

Read Genesis 28:10–22.

After Jacob was exiled from his family, he stopped on the road to sleep. God appeared to him in a dream and confirmed his covenant with Jacob. **What do God’s words in this passage reveal about his character? How does Jacob’s response in verses 20–22 give us insight into his faith?**

Why would God choose to bless Jacob despite how Jacob treated his family? What does it mean to you to know God chooses and works through imperfect people?

Read Genesis 29:16–30.

Much like his father, Jacob married for love but not before being tricked into marriage with his love’s sister. He married two women and eventually had children with them and their two handmaidens. And yet, God used this dysfunctional situation to accomplish his purpose—to expand the family of Abraham as he promised in Genesis 17:6. **Do you think God can work through your past decisions and dysfunctional situations? Why or why not? In what ways might Jacob’s story change your mind?**

Read Genesis 31:1–13, 17–18.

Jacob realized that his father-in-law had been cheating him. So, Jacob created an elaborate scam to gain back what he had lost. His scheme worked, and he escaped back to his homeland a rich man. But once again, his ambition damaged his family. **Was Jacob justified in finding any way to take back what was stolen from him? Where is the line between justice and vengeance? In what ways can the effects of one sin ripple outward to affect others in our lives?**

Note: For more on Jacob’s breeding scheme in Genesis 30, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** below.

Read Genesis 32:21–32.

On his way back home, Jacob realized he needed to make peace with his past, specifically his brother, Esau. **Have you ever taken the first step at reconciling a broken relationship? If so, what were you feeling beforehand? Afterward?**

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group's study of the book of Genesis.

1. Jacob's Scheme to Breed the Flocks

Jacob didn't just deceive his father—he also cheated his uncle. Read Genesis 30:29–34. Jacob means “to supplant or trick another” in Hebrew—a name that he often lived up to. Despite the trouble he caused in his younger days dealing with Esau, Jacob had not changed. He felt swindled, so he reacted by swindling.

After Laban swindled Jacob, Jacob used an odd method to breed the kinds of animals he wanted. He bred the best animals for himself, increasing the value of his flock and weakening his uncle's.

Why do you think Jacob used questionable strategies to defraud his father-in-law?

Sometimes we act like Jacob, scheming to accomplish our goals—even the ones we feel God has called us to. But attempting life on our terms instead of God's can cause ourselves and those around us heartache and unnecessary suffering. Let Jacob's life be a lesson in patiently waiting on God to make his will come to pass.

When is it tempting to take your life into your own hands instead of trusting God's plan?

**What does trusting God look like for you right now?
What's difficult about it? What questions do you have for God?**

What are you hoping will happen in your life? Write down that dream or goal, then ask God to work his will

in your life and to help you trust his timing.

2. Dinah and the Redemption of Shechem

A place often takes on the feel of the events that happen there. Shechem is one such place in the Bible. In the Old Testament, Shechem was a city associated with pain and sin.

In Genesis 34, Jacob's only daughter, Dinah, was assaulted by the men of Shechem. Her brothers slaughtered her assailants and plundered the town.

Decades before, Abraham had built an altar in Shechem, which we see in Genesis 12. In the aftermath of Dinah's attack, Jacob buried the idols his family had brought back from Laban's land, as if to say, "We're leaving the old ways behind and starting over."

In Genesis 37, Joseph was sold by his brothers at—yes—Shechem. Later during the time of the judges (Judges 9), the evil Abimelech was coronated in Shechem. Terrible events happened in Shechem.

The Bible does not shy away from difficult themes—God knows our lives are not free of pain. Dinah's story was recorded—God wanted her story to be remembered—but it ends without any sense of redemption. **In what ways do your painful memories, trauma, or grief feel unresolved? As you reflect on past suffering, how do you think God sees you now?**

In John 4, Jesus took a journey through the region of Samaria and stops in the town of Sychar—the site of ancient Shechem—at the well of Jacob. Here, it was no surprise that he met a woman struggling with the pain in her past. Jesus at and spent a long time talking with the woman. He saw her. He respected her. In fact, for the first time, he openly admitted he was the Messiah, the savior all Israel has been waiting for. He revealed his identity to a woman who was enduring a very difficult life.

The woman at the well in Sychar/Shechem reacted with wonder, excitement, and action—she became the first evangelist, the first to tell others that Jesus is the Messiah. In choosing that well in that town to unveil his true identity, Jesus changed the story of Shechem from a place of pain to a city of redemption.

Jesus changes our stories, too, when we realize the truth that he redeems all broken things. **Do you believe he loves you and wants to make you whole again? What might be preventing you from trusting in God's ability and willingness to heal your broken heart? What habits can you cultivate to help you move forward into healing and wholeness?**

3. Weekly Reading Plan

Genesis is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word. Some weeks will have more reading than others, so feel free to complete the daily readings at a pace that makes the most sense to your group.

Session five focuses on Jacob's journey from deceitful brother to deceitful (and deceived) son-in-law, to defeated spiritual rebel. But his complicated family dynamics lead to another generation of dysfunction that brings sorrow and conflict. The saga will play out dramatically in his sons' lives.

Day 1: Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:19–34; 27:1–28:9)

Day 2: Jacob in Exile (Genesis 28:10–29:30)

Day 3: Jacob's Family (Genesis 29:31–30:43)

Day 4: Jacob Returns Home (Genesis 31:1–33:20)

Day 5: Jacob Establishes Himself in Canaan (Genesis 34–36)