with humility, reverence and awe. He "was afraid." Jacob woke up certain of God's presence, though he had not been before. Jacob expressed the reality he now embraced, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."





The memorial stone – 28:18-19

Jacob wanted to commemorate the place where God met him. He took his stone pillow, set it up as a pillar and anointed it with oil. In Scripture, oil often symbolizes the seal of the Holy Spirit on a life consecrated to God. Jacob changed the name of the place to *Bethel*, which means “house of God.” Many years later, God called Jacob to return to Bethel with his family. God again appeared to Jacob at that time, and he consecrated himself and his family to God. Bethel represents an important place in Jacob’s story.⁹

Vow to God – 28:20-22

Jacob made a vow to God in response to his encounter. Some people see Jacob’s vow to God as grasping or bargaining with God. A sort of, “If you will do this for me, then I will do this for you.” Others see a new character of dependence on God forming in Jacob. It is as though Jacob was saying, “*Since* God proves Himself faithful to me and has promised to bring me back here, one day I will return here. In gratitude, I will make this pillar a sanctuary to worship God, and I will give a tenth of all I possess to Him.” Tithing was

a voluntary and noble practice long before God gave laws through Moses.

Only God truly knows the motives within the human heart. Jacob met God and started on a path of growth. **Perhaps Jacob revealed growing dependence on God but also a remnant of self-dependence and immaturity.** Jacob’s natural human tendency was to use self-effort and performance to obtain what God had promised. His life story reveals God’s continuing discipline and Jacob’s gradual growth. Children learn to walk by taking wobbly first steps, experiencing new freedom, falling, getting up, trying again and growing stronger. We cannot accurately define the state of Jacob’s heart at this point in his journey. God knew where he was, met him there and Jacob responded. God knows exactly where you are as well. Will you believe that?

For everyone who follows Christ, spiritual growth is a process. Renewed trust in God exposes deeply embedded patterns of behavior. Even those who strive to believe God struggle with doubt.¹⁰ Those who are accustomed to self-effort struggle with full dependence on God. The path of growth involves God revealing truth about Himself and truth about lingering sin





within us. God disciplines believers for their good, and He stimulates growing faith. Maturity does not develop instantly, but over time.

Jacob encountered God's glory and found hope. His attempt to grab God's covenant promises through bargains and deceit brought unintended and painful consequences. Yet God came down at Bethel to assure Jacob of His presence and

promises. God freely forgives and gives purpose to those who repent and believe. God is just, gracious, merciful and good. Jacob did not find "the house of God" by his own effort, will or desires. God pursued fleeing Jacob where he was, laying on the ground, alone in the night with his head on a stone. Jacob's reality is our hope today. **God draws near and shows grace to undeserving sinners.**

The Doctrine of Grace

Jacob did not earn or deserve God's tender care. His deceitful pursuit of God's promise only revealed his unworthiness to receive it. All of us, not just Jacob, stand before God flawed and needy. **This encounter exalts God's character, not Jacob's.** God actively sought Jacob. People like to believe they are seeking God, though imperfectly. In reality, we are not running toward God but away from Him.

The depth of our sinfulness and rebellion against God exposes a beautiful quality within God's perfection. God is full of grace. This means He freely gives people what they do not deserve, not because they are good, but because *He* is good. God is a giver. He delights to give good and perfect gifts to His children.¹¹ **Eternal salvation from sin is only possible because of God's grace.** Sinners are justified "by grace" through faith alone.¹² In Christ, God gives the believer what cannot be earned by human effort. If anyone could offer God anything to earn salvation, grace would not be required. In mercy, God withholds the just punishment we deserve; in grace, God gives us what we do not deserve. He credits the perfect righteousness of His Son to all who believe in Him.

God's grace provides hope for needy souls. God's grace is costly, not cheap. Jesus Christ paid a high price so God could freely offer grace to sinners.¹³ God offers forgiveness from sin and eternity in the presence of God as a gift we do not deserve. **God can freely give believers grace because Jesus paid the price of grace.**

Most people do not realize how much they need God's grace. Human pride and arrogance make people believe God owes them something. Without God's grace, you stand before God with only inadequate human contributions that will never meet His righteous standards. If God were not gracious, you would be left with no refuge from His deserved wrath. To refuse God's grace means that your sin will face His righteous judgment without hope of rescue. To ignore God's grace is to refuse a costly gift you desperately need.

Though indwelling sin makes you a taker, your God is a giver. God is gracious. He gives strength to the weary. He gives power to the weak. He gives hope to the hopeless. He gives light in the darkness. He gives grace to the undeserving. **To understand and believe that God is gracious provides security you could not otherwise know.** What God gives, not what you earn, puts your feet on solid ground. He will not take away what His grace gives. When you sin, and you will regularly, you can know that God extends grace and forgiveness through Christ. You can approach God's holy throne boldly because God delights to extend grace.¹⁴ God's grace is the source of true peace. How has God been gracious to you? Praise to the God of all grace!





Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Isaac first resisted, then surrendered to God's will. **He recognized God could not be manipulated to serve his cause and yielded to God's higher ways.** Isaac sent Jacob to Harran with clear instructions and his blessing. Isaac was perhaps a reluctant spiritual leader. He faced the battle between self-will and God's will but conformed to God's overruling power.

Esau displayed a life that elevated earthly and material concerns over pleasing God. At every turn, Esau not only rejected opportunities for grace and repentance, but also hardened his heart against God and His people. **Esau freely made his choice, but he was not free to choose the consequences.** God uses Esau's life in the book of Hebrews as a caution. "See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done" (Hebrews 12:16-17).

Jacob wanted the right things but sought them the wrong way. **God pursued him and called him to increasing surrender.** His path of growth incorporated hard consequences, but God continued to mold his character. Jacob did not understand everything God had in store for him, but he recognized God's awesome power and presence. He pledged his trust to God, a trust that would be tested and grown. Jacob, later renamed Israel, plays a big part in God's story of redemption for mankind.

Apply It

Jacob, the deceiver, met the Lord at Bethel, a pivotal point in his life. God could not be only the God of Abraham and Isaac. Jacob needed to personally embrace the promises and person of





God. Jacob needed to grow in his understanding of God's character and promises and learn that God could be trusted. God invests in the lives of His children. Christians can reflect on specific times in their lives when God pursued them in powerfully personal ways. **The journey of faith involves specific moments of increasing surrender and growing confidence in God.**

God meets His people in many ways – through victories, trials, His Word, other people and circumstances, just to name a few. Believers need “Bethel encounters,” specific moments of deepening awareness of God. How have you encountered God in a significant point in your life? What pivotal moments in your life has God used to draw you to Himself? How have you moved forward in worship and faith?

Jacob responded to God's revelation and promises with a deliberate vow of surrender. His personal experience with God led him to action. He set up a physical memorial and voluntarily offered God a tenth of his possessions. Jacob experienced God's grace and received blessings he did not deserve. His desire was to give back to God. **True faith in God produces outward expressions of inward transformation.** Believers express gratitude and worship to God by giving voluntarily, not just their money but their lives. Giving to God's work and to others does not earn His favor or pay Him

back, both of which are impossible. Giving back reflects God's gracious, giving nature reproduced in a believer's heart. God does not need anything you offer Him – He lacks nothing. A deep relationship with God creates a desire for others to experience the joy and peace you have received. What has God given you, just because He loves you? What response expresses your worship of the gracious God who has given much?

God pursues sinners. God sought Adam and Eve when they were hiding in the garden. God pursued fleeing Jacob when his comfortable world crumbled because of sin. God sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, who left the glories of heaven to take on human flesh and die a death He did not deserve to redeem sinners. God seeks those who come to faith in Christ. He awakens dead hearts to hear and understand the gospel and respond in faith. **Salvation and ongoing spiritual growth depend on God's grace, His generous outpouring of love on the undeserving.** God actively stimulates growth in Christians by speaking into their lives directly through His Word and in many other ways. Do you recognize God's active pursuit of you? How have you experienced God's intentional, intimate investment in you? How does God's amazing grace lead you to worship?

Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1: Abrahamic covenant: Genesis 12; 13:14-16; 26:3-4 | 5: The nearness of God: Psalms 34:18; 73:28; 119:151; 145:18; Philippians 4:5; James 4:8 | 10: Belief and unbelief: Mark 9:24 |
| 2: God's prophecy regarding Jacob and Esau: Genesis 25:23 | 6: Bethel: Genesis 12:8; 13:4; Hosea 12:4-5 | 11: God's good gifts: Matthew 7:11; James 1:17 |
| 3: God's universal witness: Matthew 5:45; Romans 1:19-20 | 7: Resettling at Bethel: Ezra 2:28; Nehemiah 7:32 | 12: God's grace in salvation: Ephesians 2:8-9 |
| 4: Angelic messengers: Luke 1:11-19, 26-38; 2:8-20; Hebrews 1:14; Revelation 1:1 | 8: Humility before God: Exodus 10:3; 2 Kings 22:18-20; Isaiah 6:1-5; Jeremiah 1:4-10; Daniel 10:12; Romans 12:3; James 4:10 | 13: Cost of grace: Hebrews 12:2; 13:12; 1 Peter 2:24 |
| | 9: Jacob and Bethel: Genesis 35:1-3, 9-15 | 14: Confidence in God's grace: Hebrews 4:16 |

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WEEK THREE

JACOB: THE DECEIVER REAPS DECEPTION

GENESIS 29



Scripture Memory Verse

When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me?
I served you for Rachel, didn’t I? Why have you deceived me?”

Genesis 29:25



Day 1

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. (How has He provided, answered, comforted, reconciled, guided, etc.?)

