

The Story of Jacob
Heroes of Faith Series
Week #6: Different Paths and Dreams

Scripture

Genesis 28

Review

Where are we in the story of Jacob and Esau?

A Quick Recap...

- Isaac determines it is time to bless Esau (His favorite)
- Rebekah determines that Jacob should be blessed instead (Her favorite)
- Rebecca schemes with Jacob to deceive Isaac and steal Esau's blessing (Disfunction and Betrayal)
- Esau hates his brother and vows to kill him (Resentment and Retribution)
- Rebecca sends Jacob away until Esau calms down (Enabling and Avoidance)

The deception of Isaac has led to...

- Isaac feeling betrayed
- Esau feeling betrayed
- Rebecca revealing how she felt betrayed by Esau
 - Marriage to Hittite women
- Jacob, the deceiver, running from his consequences
 - Leaving his family in a mess of Hostility, Division, and Heartbreak
 - This is God's chosen family of representatives here on Earth...
 - Sounds like a great place for God to step in...

Motivation

Jacob's Transactional Faith

Much of life runs on transactions. Think about it:

Our Economy:

- If you pay me well, I'll work hard for you.
 - If not... I'll find another job.

Our Services:

- If you do a good job, I'll leave a good tip.
 - If not... maybe just a gospel tract.

Our Relationships:

- **Friendships:** If you're loyal to me, I'll be loyal to you.
- **Marriage:** If you meet my needs, I'll meet yours.
- **Community:** If you support me, I'll stick around.
 - But if not... I'll pull away, shut down, or move on.

If we aren't careful, we can carry this mindset into our faith.

Genesis 28:20-22 (abbreviated)

²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "**If God will... then** the Lord shall be my God..."

Our love for God needs to move beyond an IF-Then transaction.

Information

What's Jacob's problem?

Jacob and Esau were fighting in the womb! Jacob came out grabbing Esau's heel
(Clearly Nature)

Jacob has grown up in an environment where he feels he must watch out for his own best interest. His family was plagued by favoritism and dysfunction. (Clearly Nurture)

He has developed a particular skill set - getting what he wants through cunning dealings. Jacob then applies this skill to his first encounter with God.

So You Got What You Thought You Wanted...What Did it Cost?

How often do we eat, sleep and breathe something? We pour our lives, our resources, our everything into a goal—something we think we want. And then we get it, only to find out, we don't want it.

Let's look at the Cost of Rebecca and Jacob's Plan

A. Broken Relationships

Genesis 27:42-45

⁴² But the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son and said to him, "Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you. ⁴³ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice. Arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran ⁴⁴ and stay with him a while, until your brother's fury turns

away— ⁴⁵ until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?"

Rebecca says - "Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?"

- Her husband is already **dying** - hence the whole blessing thing..
- This stunt has pushed away Esau, so he is essentially **dead to me** or she is dead to him.
- And Jacob could literally be **dead** if they don't act now.

This little plan she cooked up has taken an axe to the family tree

Jacob has just sacrificed every relationship he had for this blessing.

Now that he has it, what is he going to do with it?

- What good is an inheritance and blessing if you're dead?
- Not much to show for all his efforts as he runs out into the wilderness
Utterly Alone

Being alone has a way of forcing us to wrestle with the **innerman**

B. Unanticipated Consequences

Remember who cooked up this deceptive plan in the first place? **Rebecca**

until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what **you** have done to him.

Remember what she said to Jacob's concerns about her plan? *"Let your curse be on me, my son..."*

The problem is, that isn't how it works. Who has to bear the brunt of the consequences? Jacob will pay dearly for this life-choice. That wasn't intended, but it was the cost.

That said, she does receive a curse - in a sense...

It seems that Rebecca did not anticipate such a strong response from her oldest son. (Perhaps she thought Esau wouldn't care like he didn't care about his inheritance?)

The words Rebecca uses “a while” which implies a short time...

What Rebecca assumed would be “a little while”, ended up being **20 years!**

In those 20 years, it is likely that Rebecca died, as she is never mentioned again in the narrative.

