



YEAR 3—The God Who Pursues Relationship: A Story of God's People

Module 2—Genesis Part 2

Lesson 2: The Story of Jacob—Genesis 25:19–27:40

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)

Jacob was the son of Isaac and therefore the grandson of Abraham. Jacob, like his father, was a surprise in that he too came from a mother who was considered barren. Jacob was the son of Rebekah and the brother of Esau. Jacob was the favorite son of Rebekah and was nicknamed “deceiver” because when he was born second (Esau was his twin) he came out of the womb grabbing for the heel of his brother (25:26).

Jacob's life can be summed up by, among others, these four words: deceiver, dreamer, pilgrim and restorer.

Deceiver: Jacob was known to take hold of possessions of others. He took his brother's birthright (25:29–34), his father's blessing which also belonged to his brother (27:1–29), and even scammed his father-in-law out of his flocks (30:25–43).

Dreamer: Twice Jacob dreams very dramatic dreams. The first occurs at Bethel (28:10–22) and the second occurs at the Jabbok River (32:22–32). At Bethel, Jacob is told he will inherit the land and that his descendants will be as many as the dust of the earth. Later in Jacob's life he journeys back to Bethel in order to make a permanent memory, or to build a monument to remember the promise and receive a blessing (35:6–15). This also is a reminder for all of Jacob's descendants, not just for Jacob.

At the Jabbok River, Jacob wrestles with God. Here Jacob receives a new name, Israel and builds an altar to remember the time he saw God's face (32:30).

Pilgrim: Jacob wandered, or journeyed, most of his life. Much like that of his grandfather, Abraham, Jacob spent most of his life wandering from place to place. From Jacob's home in Beersheba to Bethel (28:10–22) and back and forth on several occasions, Jacob eventually treks to Egypt where he eventually dies. Jacob's life was one of consistent movement and unsettledness.

Restorer: One of the more critical aspects of Jacob's life was the time in his life that surrounded God's theme of restoration. Jacob's life is characterized primarily by his restored relationship with God, self, others and the world. First, Jacob realizes the need to honor and trust God. This is why we see Jacob building so many monuments. Second, Jacob finally comes clean on who he is as a person created in the image of God. Jacob's growing sensitivity to spiritual matters proves that he desires God's best for himself and his family. Third, Jacob restores his relationship with his brother. After stealing his birthright, deceiving his father in order to get the family inheritance and blessing and running from Esau for years, Jacob and Esau are restored. The narrative of Jacob and Esau restoring their relationship is a great moment of God showing who God is. Finally, through Jacob the 12 tribes are established and through his son Judah, the world is given the chance to be restored as Jesus is in the line of Judah.

GOD'S STORY

God's plan is never completely spoiled. Despite the human freedom that manifests itself in various forms of envy, deception, dishonesty and jealousy, God's plan to fulfill God's covenant always remains intact. God, in God's supreme power, works through the human errors in order to accomplish God's plan or will.

So what is God's will? God's will is that the world might be restored to its intended wholeness. God desires relationships with humans that are marked by God's original intent—peace, harmony and love. How does God do this? Through Jesus Christ, God provides the opportunity for all people to reconcile their relationship with God. This is what the death, burial and resurrection is all about. Jesus conquers death in order that all that believe may have everlasting fellowship with God. In what way does God involve believers? God calls God's believers, the Church, to find ways to contextualize the gospel in order to bring the good news to the world. Jacob, although a man of deceit and crime, points to Jesus.

OUR STORY

It is very hard to sustain dishonesty, betrayal and deception. Eventually, through the events of life, planned and unplanned, one's true character emerges. We see this in the life of Rebekah, Jacob's mother. Rebekah's emotion is what drives her. Her love for her son and her desire for her to be successful drives her beyond what her true love should be; that is, a faithfulness and commitment to God living a different life—a holy life.

Emotion can, at times, drive all of us to do things we know are wrong. The feelings of love, jealousy, hatred, passion, excitement, and so on, and the various sentiments can often make us do things and say things we wouldn't normally do and say. This is normal, unfortunately. The only way to avoid being consumed by a spirit of negative passion is to keep God first and to remain committed to the virtues of Jesus.