2. What truths from the week's verses, lecture, notes or discussion most clearly apply to your life?

Day 2 – Genesis 29:1-14

Jacob met Laban's daughter Rachel at the well near Harran.

3. What similarities or differences do you see between Jacob's quest for a suitable wife and Abraham's servant's search for Isaac's wife? (See Genesis 24:10-32.)

4. Define the word "providence" and explain where you see God's providence in these verses.

5. How have you experienced God's overruling provision, sustenance or guidance in your life this year?

Day 3 – Genesis 29:15-20

Jacob agreed to work seven years for the right to marry Rachel.

6. What happened during Jacob's first month in Harran? What do these events reveal about Laban?





7. a. How did this arrangement benefit or challenge Jacob? What is revealed about Jacob?

b. How does Jacob's approach compare to how people get what they want in today's culture?

8. a. How does God use hard life circumstances to accomplish His purposes? (See Proverbs 3:11-12; Romans 8:28; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-8.)

b. What is God revealing to you in a hard situation you are facing now?

Day 4 – Genesis 29:21-30

Laban deceived Jacob by disguising Leah as Rachel on the wedding night.

9. What possible motivations did Laban have for the deception he chose? What reason did he give?

10. Describe the multiplied hurt imposed by Laban's deception.

11. In what ways did Laban's deceit cause Jacob to reap what he had sown? (See Genesis 27 and Galatians 6:7-8.)





12. How do you explain the fact that even with God's forgiveness, sin has consequences?

13. How has God disciplined and developed you through the consequences of your sin?

Day 5 – Genesis 29:31-35

The Lord enabled Leah to bear four sons.

14. Based on these verses, what did Leah long for?

15. God showed Leah kindness. How has God shown you kindness in the midst of difficult circumstances?

16. How could you explain Leah's progression from human disappointment to praise for God, as evidenced by the names of her sons?

17. From these verses, what truth about God means the most to you right now?

Day 6 – Genesis 29

18. What lessons in this passage provide hope or help in your current life situation? What questions do you have for God about His discipline of you?





Genesis 29

Focus Verse

“When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, ‘What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn’t I? Why have you deceived me?’” – Genesis 29:25

- Jacob’s Arrival in Harran – Genesis 29:1-14
- Jacob’s Betrayal by Laban – Genesis 29:15-30
- Jacob’s Sons by Leah – Genesis 29:31-35

Engage

Have you ever had to learn a lesson “the hard way”? Are you surprised when something that should be easy turns out to be difficult? Learning to tie our shoes, solve algebra problems, navigate relationships and many things that matter often bring unanticipated challenges. Sometimes when we fail to learn things “the easy way,” the lessons come harder. Sometimes our choices cause unintended consequences. Sometimes others make our lives harder than necessary. Sometimes God allows suffering that exposes our weakness and draws us to Himself. We prefer for things to go our way and life to come easy. We usually recoil when obstacles stop up or slow our path. **Lasting life lessons and character development often involve hardship.**

Jacob resumed his travel to Paddan Aram to find a wife from his mother’s family. He set out with new awareness of God’s promises and presence. However, Jacob had a few lessons he needed to learn “the hard way.” God loved Jacob too much to leave him where he was. God allowed the “deceiver” to be deceived, tricked and delayed. God molded Jacob’s character through years of mistreatment and disappointment. God values character development more than quick and painless solutions. Your suffering will not be wasted when you recognize God’s deeper work through it. God will not spare His child necessary pain when that pain provides the greatest opportunity to grow. **God’s love, presence and power can bring purpose to our pain.**





Jacob's Arrival in Harran – Genesis 29:1-14

Jacob's Stop at the Well – 29:1-3

Jacob left Bethel to travel about 500 miles (895 km) to Paddan Aram as the heir of God's covenant. He went in faith toward his grandfather Bethuel's house to find a woman to marry among his uncle Laban's daughters. Paddan Aram was "the land of the eastern peoples," a reference related to the Euphrates River and the people living in Mesopotamia.

Jacob's journey returned him to the land his grandparents left behind more than a century earlier. The following facts recount the history of Jacob's family in this area:

- Jacob's grandparents Abraham and Sarah left this area when called by God.
- They had lived in Harran with Abraham's father, Terah, and Abraham's nephew Lot.
- Abraham's brother Nahor; Nahor's wife, Milkah; and their son Bethuel stayed in this land.
- Abraham sent his servant to Harran, and he found Bethuel's daughter, Rebekah, as a wife for Isaac.
- Rebekah married Isaac and bore Jacob and Esau.

Jacob arrived and approached a well surrounded by three flocks and some shepherds. Perhaps Abraham's servant met Rebekah at this same well. A large stone covered the opening of the well. Several people were required to lift the stone, preventing theft of water by single individuals.

Jacob Meets Rachel and Other Shepherds – 29:4-12

Jacob started a conversation and signaled his peaceful intentions by greeting the shepherds as "my brothers." Jacob quickly discovered they were from Harran and knew his uncle Laban. Jacob honored the family by connecting Laban to Nahor, Laban's grandfather and Abraham's brother. **In God's providence, Laban's daughter, the shepherd Rachel, approached the well with her family's flock.**

Jacob asked the shepherds why they were not watering their sheep and taking them back to pasture. "We can't" was the reason offered for loitering at the well. Either removing the stone required teamwork or tradition required they wait until all the shepherds arrived before removing the stone. **Assessing the situation and likely**





aware of Rachel's presence, Jacob sprang to action. He single-handedly removed the stone and watered his uncle's sheep for Rachel. Was she impressed?

The actions of Jacob here and those of his mother in Genesis 24 present an interesting comparison. When Abraham's servant arrived in Harran, he prayed for a confirming sign at the well. He prayed for the woman providentially chosen as Isaac's bride to respond to his request for a drink with an offer to water his camels also. The servant watched as Rebekah quickly carried out this enormous task. Now, Jacob, her son, shows a similar compassionate and helpful nature. **Jacob witnessed Rachel's need and acted quickly to water her flock.**

Jacob's strength to remove the covering and ability to tend the flock reflected his intense emotion and affection. Overcome, Jacob introduced himself and kissed Rachel. In the same way that Rebekah had responded to the servant, Rachel also ran home with the great news.

Jacob Meets Laban and Family – 29:13-14

Years before, Laban had gone out to a well to meet Abraham's servant. He now went to meet Jacob. Both times, Laban warmly welcomed the men as his own family.¹ For the second time, Laban listened to his guest's story. Laban had heard Abraham's servant report God's promises and provisions for his journey.² Now he heard "all these things" from Jacob.



Jacob's Betrayal by Laban – Genesis 29:15-30

Laban's Bargains and Jacob's Love – 29:15-20

Jacob's mother, Rebekah, sent him to Harran under instructions. She would notify him “when your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him.”³ More than 20 years would pass before Jacob would return. And then he would return by direction from the Lord, not his mother.

Jacob did not rest as a guest under Laban's hospitality but worked around the homestead or in the fields. Jacob had been raised in a wealthy household as his mother's favored son. Scripture reports he preferred to remain among the tents instead of in the country hunting game like his brother.⁴ But Jacob was not weak, lazy or lacking in ambition. He displayed his character in Harran by his choice to work hard at tasks usually done by servants.





After a month, Laban told Jacob he should not work as a servant for him for nothing. Laban's approach makes him seem generous, though the rest of the story reveals his shrewdness. Jacob had worked hard for a month without pay. Now, Laban wanted to bargain for Jacob's continued labor. Laban surely would have noticed Jacob's affection for Rachel. Laban presented his purpose as sincere. Jacob had no money as his swift departure from Beersheba did not allow him to bring a dowry for his bride's family as Abraham's servant had previously. He obviously wanted to marry Rachel, the woman he loved. Instead of treasures, Jacob offered his loyalty to Laban. Jacob would work seven years in return for Rachel.

The record of Jacob's request to marry Rachel includes a rather abrupt mention of Laban's older daughter, Leah. The passage contains a physical comparison of the two sisters. "Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful." The meaning of "weak eyes" is debated and could refer to color, reflection of her attitude or ability to see, among other things. Rachel's aunt Rebekah (Jacob's mother) was so beautiful that Isaac had once lied about their marriage to protect himself.⁵ Therefore, it is inferred that Rachel bore similarities to Jacob's mother unlike Leah, the older sister.

This outright comparison based on superficial physical qualities bothers some people. Ancient culture prioritized a woman's marriage. This description may explain why Leah, the older sister, was not already married. There is no record of the women's words, characters or other qualities at this point. Perhaps this mention reflects more about Laban's questionable character than anything else. **Laban viewed his daughters as objects to be bargained over, exchanged and controlled.** Perhaps Laban thought once he gave Rachel to Jacob in this bargain that other suitors would take an interest in Leah. But at the end of the seven years, Leah was still unwed.

Laban's manipulation of circumstances to his own advantage also impacted Jacob. **Laban**

took advantage of Jacob's desires. The dowry equivalent of Jacob's wages for seven years was far beyond the ordinary. Laban would reap the reward of Jacob's labor at no expense to himself. What Jacob offered in honor, Laban seized as a good bargain.

The seven years of labor "seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her." Jacob clearly loved Rachel deeply, likely from the moment he saw her at the well. His love for her was a patient love, demonstrated over a long period of hard service. Though complicated, Jacob and Rachel have a great love story. Love that honors God and others is selfless and sacrificial. **Though we cannot fully know all that Jacob and Rachel felt and experienced, Jacob's willingness to work and wait for her is admirable.**

Laban's Deceit With His Daughters – 29:21-30

Laban was in no hurry to lose his worker or his daughter. Once married, Jacob could return to Canaan (and take Rachel with him) at any time his mother sent word. Laban's bargain ensured Jacob would stay for at least seven years. Jacob thought the years went quickly, but he kept a careful record of his service. He had to urge Laban to keep his word saying, "Give me my wife." Jacob did not want to wait another day to marry and make love to Rachel. Laban should have fulfilled their agreement, but he had other plans.