Rebecca was close with Jacob - however now she is forced to send him away to spare his life, leaving her to face the object of her misery, **Esau's wives**.

And Isaac? What was he to do?

The son who now carries the promises given to his family is a man on the run.

“Now Isaac, whatever misgivings he may have about Jacob's act of deception, knows that his younger son has irrevocably received the blessing, and he has no choice but to reiterate it at the moment of parting.”

- Robert Alter Translation and Commentary

Genesis 28:1-5

Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, “You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women. ² Arise, go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel your mother's father, and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. ³ God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. ⁴ May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham!” ⁵ Thus Isaac sent Jacob away. And he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.

C. New Challenges

Rebecca sends Jacob to good ol' uncle Laban. This is like sending him out of the frying pan and into the fire. We will learn more about uncle Laban in coming weeks.

- Jacob's problems are FAR from over.

Esau now makes a desperate move to try to impress his parents.

This scene is truly sad to me. It really demonstrates the level of dysfunction that these boys have grown up in this family.

Rebecca hates her life because of her daughter-in-laws;

Genesis 27:46

⁴⁶ Then Rebekah said to Isaac, “I loathe my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?”

and now even Isaac has instructed Jacob not to marry Canaanite women.

Genesis 28:1

Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, “You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women.

Jacob now has literally **everything** Esau could ever want;

- His Inheritance
- His Blessing
- Even His Father’s Approval (or seemingly so)
 - Remember they were close, so this likely cut deep for Esau

So he makes an attempt to earn his parents love. Maybe a daughter from Uncle Ishmael will be better?

Genesis 28:8-9

⁸ So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac his father, ⁹ Esau went to Ishmael and took as his wife, besides the wives he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebaioth.”

Will adding **another** wife to this dysfunctional crew solve any of their relationship problems?

Most likely it will just create new problems for the family.

A Word to Parents (Including Myself)

Our love is not something to be earned.

As a reminder to us all - are we always lovely? Do we always make the right choices? Do we always live according to our Father’s wishes? Do we deserve His love?

- We are an example of the Father’s love to our children. What message are we sending as they grow?
- If you do X,Y, and Z – then I will love you. Of course we would never say that, but we don’t have to. The question is, Do they **feel** that?

- We are to be regularly reminding them of what God is always reminding us...

Nothing you say, and nothing you do, will ever change how I love you

It seems that at different times **both boys** felt like;
“If only I was more like my brother... then dad would love me.”

Jacob's Dream

Genesis 28:10-15

¹⁰ Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. ¹² And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!

The first thing we need to identify straight out of the box on this is that Jacob wasn't looking for God.

A.W. Tozer wrote a book called ***The Pursuit of God***

“To most people, God is an inference, not a reality. He is deducted from evidence which they consider adequate, but He remains personally unknown to the individual...While admitting his existence, they do not think of him as being knowable in the sense that we know things or people.”

Another word to Parents:

Jacob knew **OF** God, but he did not yet **know God** personally.

We cannot confuse a knowledge *about* God with a personal relationship *with* God

There can be a disconnect between head-knowledge and heart-relationship.

That's why **heart** conversations are just as important as **head** conversations!

“He was not seeking God. He was not on a religious quest or a sacred pilgrimage to a holy site, fervently praying for a visionary (interaction) with the deity. He was just a man on the run, bone-tired, and camping under the stars on what he assumed was an ordinary plot of ground. In other words, Jacob was not looking for God when God came looking for him.”

- Chad Bird, Limping with God

Here we find selfish, scheming Jacob, nothing further from his mind than God, when God Himself shows up. And to do what?

- To smack Jacob down with the law?
- To open the floodgates and pour out punishment on Jacob for his deceitful actions?
- **No, to invite him into a relationship.**

¹³ And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, “**I** am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie **I** will give to you and to your offspring. ¹⁴ Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵ Behold, **I** am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For **I** will not leave you until **I** have done what **I** have promised you.”

