



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

Module 2—Genesis Part 2

Lesson 3: God Desires Reunion and Reconciliation For His People—Genesis 32–33

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

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

God is personal. Because of this truth, all people have the right and privilege to offer prayers to God. Believers, however, have a certain fellowship with God that non-believers do not have. This fellowship creates lines of communication that exist for worship, confession, adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and so on. It is through God's eagerness to listen and reveal God's presence that we rely on and commit to prayer as a spiritual discipline. This two-way communication symbolizes God's desire for us to have union with God, or reunion for some.

Jacob resorted to prayer at various points in his life. Jacob's prayer, however, came in his life when he found himself most in need (32:9-10), until the point of being scared for his and his family's life. Chapter 32 verses 9-12, reveals Jacob's desire to call on God for help.

First, Jacob appeals to God through his family lines (Isaac and Jacob). Jacob is using the history of his family, the knowledge he has of God's intervening in their life, and the events as they unfolded to petition to God for help.

Second, Jacob appeals to God through reciting God's own words. Jacob uses a technique that all of us have used at previous times in our lives. Jacob uses God's own words of promise to remind God what God has already spoken. God does not need to hear these words again. God already knows these things. God reigns by God's words. The use of God's words reveals how desperate Jacob really is.

Third, Jacob appeals to God through a confession of self and of who he believes God to be. One of the keys to going to God in prayer with an authentic plea for help is to confess who we are in relationship to who God is. We are merely men and women; we are not supernatural beings who reign. We are living under submission to God's reign and announcing this fact puts us in a position and posture of humility. By declaring that he is unworthy of God's kindness and faithfulness Jacob declares his place as a servant.

Fourth, Jacob acknowledges that God has made him prosper, as promised. Jacob communicates this prayer in humility by confessing that it is God who made him prosper, not any actions that he himself had done. God is the one who allowed Jacob to increase from himself and a staff into an extended family and an increased role as patriarch.

Fifth, Jacob declares his fear and appeals to God to save him (deliver me). Jacob, at this point in the prayer, gets directly to the point. Jacob is afraid. Jacob is afraid that his brother Esau is going to attack him and his family. This is not, by any stretch of the imagination, an unreasonable belief on Jacob's part. After all he did steal his brother's blessing from him. Also, the last words spoken to him by Esau were that he was going to kill Jacob. So, not surprisingly, Jacob fears for his life and calls out to the true deliverer, God, for help.

Finally, Jacob again uses God's words. Knowing he cannot rely on his own assets and power to secure his family's safety. Again, Jacob reveals his complete dependence and desperation on God for help by telling God what God already knows.

After this prayer, we see Jacob take action. Yes, he prays to God and declares his trust and loyalty to God but he also takes action to better his situation. This is where most of us live. We call out to God for help and declare God's reign and rule but yet can't quite get ourselves to fully trust. Although Jacob is honest with God, he still works on his own behalf to secure the safety of his family. In verse 13-21 he sends the following to Esau, his brother...

- 220 goats
- 220 sheep
- 30 camels
- 50 cows/bulls
- 30 donkeys

Yes, Jacob wishes for Esau's sympathy and favor from his angry brother, perhaps Jacob also hoped these gifts would slow Esau down and occupy the attention of Esau's men. Jacob is crafty to say the least.

GOD'S STORY

God's presence is powerful. Being in God's presence allows for safety, joy, goodness, security, sustainable strength, gladness, assurance, and the very life that allows us to experience God's presence.

So in what ways can we become more aware of God's presence in our lives? Following are several spiritual practices that we can use to make known God's presence in our lives:

- *Pray:* Develop a regular and unfailing prayer life. Use an app, a book, the daily office, etc., but find a way to create a rhythm of prayer in your life. Prayer allows us to submit to God's leading through the Holy Spirit, among other things. This helps us to allow God to guide our lives as opposed to living our own way.
- *Openness:* Expose yourself to God's authority in your life. Meaning, allow your life to be open enough for God to work in you and through you without trying to have everything in your life already planned out.
- *Scripture:* Read the Bible frequently and attentively. An attentive or thoughtful reading of Scripture means that you seek ways to interpret your reading and apply your reading directly to your life.
- *Ask others:* Seek counsel of others when you need to make a decision. God gives people intelligence, you and me included. However, sometimes we get either so far or so close to a situation that we cannot see it for what it truly is. God works through other people too. Simply asking others around you that you trust (pastor, friend, co-worker, spouse) can reveal God's presence in your life.
- *Contribute to God's mission:* To live in God's will is to participate in God's mission. People all around me ask me, "How do I know I am living in God's will?" My response is always, "You are living in God's will when you are finding ways to faithfully participate in God's mission to restore the world to its intended wholeness."
- *Fasting:* Engage in times of fasting, not just from food, but also from other things that control you. Fasting is not going hungry. Fasting is a practice that allows you to release your grip on the things that you let control you—your mobile phone, your social media accounts, your television, your books, your hobbies, and so on. Fasting is simply a practice that allows you to remember what truly sustains you in life—God.

- *Confession*: Practicing on-going rhythms of repentance in our lives keep us aware of the things that may distance us from God. Remember: God is never far from us, it is we who, at times, are far from God.
- *Simplicity*: Uncluttering our lives from all the stuff such as possessions like money, clothes, cars, homes, vacation homes, business, work, etc., in our life give us more room in our life for God.

Attending to the practices above (and many others that are not listed) can help you be more aware of God's presence in your life.

OUR STORY

We, like Jacob, wrestle with God. We struggle spiritually—emotions, fear, desperation, control—these are all things that, at times, we wrestle with. When we wrestle with God we ought to remember, first, that a wrestling match requires two or more individuals. Meaning this, when we wrestle God engages with us. God desires that we arrive at a decision and God desires to help us with this. Second, we ought to remember that God meets us at our level. God, at any time, can and does overpower us (like God touching Jacob's hip socket), but we can prevail as Jacob did when we don't give in and quit. God allows us to prevail when we take action and don't give up. Third, when we wrestle, it is important to remember that we wrestle for one reason—spiritual transformation. Wrestling with God, while at times full of angst, can allow us to find a new way forward removing us from our current situation or events that hold us back. Finally, with this new way forward, we chart a new course looking even more deeply to God for guidance. Wrestling with God over issues and circumstances in our lives, is not something we should avoid. On the contrary, this is something God wants us to do.

OTHERS' STORY

Like Jacob illustrated, we win when we lose. We prevail when we hold onto God long enough to receive God's blessing. We are debilitated and brought to a place of obedience. Jacob holds on to God or clings to God until Jacob is convinced God will give him the peace he desires. When we abandon self, God desires us to love more fully as our true selves. If we want to establish peace with others, we must find ways to submit to God's leading.

THE WORLD'S STORY

Theologian Henri Nouwen said, *"We must learn to live each day, each hour, yes, each minute as a new beginning, as a unique opportunity to make everything new. Imagine that we could live each moment as a moment pregnant with new life. . . ."*

What would it look like if we could live in such a way as to provide the world around us with a new beginning—a chance to start over? This is our role as a blessing in and to this world, that we help people find peace with self and start a new beginning in life.