The original audience understood these verses in the context of Eastern wedding customs. Laban prepared a feast attended by many friends and neighbors. The heavily veiled bride remained separated from her husband until after the feasting. **Late in the evening, Laban "took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob."**

The morning light revealed the true identity of the disguised Leah. Jacob, the deceiver, had been deceived! The comparison of Laban's sin to Jacob's sin cannot be avoided. Jacob, at his mother's





doing, disguised himself as his brother to deceive his father. Now, Leah, at her father's doing, disguised herself as her sister to deceive Jacob. God was molding Jacob, as he learned lessons "the hard way."⁶

The pain inflicted on Leah must be acknowledged. **Leah must have suffered greatly from humiliation and rejection, that morning and later.** Her father, who should have protected her, subjected her to deep hurt and a hard life. Laban brought terrible conflict into his family. The comfort here is to know that God saw Leah and her pain. God was kind to her, even when the people closest to her were not.

Jacob placed the fault on Laban, where it belonged. Laban offered no apology but justified his actions as "our custom here." Often those who impose pain on others fail to take responsibility and instead defend their behavior. **Laban wanted both his daughters married and schemed to accomplish his will at the expense of all involved.** He dishonored Jacob, Leah and Rachel.

Laban knew Jacob would agree to any terms to have Rachel as his wife. The customary wedding celebration included the bridal week following the wedding. Laban bargained for Jacob to finish Leah's bridal week, then receive Rachel in exchange for another seven years of work. Jacob, Leah and Rachel had to pretend all was well while the celebrations continued. The pain of the humiliation, manipulation and deception continued to multiply.

Scripture remains silent about the thoughts, words and reactions of Leah and Rachel. **Laban gravely mistreated both daughters.** How did they respond when Laban took Leah to Jacob on the wedding night and kept Rachel away? How did they treat one another during the bridal week? Certainly, they both remained under their father's control. After the week, Jacob was given Rachel. How painful to read the words, "his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah." Patiently and faithfully, despite the injustice, Jacob served Laban seven more years without wages.



Jacob's Sons by Leah – Genesis 29:31-35

The passage clearly states Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. He did not, however, neglect Leah's welfare. **God showed compassion toward Leah's undeserved suffering.** God enabled her to conceive a son when her daily life as a daughter and wife revealed she was unloved. God saw Leah and took up her cause when others did not.

In this time and culture, childbearing represented God's favor. The husband had to provide his wife the opportunity to bear children and claim her position, protection, security and social acceptance. Jacob upheld this aspect of the marital covenant. God promised descendants to bless the world through the Abrahamic blessing. **Leah received a great honor among women in bearing descendants for this family.** These descendants would lead to the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. God orchestrated the timing and order of these births.

In God's providence and plans, He comforted the lonely Leah by giving her Jacob's first four sons.⁷ Leah's pregnancies prove Jacob fulfilled his responsibility as her husband in this difficult situation. Leah's developing faith in God and her longing for the personal love of her husband, Jacob, are seen in the names she gave these four sons and her own response at each birth.

- **Reuben** means "see, a son." – "It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."
- **Simeon** means "one who hears." – "Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too."
- **Levi** means "attached." – "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons."
- **Judah** means "praise." – "This time I will praise the LORD."

Leah did not waste her suffering. She matured in faith as she bore sons to Jacob. The unloved Leah, who longed for Jacob's love, found love from and for the Lord.⁸ Can the Lord's love be enough? Leah may not have found love packaged the way this world applauds. Instead, she learned to surrender what she lacked and gain what this world could not give. **Leah learned to praise the Lord, not for her pain, but through her pain.** God gave Leah everlasting riches. Leah's third-born, Levi, was appointed by God to form the line of priests called Levites. They blessed Israel until Christ came.⁹ Best of all, Leah's fourth son, Judah, was the great ancestor of the Jews, including King David and Jesus, the promised Messiah.

This chapter in Jacob's story reveals a hard-hearted father-in-law, but more importantly, a faithful God. He had future plans for Jacob and orchestrated his life so he would grow. Jacob experienced firsthand the deception and scheming he had thoughtlessly imposed on others. God did not withhold hard things that promoted good things within Jacob. Instead of grabbing what he wanted, Jacob was forced into hard, long labor to obtain what had been promised to him. We can trust God's good purposes, even when we do not understand what He is doing. We can trust God when life is harder than we expected. **God's love, presence and power can bring purpose to our pain.**





The Doctrine of Suffering

This passage throbs with pain and suffering. Laban's self-serving plot imposed lifelong anguish on the people he should have celebrated and protected. Wounds inflicted by those who should love us bring intense pain. **Life in this fallen world includes human suffering, in many forms.** Spiritual, physical, mental and emotional pain entered the world through the fall of humanity with Adam and Eve. Though all suffering is the indirect result of sin, not all suffering is the direct result of personal sin.¹⁰

There are many sources of suffering and many reasons God allows suffering.¹¹ Our own sin and the sins of others bring painful consequences, even God's judgment. Life in a broken world brings natural disasters, sickness, aging bodies, injustice and difficult relationships. Christians are persecuted for their faith. Some suffering is God's loving discipline, designed to grow faith. But sometimes, the reasons for suffering remains entirely mysterious, known only to God.¹² Therefore, we should be cautious about explaining the cause of our own suffering or the suffering of others.

The universal presence and personal experience of suffering raises challenging questions. Some hard questions must be trusted to God, who understands what we cannot. No suffering takes place outside God's sovereign rule (Genesis 18:25; Job 1:8-12; 2:3-6; Isaiah 45:7). God can use suffering, even suffering caused by sin, for our good and His glory.¹³ Hard times create deeper dependence on and intimacy with God. And we know that Jesus, the Suffering Servant, understands our suffering.¹⁴

The suffering God allows never diminishes His love for us. God so loved the world, that He poured out suffering on His Son on the cross (Isaiah 53:4-5; John 3:16).

Without a focus on God, pain seems pointless. No one likes to suffer. Our natural response to suffering is to seek relief as quickly as possible. Attempts to ignore or numb pain will not provide lasting relief or healing. The cycle of pain repeats itself as hurting people hurt others. Without hope that God will one day overcome suffering, hopelessness and bitterness take root.

But for the Christian, suffering is not just something to be endured ... it is an opportunity to seek God more passionately and know Him more deeply. Faith grows when we lean into God and trust Him for needed strength when times are hard. Suffering can increase our spiritual sensitivity and tenderize our hearts toward God. Suffering removes the pretense that we have things figured out or that we can control what we cannot. Suffering strips away dependence on people or things that cannot satisfy our deepest longings. Suffering in this world makes us yearn for eternity, where there will be no more pain and where sin's damage will be stopped. But even for Christians, held secure by the promises of God for today and eternity, suffering is hard. We must not minimize the anguish of human suffering, even as we embrace God's higher ways.

Jesus suffered to overcome suffering. What an amazing truth! God did not sit on a throne in heaven and watch people suffer. He took action. He sent His Son. His Son suffered like no human has ever suffered. Sin, death, pain and suffering will one day stop when Jesus says so. When we believe Jesus Christ bore our sorrows because He loved us, we do not endure this world's inevitable pain without hope. Suffering still hurts, but we can endure hardship and even death with eternal hope.





Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Jacob learned important lessons “the hard way” as God’s discipline developed his character.

God values people and has unique plans for their lives. God develops the faith of His children in ways similar to parents helping their children mature. Trials in life test our faith and require choices. God holds us responsible for our actions and the consequences that follow. God directs circumstances to accomplish His will and bring about good, ultimately. God always acts for good. God never deserves blame for people’s evil actions. He always deserves our praise.

God demonstrates His grace and accomplishes His purposes despite human failures.

Jacob started out as a young man eager for God’s blessings. However, he was unprepared to wait patiently on God to receive them. God always finishes what He starts. He begins His good work of salvation by grace through faith. He never rejects His children because of their negligence, ignorance or dishonor. On the contrary, He promises to continue His good work.¹⁵ God disciplines His own using circumstances or other people. Through such hardships, God reveals to His children the deceits within their own hearts. God’s purpose is to lead us to confession, repentance, forgiveness, growth and dependence on Him.

Apply It

God is more committed to your spiritual growth than you are. **While we prefer shortcuts, God will invest whatever is needed, even allowing suffering to accomplish His higher purposes.** Like a surgeon who willingly inflicts pain to bring healing, God allows us to hurt for our good. Jacob’s needed character development did not happen quickly, easily or without pain. What if you viewed your current hardship as a loving





investment by your faithful God for your greater good? If you are currently in a long and tough battle, what is God doing in you? How are your spiritual sensitivities being awakened? Don't waste your suffering; look for every opportunity to grow and experience God's faithfulness.

What do you do with a "Laban" in your life? How should you respond to someone who has done you wrong and inflicted pain? What does God expect of us in dealing with a cruel or evil person? **You cannot control the behavior, responses or consequences of someone else; in every toxic relationship, you are responsible only for you.** Certainly, God may offer opportunities to speak truth and to stand for what is right. Sometimes you are left without a voice and know that speaking up would only make things worse. There are times when you must escape for your own safety or well-being. While revenge tempts us, ultimate peace comes from knowing that your pain and someone else's wrongs are known by God. Matthew 5:44 says, "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ..." There are no easy answers. God can be trusted

with what you cannot figure out. He will show you what it means to "love your enemies."