Do you notice how little God expects of Jacob, and how much He says He will do?

There is no transaction - it's a promise. ***I am the Lord - I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.***

After all we've seen of Jacob - Why would God choose to affirm these promises to him? Shouldn't he have to earn it?

God already knows he can't earn it. His goal is to get Jacob to understand that. That goal will take the rest of Jacob's life...

Psalm 23:6

***⁶ Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me
all the days of my life,***

If Jacob had his own book on shelves today, it would **not** be titled: *Jacob's pursuit of God*

Title: **God's Pursuit of Jacob**

Subtitle: **How far is God Willing to go to be Known by a Stubborn Prodigal?**

An important note: Jesus later interprets this story as being about **Him**.

John 1:51

⁵¹ And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Jacob was the patriarch of Israel, representing this chosen family of God's representatives here on Earth. But we know how that works out...

Jesus, not Jacob, would be the one who becomes the link between Heaven and Earth - restoring relationship between **Creator** and **Creation**.

He is the ladder

Jacob's Response

What else needs said? but...

Thank you God

We are often full of words, but often not **these** words.

1 Thes. 5:16-18

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ **give thanks** in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

"Christian living collapses when it is not delighted with the bounty God gives."
— David Gibson, *Living Life Backward*

Jacob's relationship with his dad set the tone for how he would relate to God:

Maybe you have a friend or family member who lives to "make a deal".

Always laying out conditions

Always bartering

Always *wheelin' and dealin'*

This is Jacob. Everything he has, he has gotten (at least from his perspective) through his cunning ability to make a deal

- He carefully stipulated the terms of sale for the bowl of soup to Esau
- He did not jump into Rebecca's plans without first considering possible outcomes
 - What if I'm caught and cursed? / Mom will take my curse? Deal.
- Now he wants to discuss conditions with God, because He trusts **no one**
- Later we will see that he continues his conniving dealings with his uncle Laban.

Genesis 28:20-22

²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, ²¹ so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, ²² and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you."

(broken down below)

Jacob's Vow (God's part...)

"God has already promised him in the dream that He will do all these things for him. Jacob, however, remains the suspicious bargainer—a "wrestler" with words and conditions just as he is a physical wrestler, a heel-grabber."

- Robert Alter Translation and Commentary

God has already told Jacob he will do these things, and then some!

- Why does he feel the need to make a deal for what has already been offered?
- We want **what** we want, **when** we want it, **how** we want to get it, and we think it's God's job to make it happen.

Jacob's terms reveal the human condition: This isn't just Jacob's problem - This is America's problem. This is my problem.

²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will..."

1. **be with me and will** (1. Relationship)

- We want a close relationship with God on OUR terms.
- We want a God who is close enough to throw his arm around me when I cry, But not close enough to make me uncomfortable when I want to sin.

2. **keep me in this way that I go, and will** (2. Protection)

- This one is the most explicitly verbatim repeat of what God says to him.

¹⁵ ***Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go,***

- Notice the language - *in this way that I go* - not wherever ***you lead*** me.
- Is this the grandson of the man who God called and said “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you”?
- Did he not grow up hearing tales of his grandfather’s sojournings and how God would lead him?

3. *give me bread to eat and clothing to wear,* ²¹ (3. Provision)

- If you are a good God, then I should never **want** for anything.
- But if we are honest with ourselves, most of us don’t find ourselves **wanting** for food and clothes – but things which are of far less importance and necessity
 - Food and clothes - the most necessary and consistent form of God’s provision for us, and the most often **unappreciated**...
 - The Israelites wandered for 40 years in the wilderness—they were fed mana from heaven and their sandals never wore out. They were provided for...
 - But were they **satisfied**?
 - (*Drinking bird, always drinking and never satisfied*)

4. *so that I come again to my father’s house in peace,* (4. Restoration)

How often do we pray this way?