OTHERS' STORY

Conflict, like in Jacob's family, can occur in all of our families. I have yet to meet a person whose family has never experienced some sort of conflict. Siblings, spouses, parents and teens—we all experience conflict of some sort—hopefully none of it creates the kind of conflict that Rebekah and Jacob created in their family. Here are seven ways to deal with conflict in families of all walks of life:

- 1. Identify the problem.** Most people in conflict never take the time to identify the true reason for the conflict. Often the symptoms such as anger, shouting, etc. are used to blame one another but seldom is the actual center of the conflict identified. This is key to any kind of conflict resolution.
- 2. Listen well.** Once the conflict has been identified it is imperative to attend to one another by truly making a conscious effort to hear what the other person (or people) is saying and how they feel.
- 3. Dialogue, not monologue.** Part of listening is allowing the other person to actually speak. In order for #2 to be helpful and effective in the conflict resolution process, those in conflict must be willing to actually converse by allowing others to put forth their opinion. To dialogue is to take part in a talk, not to be the only part of a talk.
- 4. Choose a way forward.** Creating a plan for how to move away from conflict and let it be a thing of the past is very important to the sustained relationship. This can be as simple as meeting regularly to discuss how progress is going; a prayer that each party commits to praying or even a sticky note posted on the fridge to remind each other the importance of moving past the conflict.
- 5. Take action.** The way that you move past conflict and learn to work through the conflict that emerges (and it will) is to take action—live it!
- 6. Find a neutral party to hold all parties accountable.** A counselor, a friend, or a relative that is unbiased—all of these people can help you sustain an environment where conflict is held at bay. It can be incredibly helpful for people in conflict to seek mediation.

- 7. Make a memory when the conflict is resolved.** One of the best ways to move past conflict is to find ways to remember the conflict being resolved—celebrating the reconciliation. Mark it on your calendar and remind each other how it is possible to move past conflict.

THE WORLD'S STORY

I think it is incredible that God has invited us to participate with God to restore the world to its intended wholeness. This cosmic mission is the very purpose of our existence. It is up to us, as the Church, to find ways to help the world realize that God has not forgotten them.

Jacob was one who created monuments. At the Jabbok River, Jacob created a monument to remembering seeing God's face. This monument served future generations as a mark of Jacob's discovery. This monument served also as a reminder to all those who would come into contact with it that God had not forgotten the Israelites.

Today, we have a chance to help the world meet God and remember God as the generations after Jacob did. Here are some ways that you and your community can create monuments for the onlooking world around your church and community.

- 1. Serve.** Find ways to meet the needs of those in your community. Feed the hungry. Find housing for the homeless. Heal the brokenhearted. Educate the uneducated and provide care for the elderly. All of these, and the many more that you can think of to serve your community, create an authentic monument or tribute to God that the world sees.
- 2. Scripture.** Never once have I had a person from the community, un-churched to be specific, get angry when I have read Scripture in public or private. I've read Scripture at funerals, in hospitals, at schools, etc... The hearing of God's Word can be something people remember forever.
- 3. Steadfast living.** The only real way to get someone to believe something is to live it. If we want people to engage the idea that God has not forgotten them, then we'll need to live in such a way that proves that God is who we say God is. We can't live an inconsistent spiritual life of mission and justice and expect that people are going to meet God. Sometimes a steadfast life can make a monument for someone.
- 4. Search.** People seek the face of God more than we realize. Seek with them. You are not a seeker, you say? You are a believer? Believers seek too. We ought never to cease seeking God's face.
- 5. Sacrifice.** To give something valuable often requires a sacrifice. If we want to help the seeking people around us we must be willing to give knowing that it will cost us something or that we'll need to sacrifice. Giving clothes to the local charity? Give your new stuff away, not just your rags. People in poverty like to remove tags from clothing too.
- 6. Spirit.** When people walk by way of the Holy Spirit, people notice. To live a life accepting and acting on the promptings of the Holy Spirit can change the way that people not only view us, but most certainly the way that they perceive God and God's love for creation. Living in the way of the Spirit is not just for our own piety; it is for the sake of the world.
- 7. Substantial.** People notice the richness and the fullness of a substantial faith. Consider this, the fuller or more abundantly (John 10:6) that your life is, the more others will notice the substance of your relationship with God. This is what it means to be holy—to be different. To be set apart is a privilege, yes, but it also comes with responsibility; a responsibility to love others and be a blessing to the world around us!