Leah's lifelong story of rejection is painful to read. She lived with a physical attribute that made her feel unaccepted. Her own father discounted her value and feelings and put her in a position that caused further hurt. Her husband was tricked into marrying her and gave her children but not love. Within her story of pain, Leah's hope in God grew. **Like desert flowers that bloom without water or a mountain tree that sinks roots in the cracks in the rock, Leah found a way to survive and even thrive.** The names she gave her sons show she acknowledged her pain but turned to her God. She found hope in God's steadfast love – the greatest love of all. You may live entrenched in a hurtful situation that escapes simple answers. Have you expressed the reality of your suffering to the God who loves you best? Can you trust God for step-by-step wisdom? Can you ask God to give you a song "in the night," a song of praise that rises from a deep and painful place in your heart? Can you find rest and hope in the steadfast love of God?

Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

- 1: **Laban's hospitality:** Genesis 24:28-31; 29:13-14
- 2: **Abraham's servant:** Genesis 24:34-50
- 3: **Esau's anger:** Genesis 27:45
- 4: **Jacob and Esau work:** Genesis 25:27
- 5: **Rebekah's beauty:** Genesis 26:6-7
- 6: **Sowing and reaping:** Galatians 6:7-9
- 7: **Blessing of children:** Psalm 113:9
- 8: **God's sustaining love:** Psalm 27:10

- 9: **Levites:** Deuteronomy 10:8-9
- 10: **Not all suffering is direct result of sin:** John 9:1-3
- 11: **Reasons for suffering and our response:** Job 1:9-12; Proverbs 3:12; Joel 2:12-14; Amos 3:6; Luke 9:38-42; Romans 1:18-32; 5:1-5; 8:17-18; Philippians 3:7-10

- 12: **Mysteries remain:** Deuteronomy 29:29; Romans 11:33-34
- 13: **Good from suffering:** Genesis 50:15-21; Romans 8:28; James 1:2-4
- 14: **Jesus understands:** Isaiah 53:4-5; Hebrews 2:18; 12:2-3
- 15: **God's good work:** Philippians 1:6

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Jacob's Journeys With the Lord

In Jacob's dream, the Lord promised to watch over Jacob in his journeys. The Lord would later bring him back to his father's household in the promised land. In response, Jacob vowed his fidelity to God. Genesis tells Jacob's story through a series of 14 locations. God faithfully provided and protected Jacob in his journey through life. In every place, God wisely led Jacob through trials and unexpected events to grow him into the faithful patriarch who fathered the 12 tribes of Israel.

Beersheba – bought the birthright and deceived his father (25:28-34; 27)

Bethel – arrived here after he fled from Esau toward Harran to find a wife; the Lord appeared to him in a dream (28:11-22)

Harran – married Leah and Rachel, fathered children and worked for Laban (29-30)

Mizpah – confronted by Laban, achieved peace and left for home (31)

Mahanaim – ministered to by angels and prepared to meet Esau (32:1-5)

Peniel – prepared to meet Esau, wrestled with God who renamed him Israel, met with Esau (32:6-33:16)

Sukkoth – stopped with family and enjoyed a place of rest (33:17)

Shechem – purchased land but moved after sons' disastrous sins (33:18-34:31)

Bethel – returned with family to place of dream to renew vow to the Lord (35:1-15)

Bethlehem – Rachel bore Benjamin, died and was buried (35:16-20)

Hebron – reunited with Isaac, later jealous sons sold Jacob's favored son Joseph (35:27-37:36)

Beersheba – stopped to call on the name of the Lord on his way to Egypt (46:1-5)

Egypt – reunited family with Joseph and lived in Goshen (46:5-47:12)

Hebron – at death, his body was returned and buried in the cave of Machpelah (50:1-13)

WEEK FOUR

JACOB: TRIALS WITH WIVES AND LABAN

GENESIS 30-31



Scripture Memory Verse

I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.

– Genesis 31:13



10. a. Why did God bless Jacob despite his many flaws and failures? (See Genesis 12:1-3; Colossians 3:22-25; 1 Peter 2:18-20; 3:9; 5:6-7.)

b. How does this give you hope?

Day 5 – Genesis 31 and Hebrews 12:3-15

God intervened as Jacob and Laban confirmed a treaty, and Laban allowed Jacob and his family to return to Canaan.

11. Why did Jacob decide to leave Harran for Canaan?

12. a. Give verses in which Jacob praised God and resolved his bitterness over unjust treatment.

b. How can you give credit where credit is due for the good things that happen to you?

13. Which of today's verses help or encourage you?

Day 6 – Genesis 30–31

14. What have you learned from Jacob's life about how God disciplines you and controls your circumstances?





Genesis 30–31

Focus Verse

“I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.” – Genesis 31:13

- Jacob’s Family – Genesis 30:1-24
- Jacob’s Flocks – Genesis 30:25-43
- Jacob’s Flight – Genesis 31

Engage

What do you do when hard things only get harder? Does a long road where every step feels uphill mean God has forgotten you? How do you process life when you face not only a season of hard circumstances, but years of trouble? **Jacob’s challenging life in Harran did not get easier.** In fact, the unfair treatment Laban imposed on him only multiplied with the years. The strife in his strange family dynamic increased.

The loving discipline of Jacob’s heavenly Father permeated his troubles. While Jacob wanted his circumstances to change, our unchanging God had a bigger plan. He molded Jacob’s character through discipline that included hardship. God does not abandon His children. Rather, He lovingly aims everything He allows toward something good. God is steadfast when life is uncertain. **God’s unchanging character secures believers in this life and for eternity.**



Jacob's Family – Genesis 30:1-24

Laban succeeded in his deceptive plot to marry off both his daughters to Jacob. He secured Jacob's servitude for 14 years in the bargain. Laban sinned against Jacob and both of his daughters when he exchanged Leah for Rachel on the wedding night. Then, Jacob insisted he also wed Rachel, the woman he loved. **The complicated relationships in this dysfunctional family only intensified.** Leah bore Jacob four sons yet despised of Jacob's favoritism toward Rachel. However, Rachel was beautiful but barren.

Rachel's Struggle – 30:1-8

Rachel's inability to conceive a child brought deep despair. Leah's multiple sons only added to her pain, proving the difficulty to conceive fell on

Rachel, not Jacob. In their culture, childbearing signified God's favor. The complicated family relationships described in this passage brought pain and insecurity to both Leah and Rachel. But the ongoing distress of Rachel's infertility should be noted.

In our world today, people are often unaware or insensitive to the challenges caused by infertility. Sometimes men and women deeply desire marriage and children, but God never brings a spouse. Watching others celebrate pregnancies, new babies and growing families can cause internal conflict as the joy of others intensifies personal pain. **We are wise to recognize that people often face hidden struggles.**





Personal pain impacts relationships, often with those closest to us. **Rachel's pain turned into anger, jealousy, bitterness and resentment.** Her first words recorded in Scripture, "Give me children, or I'll die!" reveal a demand that held Jacob responsible for life itself. Her struggle blinded her to the truth that God, not Jacob, was the giver of life. Rachel dismissed the love Jacob gave her when she chose to focus on what he could not give her – a child. Pain often clouds right thinking as emotions and heartache speak most loudly.

Jacob's response revealed the growing strain in his relationship with Rachel. He pointed her demands to "God, who has kept you from having children." He spoke with truth but lacked grace and compassion. By contrast, Genesis 25 records how Jacob's father, Isaac, and his mother, Rebekah, responded to their childbearing challenges. Isaac prayed to God on behalf of Rebekah because she had not yet conceived.¹ Rebekah was also attuned to the Lord's will through prayer as she sought God's wisdom in her pregnancy with Jacob and Esau.

Rachel impatiently suggested the cultural practice of giving her maidservant, Bilhah, to Jacob to bear a child for her. Laban had given each daughter a maid when he wed Leah then Rachel to Jacob. Jacob obviously agreed to Rachel's plan, and when Rachel ordered Jacob to sleep with Bilhah, she bore him two sons. Rachel's words and the names she gave these sons revealed her continued focus on winning the rivalry with her sister, Leah. The first son she named Dan, meaning "he has vindicated," and the second son Naphtali, meaning "my struggle." After the birth of Naphtali, Rachel said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won."

Leah's Response – 30:9-13

The conflict in this family continued to grow. Leah stopped bearing children after giving birth to four sons. Leah now answered Rachel's scheme by giving her servant Zilpah to Jacob.





Zilpah bore Jacob two sons that Leah received as “good fortune” and a source of happiness – likely referring to her struggle against her sister. These arranged, polygamous marriages produced unhealthy, complicated and painful relationships. However, God’s plans for each person prevailed despite their scheming. God remained faithful to His covenant regarding Jacob’s family and their destinies. God brought about good, even through the consequences of their sins. Human failings cannot stop God’s purposes and plans.

Strife Between the Sisters – 30:14-21

Now, superstition adds yet another strange twist to the rivalry and quest for fertility between the sisters. Mandrake plants produce an orange-yellow fruit the size of a large plum and full of soft pulp. Mandrakes were believed to promote fertility. Rachel boldly requested the fruit from Leah’s son Reuben to help her conceive

a child. Leah’s response and accusations that Rachel had stolen her husband reveal the tension and bitterness between them. Rachel did not deny the charge.