- We know what we want, and God’s job is to make sure it happens.
 - Lord, I know You are good, You are faithful, You have good plans for me...
 - let me get that job/promotion
 - Let us get that house
 - Let us get a good deal on that car
 - Let my sick loved one get better
 - If you make sure that my life works out **as I have it planned**, then we will be good.
- The trouble with this is that Jacob is constantly putting himself in situations that make “peace” **impossible**.
 - Why is on the run? Because he’s a liar and cheater
 - But now he just wants God to waive his magic wand and fix it for him.

We want the promised land but we don't want to face the giants

Jacob's Vow (Jacob's part...)

then

1. the Lord shall be my God, ²² and (1. Love)

Prove You are for me, and I will be for You.

(More on this to close...)

2. this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. (2. Worship)

If you do all of this for me, I will establish a place of worship to you forever, me and my family!

Made me think of when David tells God he wants to build Him a house...

(2 Sam. 7:4-7)

God says, did I ask for a house? I'll tell you what David, I'm going to build *You* a house.

This is a similar feel. God has just told Jacob that he is going to establish him and his family, *build him a house (Nation)*. Yet here Jacob thinks that he is the one going to build God a house. **He has it backwards just like David did.**

3. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you." (3. Sacrifice)

I will be so generous, God. I will give back a tenth!

- This is long before the law of Moses was written, I wonder where he got this idea from? Remember Abraham's gift to Melchizedek in **Genesis 14**?
- Maybe he was listening to some of his grandfather's tales after all...

But notice this is a contingent offer - ***of all you give to me (from here on), I will give back***

Remember when Abraham gave to Melchizedek;

- The king of Sodom wanted to give Abraham all the stuff he had won, but he declined the offer
- he gave instead out of what he ***already had been given***

IN CLOSE

Why do we Love God?

Matthew 22:37-40

³⁷ And he said to him, “**You shall love the Lord your God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: **You shall love your neighbor** as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

What does it mean to love God?

C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves* → **Gift-love** vs. **Need-love**

“The typical example of Gift-love would be that love which moves a man to work and plan and save for the future well-being of his family which he will die without sharing or seeing; Of the second (need-love), that which sends a lonely or frightened child to its mother’s arms.”

- What makes someone “lovable” to me?
- There is a very real sense in which we “fall in love” easily—But we spend the rest of our lives **learning** what it means to “**love** that person”.
- I have witnessed love that ceases to exist the moment what is “loveable” changes. (purely a need-love)
- And I have witnessed a love that presses on when what is “loveable” is all but gone. (more of a gift-love)

Need-love cries to God from our poverty; Gift-love longs to serve, or even to suffer for, God; Appreciative love says: “We give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory.”

- C.S. Lewis, The Four Loves

I would like to add to this insufficient portrait of one man’s work, a second insufficient look at another man’s work...

In a book written in 1923 a German, Jewish philosopher named Martin Buber wrote a book entitled ***I and Thou***.

There are two basic forms of human relationship: ***I-it***, and ***I-thou (you)***.

In an ***I-it*** relationship; we experience the other (people, nature, even God) as an *object*, something we can use, analyze, categorize, or manipulate.

- In this relationship, we relate to God as ***It***—something to be used for my personal benefit.

In an ***I-Thou*** relationship; we experience the other (people, nature, or God) as a whole, in their full presence, without objectifying them.

- In this relationship we relate to God as *Thou*—not an object, but as a **Person** with whom you are in a genuine, present connection.

Jacob's *deal* with God is a classic case of Buber's ***I-it*** relationship.

To Jacob, God is not yet **Someone to be known**—He is a **resource to be negotiated with**

What kind of love do we have for our God? What makes God “loveable” to us?

Do we have an ***I-it*** relationship with God, never growing to an ***I-Thou***?

Do we purely have a ***need-love*** for God, never growing to a ***gift-love*** or an ***appreciative love***?

Admittedly, this just scratches the surface of what needs to be a much more thorough, life-long examination of our hearts in how we relate to our Father.

Today, will you take a moment to consider what it means for us as Disciples of Jesus to follow His command to:

1. **Love the Lord**
2. **Love our neighbor**

Pray to Close