Rachel sought to gain what she wanted through more bargaining. The women made a deal. Rachel could have the fruit, but Leah would sleep with Jacob that night in a quest to conceive again. They reduced Jacob to an object they bargained over. Both sisters demanded their rights and sought superiority and control. Leah informed her husband, Jacob, she had hired him, “so he slept with her that night.” **Leah conceived and ultimately bore two more sons, Issachar and Zebulun, and a daughter, Dinah.**

God Answers Rachel’s Prayer – 30:22-24

God listens to our prayers, even though we may not pray with the purest of motives. Verse 22 turns the focus abruptly from desperate human bargaining to God’s compassion and power. **“Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and enabled her to conceive.”** Rachel’s ultimate ability to conceive had nothing to do with mandrakes but everything to do with the omnipotence of God, the source of life. Despite Rachel’s wrong attempts to gain what only God could give, she prayed. Perhaps God used her suffering to humble her and soften her heart.

Rachel bore a son she named Joseph. She rejoiced because “God has taken away my disgrace.” This name, meaning “may he add,” reflected both Rachel’s gratitude and her desire for another child. She said, “May the LORD add to me another son.” Joseph would become one of the most beautiful characters in the Bible. God did indeed allow Rachel to bear another son, though she died in childbirth.²

Jacob’s 12 Sons

The descendants of Jacob’s 12 sons became the 12 tribes of Israel. Before his death, Jacob gave the patriarchal blessing to his sons.³ Each name held intentional meaning and reminded Abraham’s descendants of the future of each respective tribe. Later, Moses’ last patriarchal blessing offered even greater clarity regarding the future historical development of each tribe.⁴

Old Testament history revolves around the 12 tribes of Jacob-Israel. The names of Jacob’s sons are important to remember. Each son is listed in birth order by his mother. (See Genesis 35:23-26.)

Leah’s sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun

Rachel’s sons: Joseph and Benjamin

Bilhah’s sons: Dan and Naphtali

Zilpah’s sons: Gad and Asher





The Doctrine of Eternal Security

God chose to bring His own Son into the world through a deeply flawed family. **The troubling choices made by Jacob, Leah and Rachel are easy to recognize but hard to reconcile in the family God chose as His own.** How could God choose and use a family so filled with self-serving people and torn by conflict? But if we are honest, we relate. We do not offer God anything better. We also come from an imperfect family and contribute to the chaos.

God's perfect standard and the far-from-perfect reality of daily life raise real questions worth pondering. Will God abandon me when I do not do what is right? Even if I start well, what if I do not end well? Am I strong enough or good enough to continue to earn God's favor? Can I disappoint God so badly He will give up on me? **When I am honest, I admit that if my standing with God depends on me, I am in big trouble.**

For those who have come in faith to Christ for salvation, there is good news! **No human opposition or personal failure can undo what God has declared "done."** I do not possess enough human goodness or strength to earn my salvation or keep it secure. Christ does that for me. His perfect righteousness is transferred to me, not based on anything I have done or will do. The security in salvation rests in the finished work of Christ (John 10:27-30; Romans 8:31-39; Ephesians 1:13-14). As a believer, I will continue to sin, but the Holy Spirit is always working in my life through loving discipline and correction (Proverbs 3:11-12; Hebrews 12:4-12). Mere profession or mental agreement with the gospel does not give true salvation. True believers continue to follow Christ, though not perfectly. Philippians 1:6 says, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Failing to trust that Christ holds salvation secure for eternity makes stability in daily life and peace for the future impossible. At the end of each day, how could anyone know if they have retained God's favor? Can unintentional failings or even deliberate or unconfessed sin overpower the promises of Almighty God? If the answer is "yes," the best I can do is hope that when I draw my last breath, somehow God is "pleased enough" with me to allow me into His eternal presence. Security based on my own goodness and efforts does not feel very secure.

God's Word promises the believer hope and security that should make the heart sing. In Christ, I am secure eternally, and that will not change. Neither my best day nor my worst day alters my settled position in Christ. Who I am before God does not depend on me. Rather than attempting to win what cannot be earned, I can serve and love God out of gratitude and worship. I humbly rest in the sufficient righteousness of Christ. God's relentless pursuit and sanctifying work in my life gives evidence that He is committed to me. I am safe, even when I fail. "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-40).





Jacob's Flocks – Genesis 30:25-43

Jacob Wants to Go Home – 30:25-28

Jacob knew his service commitment to Laban was complete and decided it was time to return to his people and country. His promised inheritance and blessings awaited him there.⁵ **Jacob called on Laban to recognize the fulfilled contract and allow him to depart with his wives and children.**

Laban had other ideas; he wanted Jacob to stay. **Laban acknowledged he had prospered because of God's blessing on Jacob.** His own flocks, herds and wealth greatly increased under Jacob's conscientious work as a shepherd. Laban was right – he spoke the truth. But what you do with what you know matters. Laban could have expressed humble gratitude to God and Jacob. Instead, Laban tried to exploit the truth to his own advantage. He desired Jacob's ongoing labor and God's continued blessing to advance his cause. Laban reduced relationships to transactions. He asked Jacob to name his price to strike a deal.

Jacob's Offer and Laban's Deceit – 30:29-36

Laban was no stranger to bargaining with Jacob. When setting terms for marrying his daughters, Laban had the advantage. Jacob's approach was courteous but bolder. He did not want to return to Canaan penniless. **After years of working for Laban, Jacob recognized his shrewdness and knew he had to protect himself.**

Jacob reminded Laban his great increase in wealth came through the Lord's blessing and his labor. While Laban had become rich, Jacob still could not provide for his growing family. Jacob proposed a solution. Laban's sheep were mostly pure white, and goats were usually pure black. **Jacob would remove the speckled, spotted and brown sheep and spotted and speckled goats as his very reasonable wage.** As the herds grew,

Laban's flocks could be easily distinguished from Jacob's, upholding the integrity of the deal.

That day, Laban hastily removed the multi-colored animals himself. **In another act of flagrant deceit and manipulation for his own advantage, Laban left Jacob with nothing to claim as his own.** Laban's sons took the animals the distance of three days travel away from Jacob. Laban figured Jacob would be unable to produce speckled or spotted animals from his solid-colored herds and would be forced to stay. However, God's plans could not be thwarted by Laban's unfair and unscrupulous scheme.⁶

Jacob's Counterstrategy – 30:37-43

Jacob drew on his experience breeding and raising livestock for both his father and Laban.

While he likely did not understand the genetics of dominant and recessive genes, he had a plan. Was Jacob's plan superstitious? Was it given to him by God? Was it a desire for revenge? The passage is not clear and the question is much debated. Regardless of how we judge Jacob's motives, God blessed his efforts.

Jacob used three methods to gain the advantage.

- He peeled and placed special branches in the water where the flocks would likely mate (30:37-39).
- He separated the newly born flock so they would tend to bear spotted young (30:40).
- He built a herd for himself of the strongest animals (30:41-43; 31:7-12).

Jacob's plan made him "exceedingly prosperous." He acquired flocks, servants, camels and donkeys. While Jacob's methods cannot be fully understood, God's supernatural blessing is obvious.





Jacob's Flight – Genesis 31

The Conference – 31:1-16

Jacob still intended to return home to Canaan, and the situation in Harran became even more stressful. Laban's sons circulated reports that Jacob had stolen their father's wealth, and Laban's attitude toward him changed. God did not leave Jacob confused about his next step. **The Lord Himself commanded Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."**

Jacob summoned his wives to explain how God had blessed him despite Laban's deceit. He shared God's command to leave. Both Rachel and Leah recognized they were now strangers in their father's home. They acknowledged Laban's unjust treatment of Jacob and doubted they had any share in his inheritance. They knew God was with Jacob. Therefore, they told Jacob to do "whatever God has told you." **Leah and Rachel journeyed about 600 miles (about 965 km) and separated permanently from their home, country and family.** In their time and culture, this was an unprecedented and life-changing decision.

The Chase – 31:17-25

Jacob carefully planned their secret departure, sending his wives, children and household goods ahead. For reasons not explained in the passage, Rachel stole Laban's "household gods" while he was busy shearing sheep. She could have taken the idols for protection on the journey or as a claim of inheritance. Genesis 35:2-4 indicates that others in Jacob's party also brought their own gods.

Jacob and his family left without saying goodbye to Laban. After three days, Laban discovered their absence. He pursued them for seven days before he caught up with them in the northern mountains of Gilead, southeast of the Lake of Galilee. However, God intervened with the self-

serving Laban. **Before he reached them, God commanded Laban not to interfere with Jacob's plans.**

The Conflict – 31:26-42

Laban confronted Jacob with a familiar question, "What have you done?"⁷ Laban's deceptive, abusive patterns of behavior continued to surface. **Laban's familiar practice of twisting truth to his advantage and forcing others to take the blame appears again.** He questioned their secret departure and declared he would have thrown them a joyful farewell party and kissed his family goodbye. Proud Laban boasted of his power to harm them but stated he had been warned by "the God of your father" not to do so. Instead, Laban accused Jacob of stealing his gods.





Jacob admitted his realistic fear that Laban would take his daughters by force. Jacob's over-confident boast in verse 32, "But if you find anyone who has your gods, that person shall not live," unwittingly endangered Rachel. Laban's search uncovered nothing. Rachel hid the gods and used the cultural considerations attached to a woman's menstrual cycle to prevent her father from searching the area where she was seated.

God guides His people in practical ways. God prepared the way for Jacob to remove his family from Laban's control and gave him boldness to confront the troubling issues. Jacob reminded Laban of his 20 years of faithful service that honored Laban's interests, despite his manipulation and abuse. **Ultimately, Laban's prosperity reflected God's faithfulness to Jacob.** God had upheld Jacob's cause by His direct rebuke of Laban,⁸ which opened a way for a peaceful departure.

The Covenant – 31:43-55

Though Laban continued to view Jacob's wealth as his own, he sought a covenant of peace. They piled up stones to symbolize God's witness of their agreement. Laban, who had misused his own daughters terribly, made Jacob swear he would not mistreat them. Jacob offered a sacrifice, and they committed to peace with one another, confirmed by sharing a meal. Then, early the next morning, Laban kissed his daughters and grandchildren, and he returned home.

God's promise to Jacob would be fulfilled, despite human opposition. The struggles within Jacob's family between his wives and with Laban did not deter God's greater purposes. God's unchanging character, not Jacob's circumstances, secured His future. God does not depend on human perfection to accomplish His perfect plan. God's children rest secure because He is immutable. Though life in this world brings many unexpected twists and turns, the purposes of God remain steadfast. **God's unchanging character secures believers in this life and for eternity.**

Jacob's Character

Jacob makes an interesting character study. **Like any of us, Jacob had human strengths and weaknesses but ultimately matured through God's refining work in his life.** Genesis 25:27 describes younger Jacob as a man who was content to stay home among the tents rather than hunting. Jacob had glaring weaknesses, particularly regarding deceit and scheming to obtain what he desired. Jacob also showed positive qualities such as persistence, hard work, ardent love and patience. He obeyed his father concerning his marriage.⁹ Jacob was obedient and courteous, but also tenacious in his pursuits. He recognized and revered God and obeyed when God gave him direct guidance.¹⁰

Jacob, who is later renamed Israel, represents a significant contribution in God's story of faith recorded in Scripture. In fact, many times the Bible refers to the "God of Jacob."¹¹ **The fact God loved and honored Jacob, despite his personal failings, brings hope to all believers.** God relentlessly pursued Jacob and designed a sequence of circumstances to break him of wrong thinking and actions and to bend him toward His higher purposes. The study of people such as Jacob serves to remind us God can use all kinds of people, even the "wrong" kind of people, because of who He is. When God uses flawed humans for His purposes, all the glory is His. Isaiah 41:8-9 says, "But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are my servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you."





Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God continued to discipline Jacob's tendency toward cunning self-effort. For 20 long years, Jacob toiled under a father-in-law who sought every opportunity to exploit him for personal gain. God faithfully chiseled Jacob's will to bring gradual, though not perfect, surrender to His will. Even as we praise the "God of Jacob," our awe is not fixed on Jacob, but on God. We study Jacob and learn God can do much with little because He is God. Jacob's biography serves only to exalt an unchanging God who changes people, inch by inch.

Jacob's oath and sacrifice in Genesis 31:53-54 sets the course of his faith and his people. The pillar named Mizpah marked the setting apart of Jacob's descendants from the family of Nahor. From now on, Abraham's descendants through Jacob are connected with the land of Canaan. In future generations, Laban's family merged with the nations around him. **Through Jacob, God established a people for His name in the land He promised to Abraham.**

Apply It

Throughout his 20 years in Paddan Aram, Jacob gradually grew to trust God more through diligent, faithful service to Laban. As Jacob worked hard under Laban, God worked deeply in Jacob. God's blessing included loving discipline through prolonged hardship. When your troubles escalate, what does God want most from you? God has more important things on His agenda than your escape from hardship. **God will lovingly lead you to growing trust and specific surrender.** Where might you be fighting God instead of yielding to Him? Where and how is God leading you to a place of fresh and deeper surrender? How are you learning the folly of your own efforts and the safety of surrender to God? God cares more about your heart than your comfort.





God will one day set right the injustice in this world. What do you do while you wait for that day? How should you respond to the proud and powerful, who, like Laban, misuse truth and abuse people for personal gain? **God promises His children strength not only to endure opposition but also to face and fight injustice in His way and time.** Jacob endured patiently but also took action to protect his family. What if standing up for what is right threatens you with personal loss? Challenging situations usually escape simple answers. Dependence on God, trust in His Word and sensitivity to His Holy Spirit provide the best course forward. Sometimes God will lead you to patiently endure and other times to boldly confront evil. God can be trusted to help you know what to say and when. If God appoints you to call out evil, are you willing? Can you trust God to know your part and find your voice when He calls you to action?

The unchanging character of God provides stability in a world in constant change. Every age and stage of life offers new joys and unfamiliar challenges. Your moods, personality, relationships, days, weeks and years remain in constant flux. Perhaps you relate to Jacob, whose life under Laban brought constantly changing deals and much uncertainty. What a comfort to know that God is the most stable part of your world! Every morning when you wake, God is exactly the same as when you went to sleep the night before. God's perfect character never changes, and He can be trusted completely no matter what your day or year holds. What changing circumstances in your life are calling you to trust the unchanging God? How will this truth about God help steady your life through not just a season of change, but also the reality of constant change in your daily life?

Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1: Isaac and Rebekah pray: Genesis 25:21-22 | 6: God helps His people: Genesis 26; 30:43; 31:1-16 | 10: Jacob's obedience: Genesis 28:16-18; 31:3, 21, 42; 32:9, 30 |
| 2: Rachel's second son, Benjamin: Genesis 35:16-18 | 7: "What have you done?": Genesis 3:13; 4:10; 12:18; 20:9; 26:10; 29:25 | 11: The God of Jacob: Exodus 3:6, 15-16; Psalms 20:1; 24:6; 46:7, 11; 75:9; Isaiah 29:23; Micah 4:2; Matthew 22:32; Acts 7:32 |
| 3: Jacob's patriarchal blessing: Genesis 49 | 8: God intervenes with Laban: Genesis 31:24 | |
| 4: Moses' prophecy regarding the 12 tribes: Deuteronomy 33 | 9: Isaac's marriage instructions: Genesis 28:1-2, 6-7 | |
| 5: Jacob's inheritance: Genesis 28:1-5, 13-15 | | |

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WEEK FIVE

JACOB: MEETS WITH GOD AND ESAU

GENESIS 32-33



Scripture Memory Verse

Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”

Genesis 32:28



Day 1

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. (How has He provided, answered, comforted, reconciled, guided, etc.?)

2. What truths from the week's verses, lecture, notes or discussion expanded your understanding of God?

Day 2 – Genesis 32:1-8

Jacob prepared to meet his brother, Esau.

3. a. What did God do to prepare Jacob to meet Esau? (See also 2 Kings 6:8-23; Psalm 34:7; Daniel 6:22; 1 Corinthians 6:2-3; Hebrews 1:14.)

b. What caused Jacob to fear meeting his brother, Esau, again? (See Genesis 25:27-34; 27:35-41; 32:6.)

4. a. Describe Jacob's strategy for preparing to meet Esau.

b. What does Jacob's response reveal about him?



5. a. In what situations might you be making decisions or responding based on fear or uncertainty?

- b. What specific truth of God can give you needed perspective in your challenge?

Day 3 – Genesis 32:9-21

Jacob prayed and sent gifts to his brother, Esau.

6. What stands out to you about Jacob's prayer?

7. After praying, what did Jacob do to prepare to meet Esau? Why would he do those things?

8. How do you see Jacob growing in faith?

9. What keeps you from leaning completely on God with absolute trust and confidence? What helps you?

Day 4 – Genesis 32:22-32

Jacob encountered God at Peniel.

10. a. Who do you think the “man” was in Genesis 32:24? Give reasons from this passage for your answer.





b. What might God have been trying to teach Jacob in this wrestling match?

11. Why was Jacob's hip wrenched out of its socket? How did he respond?

12. What "limp" keeps you dependent on God? What have you learned?

Day 5 – Genesis 33

Jacob and Esau reconciled.

13. What does the reunion of Jacob and Esau reveal about each of them?

14. a. Where did you expect Jacob to go after parting from Esau?

b. Where did he actually go? (See Genesis 31:3 and 35:1.)

15. Do you have a broken relationship in your life? How is God using that challenge to grow your faith?

Day 6 – Genesis 32–33

16. What takeaways from Jacob's interactions with God and Esau can you apply to your present circumstances?





Genesis 32–33

Focus Verse

“Then the man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.’” – Genesis 32:28

- From Panic to Prayer – Genesis 32:1-21
- From Struggle to Surrender – Genesis 32:22-32
- From Fear to Fellowship – Genesis 33

Engage

Why do mere mortals fight against Almighty God? God’s purposes stand, despite human or demonic opposition. God is stronger than anything else. God is wiser than anyone else. And yet fallen humanity foolishly desires the impossible – to overpower omnipotent God. Something within every man, woman and child desires unhindered “freedom” and the delusion of control. **Though not logical or wise, we struggle to surrender to our Creator, the One who knows and loves us best.** We may sing “I Surrender All,” but giving God His rightful place is hard in real life.

Jacob’s life offers a living picture of this real human struggle. He knew God’s love and promises but was born a fighter. For some reason, he learned most lessons the hard way. Like Jacob, we surrender imperfectly, but God pursues us persistently. God continued to force Jacob to face his fears, his flaws and his future. **God reveals His love by His consistent commitment to our growth in faith and godly character.** If conforming our character to His requires a battle, God will fight against us, with us and for us, for our greater good. God does what it takes to soften our hard hearts. He helps us bow our stiff necks and bend our stubborn knees.



From Panic to Prayer – Genesis 32:1-21

Jacob's Preparations – 32:1-8

Genesis 32 and Jacob's return to Canaan mark a new chapter in his life story. God molded Jacob's character through 20 long years under his father-in-law, Laban, a hard master. Chapter 31 ends with a peace treaty between Laban and Jacob. After a warning from God, Laban allowed Jacob and his family to depart in peace. Jacob stood ready to enter Canaan, the land God had promised to him and to his descendants forever.¹ God's future for Jacob lay before him.

The living God encountered Jacob at Bethel 20 years earlier. At that time, Jacob saw a stairway reaching to heaven with angels moving up and down the stairs (28:12-13). **Now, Jacob again saw God's angels with him at Mahanaim, which literally means "two camps."** Later in Israel's history, this place appears again, including a time King David found refuge at Mahanaim when he was in danger.²

Jacob sought peace with Esau and sent messengers ahead of him to Esau in Seir in Edom. Twenty years earlier, Jacob fled from his homeland because Esau threatened to kill him when he deceptively gained Isaac's blessing.³ Now, Jacob humbly addressed Esau as "my lord" and referred to himself as "your servant Jacob." He

mentioned his own wealth and family to indicate he no longer sought to steal from Esau but merely sought his favor.

Jacob's messengers returned with terrifying news. **Esau approached with 400 men, a powerful threat.** No one knew better than Jacob the deep root of Esau's grudge against him. Fear and panic gripped Jacob. Was his brother determined to take revenge? How could his wives and children escape? Jacob devised a plan and divided his family and animals into two groups, preparing for the worst. He thought that if Esau destroyed one group, the others might escape. Did Jacob forget the company of God's angels camping with them?

Jacob's Prayer – 32:9-12

Moments of great fear and distress may cause panic but also can bring clarity about what matters most. First, Jacob took practical steps to protect his family. Then, as Jacob's worldly possessions disappeared into the distance, he called on God in prayer. **God often uses circumstances that exhaust human solutions to call His people to Himself.** God stands ready to hear His children pray, no matter the situation. The Almighty God of the universe is not an idea or an impersonal force, but a person. God has a mind, will and personality. God exists





as one being in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who operate in perfect unity. God made people in His image with a mind, will and the ability to communicate with Him and one another.

Jacob knew God would hear and answer his prayer. **Jacob recounted God’s promises and faithfulness, and he honestly confessed his fear and desperate need.** Believers do not pray to inform God of what He does not know or plead for mercy He is reluctant to give. In prayer, needy people humbly acknowledge God’s greatness and ask Him for what they lack in their own strength. What a joy to know that when we cry out to God, He hears and acts on our behalf. Heartfelt prayer

allows believers to communicate with God and align their hearts and will to His. Jacob’s prayer provides an excellent example for us.

Jacob's Gift – 32:13-21

Jacob took an active step to repair and restore his relationship with Esau.⁴ After Jacob prayed, he sprang into action and prepared to meet his brother by sending ahead an honorable gift – about 580 animals. His gift expressed goodwill and a heartfelt desire for reconciliation. The passage does not indicate whether Jacob’s next step was his own idea or reflected God’s guidance. Whatever motivated him, God continued to press hard on Jacob, for his own good.

Jacob’s Example of Prayer

The seven points in Jacob’s first recorded prayer can help us today as we pray.

- **Praise God.** Jacob directly addressed God in prayer (32:9a). Acknowledge your relationship with God and say what is true about Him.⁵
- **Remember God’s Word.** Jacob intentionally prayed God’s command and promise back to Him (Genesis 32:9b with 31:3,13). Repeat the promises in God’s Word, which are truer than your fear or doubts.⁶
- **Confess your sin and unworthiness.** Jacob recognized he had no right to God’s blessing and acknowledged God’s blessing, despite his sinfulness (32:10a). God answers prayer because of His mercy, not our worthiness. Confess your utter dependence on God and specific sin in full confidence of God’s grace.⁷
- **Thank God for past mercies.** Jacob recounted God’s undeserved kindness and faithfulness to him (32:10b.) A thankful heart always strengthens faith. Recounting God’s record of faithfulness gives confidence in present and future struggles.⁸
- **Present your specific requests to God.** Jacob clearly stated his request, “Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau ...” (32:11a). Praying specifically allows you to identify specific needs, recognize God’s intervention and give Him the glory when He answers prayer.⁹
- **Honestly pour out your heart to God.** Jacob exposed his emotions to the Lord – “... for I am afraid he will come and attack me ...” (32:11b). God understands you completely and is never shocked by what you feel. You can express your reality to God, trusting His compassion and knowing He is stronger than what you feel.¹⁰
- **Believe God and personally apply His specific promises.** Jacob remembered that God’s promises secured his future (32:12). Expect God to answer. With bold faith and humble submission, trust God in specific ways based on what He has declared is true in His Word.¹¹





From Struggle to Surrender – Genesis 32:22-32

Jacob's Solitude – 32:22-23

Jacob camped at the ford of the Jabbok, midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. Less than a day's journey separated him from the Jordan River and the promised land. **Jacob had done everything he knew to prepare to make amends to Esau.** When evening came, he helped his family cross the Jabbok safely and settle for the night. He then found himself alone, but not for long.

Jacob's Struggle – 32:24-26

As Jacob sought solitude alone under the stars, a “man” appeared and wrestled with him until daybreak. The passage does not clearly identify Jacob's adversary. Was the “man” an angel or God Himself? Though the identity of Jacob's opponent is not clear, clearly the “man” represented the person of God confronting Jacob. This momentous and mysterious wrestling match forced Jacob to face both his own weakness and God's strength.

All his life, Jacob had depended on his sharp mind and physical strength to get what he wanted – the birthright, his father's blessing, his wives, his flocks and herds. **Now, as Jacob prepared to enter the promised land, God wrestled with him to teach and reassure him that spiritual power comes only from God.**¹² God most often chooses those who in some way are foolish, weak, lowly or even despised in this world so no one can boast that they deserve God's blessing.¹³

The wrestling match revealed both God's relentless pursuit of Jacob and Jacob's persistent desire for God's blessing. God allowed Jacob to struggle on in human strength. When “the man” realized he could not prevail, he touched Jacob's hip.¹⁴ Jacob ultimately grasped the identity of this “man.” Though it may appear Jacob forced God to bless him, the reality of God's sovereignty leads to a different conclusion.

God controls all things to accomplish all His purposes.¹⁵ God is all-powerful. No one forces God to do anything. God is good and delights to bless His children, but He lovingly disciplines them for their good and growth.¹⁶

God's Blessing – 32:27-32

Weary Jacob persistently clung to his opponent, refusing to let go until he received a blessing. Jacob's heart and motives throughout this interesting encounter are challenging to understand. His request for God's blessing seemed to reveal growing faith and dependence on God, but also relentless persistence. When asked by the “man,” Jacob stated his name, a reminder of its meaning – “the supplanter,” “deceiver” and “the one who grasps.” Jacob struggled all his life against God and people. But he received a new name, Israel. In Scripture, new names represent a change in direction and character by the grace of God. Unlike other name changes in Scripture, Genesis continues to record his name as “Jacob” more than “Israel” in chapters 33-50. Certainly, this critical encounter impacted Jacob greatly as he was forced to recognize the futility of fighting God in human strength. While it is tempting to imagine that this encounter completely transformed Jacob, he likely continued to struggle to fully trust God for the rest of his life. God's persistent work in Jacob's life to move his faith forward represents the most certain focus of this passage.

Jacob asked the name of his visitor, who replied by offering Jacob a blessing. **God repeatedly reaffirmed His covenant promises to Jacob through the course of his life.** Jacob named the place of his struggle Peniel, “face of God,” because he “saw God face to face, and yet [his] life was spared.”

Jacob, now called Israel, emerged from Peniel with a lifelong limp, a constant reminder of the





foolishness of struggling against God. Every step he took from this day forward proved his human weakness and need to depend on God. Like the Apostle Paul's "thorn in the flesh," God

gifted Jacob with a physical reminder that His strength is made perfect in weakness.¹⁷ God prepared Jacob not only to reconcile with Esau, but to reconcile himself with this truth.

The Doctrine of Sanctification

Sinful people are saved from sin by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on their behalf. At salvation, believers are justified, covered by the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit indwells believers, setting them apart to love and serve God (Romans 12:1-2). The believer is freed from sin's penalty and one day will be fully delivered from sin's presence. However, believers continue to struggle with personal sin while living in this sinful world and are not yet fully delivered from indwelling sin. **Growing to reflect Christ in daily thoughts, conversations and actions requires a process known as sanctification** (Romans 6:1-23; 8:1-17). Spiritual growth comes when a believer surrenders to the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin and steps out in specific steps of faith and obedience. Every believer can trust the ongoing work of God to increasingly develop God-pleasing holiness in daily life.

God persistently intervened to mold Jacob's character and draw him to Himself. In the same way, God orchestrates a believer's life circumstances to reveal and root out personal sin and promote obedience and surrender. God lovingly and intentionally allows situations that require us to acknowledge our need for Him. **Daily life provides regular opportunities to trust and obey God in new and deeper ways.** God uses difficulty and even pain to move us to overcome our self-sufficiency. Our joys teach us to trust His goodness in new ways. Our struggles lead us to depend on God in fresh ways. The process of sanctification requires overcoming sin, an often painful process that reveals the new life of the Holy Spirit within the believer.

Without an understanding of God's loving and perpetual commitment to your spiritual growth, the hard things in life lack context and feel random. You might be tempted to blame God rather than trust Him. Without recognizing God's gifts of grace in the warm sunshine and gentle breeze moments of daily life, you miss the tender ways God expresses His love to you through the storms. **Without an eternal perspective, the ups and downs of daily life overshadow God's intentional and loving commitment to your growth in faith and character.**

Like Jacob, you may struggle with lifelong patterns of sin that make you long to be delivered fully from the domination of sin and self. **Believing that God's deeper work stands behind everything you encounter provides hope when life is hard.** Knowing God loves you enough to do whatever it takes to root out rebellion brings perspective to your ongoing battle with sin. God will dethrone your idols and reveal your weaknesses to call you to deeper faith and richer fellowship with Himself. God loves you too much to let you love other things more. One day every believer's battle with sin will be over. How do you see God's bigger, deeper work within you in whatever you are facing this week?





From Fear to Fellowship – Genesis 33

The Reunion – 33:1-11

Jacob looked up to see Esau approaching with 400 men. He lined up his children with their mothers, with the maidservants leading out and Rachel and Joseph last. Jacob still exhibited favoritism and perhaps had remnants of trusting his own methods. Despite this, his faith was growing. **Jacob led the throng, limping toward Esau with humility, bowing seven times.** Jacob sought reconciliation with his estranged brother and took the initiative to seek peace.



God did immeasurably more for Jacob than he asked or imagined.¹⁸ While we cannot be certain of Esau’s heart toward God, He had worked to defuse Esau’s anger. Proverbs 21:1 says, “In the Lord’s hand the king’s heart is a stream of water that he channels toward all who please him.” Like the father’s welcome of the prodigal son in Luke 15:20, **Esau ran to meet Jacob “and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept.”**

Jacob introduced his family to Esau as gracious gifts from God. Esau questioned Jacob’s costly gift of flocks and herds, which Jacob admitted had been sent to gain his favor. Esau did not similarly credit God for his own riches but said, “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.” **This exchange reveals healing in their relationship, which was formerly divided by their desire to dominate each other and seek personal advantage.**

The brothers did not mention past offenses. Jacob insisted Esau accept his gift, “For to see your face is like seeing the face of God ...” The previous night Jacob wrestled at a place he named Peniel, meaning “face of God.” **Jacob knew only God could have accomplished the brotherly love he saw in Esau’s face.** Jacob insisted, “Please accept the present ...”; because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted his gift.

The Parting – 33:12-20

Esau did not want to part from Jacob. **However, Jacob declined Esau’s offer to accompany him on his journey so he could meet the needs of his young family and animals.** Jacob’s eldest child, Reuben, was not more than 12 years old, and the family’s escape from Laban had exhausted the littlest children, as well as the flocks and herds. Jacob graciously refused Esau’s offer of guards to protect him from robbers.



Esau returned to Seir. We do not know why Jacob did not follow Esau to Seir as he had indicated he would. Instead, he went to Sukkoth. **There, Jacob built a place for himself, his livestock and an altar; he later purchased a plot of ground near Shechem.** This was only the second piece of the promised land purchased by the patriarchs, according to biblical records.¹⁹ Jacob built an altar to sacrifice to the God of Israel, *El Elohe Israel*. Nearly 2,000 years later, Jesus sat by “Jacob’s well” when He promised the gift of living water to the woman of Samaria.²⁰

Should Jacob have settled in Shechem or gone directly to Bethel?²¹ Was this stop yet another time when Jacob exercised his own plan rather than seeking God? We cannot know for certain, but the next chapter records devastating influences and consequences for his family at Shechem, after which God directly instructed him to return to Bethel. **Again, the persistence of God to deal with Jacob, despite his human flaws, stands out.**

Even before birth, Jacob wrestled with his brother in his mother’s womb. At his birth, his tiny hand firmly grasped his brother’s heel. As he grew to adulthood, Jacob seemed to wrestle to obtain what he believed was due him – first with his father, Isaac, and brother, Esau, and then with his father-in-law, Laban. The amazing truth is God never let go of Jacob. **God’s faithfulness did not depend on Jacob’s faithfulness.**

God upheld the purposes and plans He announced to Jacob’s mother, Rebekah, while Jacob and Esau were in the womb. God’s faithfulness to His character, will and Word brought Jacob to a transforming encounter at Peniel. When believers reflect on their lives, they discover that God has faithfully challenged them to change and grow, even through struggles. **God reveals His love by His consistent commitment to our growth in faith and godly character.**





Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Every time Jacob faithfully obeyed God, he gained new insight into God’s person, character and ways. When Jacob left Laban to return home, he encountered the real presence of God’s angels at Mahanaim. God’s angels still attend to and protect God’s people today. The fearful believer who calls on the Lord can say with David, “The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.”²² God later confronted Jacob at Peniel, wrestling the wrestler so he would better understand God’s strength and his own weakness. Believers grow in understanding of God’s character, and they trust Him in daily life. Greatest of all, the indwelling presence of God the Holy Spirit produces what human effort cannot.

Jacob’s powerful prayer in Genesis 32 reflects his growing relationship with God. Jacob’s faith journey includes gradual growth and setbacks. Jacob had worked faithfully under Laban then left when God commanded that he return home. **Jacob’s ongoing struggle to trust God more than his own resources offers a realistic picture of the life of a Christian.** Spiritual growth is not a matter of immediate transformation but gradual progress. Human insight, intelligence, education, talents, organization, connections, willpower or finances cannot meet our greatest needs. The good news of the gospel is not “try harder to be better.” Faith in God’s promises, now fully revealed through Jesus Christ’s life, death and resurrection, provides what human striving cannot. God draws near to those who seek Him. He is always accessible. We can praise Him, confess our unworthiness, pour out our troubles to God, ask for His help and trust His promises for our own situations. God is faithful, even when we are not.





Apply It

Jacob's independent spirit made surrender to God and people challenging. God continued to orchestrate Jacob's life to reveal His goodness, confront Jacob's self-will and lead him to greater faith. God did not leave Jacob stuck in futile dependence on his own resources. He understood Jacob better than Jacob understood himself. **God will customize His work in your life to lovingly grow you in specific ways, at specific times.** Like Jacob, we sometimes resist God, either actively or passively. How quickly and easily do you submit when God's plans do not make sense or seem undesirable to you? We often default to our own limited understanding and coping habits without thinking or taking time to pray. Has God left you with a "limp," something in your life to remind you of your weakness and need for God's grace and strength? Where is God calling you to stop fighting Him and to yield to His higher ways?

Relationships can be challenging. Every relationship on this earth involves individuals marred by sin and self-interest. Relational dynamics, competing personalities and life demands can cause brokenness between people who are important to us. Jacob suffered a severely fractured relationship with Esau because of his own sin. God led him to face

his fears and take active steps to reconcile with his brother. **Restoring broken relationships requires humility, forgiveness, sensitivity and intentionality.**²³ Sometimes our heartfelt and genuine efforts cannot mend what has been broken. What relationship in your life challenges you most? How is God leading you to pray, and what is He leading you to do? When relationships become challenging, we often first focus on the issues in the other person's life rather than discerning God's sanctifying work in us. How is God lovingly molding you through the relationships in your life?

Do you recognize the futility of resisting God? Every drop of water in the universe splashes where God intends.²⁴ God is infinitely greater, wiser and more powerful than we are.²⁵ We gain helpful perspective by stopping to think about a mere human fighting the God who holds all things by His power and in His perfect control. We sometimes fail to recognize how we exalt ourselves above God and His ways. Will you ask God to convict you of the ways you foolishly resist Him? Instead of even subtle resistance, will you take comfort and delight in the beauty of the person of God? **God can be trusted with what you cannot control and cannot understand.**

Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1: God's promises at Bethel: Genesis 28:13-14 | 9: Pray specifically: Mark 5:23; Philippians 4:6, 7; Colossians 4:3; James 5:13-18 | 17: Strength in weakness: 2 Corinthians 12:9 |
| 2: Mahanaim: Joshua 13:26; 21:38; 2 Samuel 2:8, 12; 17:22-29 | 10: Emotion in prayer: 1 Kings 19:1-8; Psalms 142:2; 143 | 18: God's actions: Ephesians 3:20 |
| 3: Jacob and Esau's strife: Genesis 27 | 11: Expectant prayer: Isaiah 55:10-11; John 14:13-14; Hebrews 4:16; 1 Peter 1:24-25; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 1:9 | 19: Abraham's land purchase: Genesis 23:17-20 |
| 4: Reconciled relationships: Matthew 5:23-24 | 12: Spiritual power: Psalm 62:11; Zechariah 4:6; Romans 9:16 | 20: Samaritan woman: John 4:5-6 |
| 5: Praise God in prayer: Psalm 62:1-2; Matthew 6:9; John 11:41; Acts 4:24 | 13: God's blessing: 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 | 21: Return to Bethel: Genesis 31:13; 35:1 |
| 6: God's promises in prayer: Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 40:11; Proverbs 3:1-3; Jeremiah 29:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:24 | 14: Jacob's wrestling: Hosea 12:2-4 | 22: Lord's goodness: Psalm 34:7-8 |
| 7: Confession in prayer: Psalms 51:1-4; 103:10-12; Daniel 9:9, 18; Luke 18:9-14 | 15: God's sovereignty: Psalm 33:10-11 | 23: Reconciling broken relationships: Matthew 5:9; 7:3-5; 18:15; Romans 12:16, 18-21; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13, 15 |
| 8: Record of faithfulness: Nehemiah 1:5-11; Psalms 57; 62:5-8; Ephesians 1:6-9 | 16: God's work to mature His children: Philippians 1:6; 2:13; Ephesians 1:4-6; 2:10; Hebrews 12:11 | 24: God controls the water: Job 38:8-11; Psalm 107:24-25, 29; Jeremiah 5:22; Matthew 8:27 |
| | | 25: God's greatness: Psalms 8; 104:24; Romans 1:20; 1 Corinthians 1:25 |

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Thank you for spending your precious time with Bible Study Fellowship. We pray your time in the Bible has enriched your life and we hope to study alongside you again soon!