

Bless Me Too, My Father



By John Louis

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My Father*

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Acknowledgements

This book is the result of seeing many people journey to far away places in order to become a person of blessing. As a leader and counsellor, in the church, I am struck by the lengths people have gone both spiritually and emotionally in order to satisfy their thirst of being blessed. In my own life, I also see this to be the case. Thank God I found the blessing in the church. Thank God I was able to receive His blessing in ways that the world would never have been able to provide. The story of Jacob and Esau, though it took place millenniums ago, resonates with us today in the church because it is a story about us. It is a story about a family ravaged in envy, rivalry, deception, trickery and favoritism. My insights deepened as I read the book, “The Blessing” by Gary Smalley and John Trent (1986), which, along with my own experiences, inspired me to do a workbook based on this family, Esau and Jacob, from Genesis 25 till 33. The book, “Jacob’s Blessing”, by Kevin and Louise Perrotta (2003) was also useful.

I would like to thank Pat Tay, Beng Hwa, Jessica, Angelia and Phua Hee who helped with the typing, design and formatting of this simple workbook.

As always, my wife played a huge part in editing and gave much valuable feedback. She has always been my editor-in-chief, and I thank her for that.

I would like to dedicate this book firstly to both my children, Sonia and David, whose lives have taught me how important it is to bless them with love constantly. To see them grow in the Lord is a much-treasured blessing.

I also dedicate this workbook to all who never found adequate blessings from their homes, but have turned to Jesus, and who have been enriched as a result. May God the Father, through Jesus and His body, the church, along with the indwelling Holy Spirit, continue to bless you as you bless others whom He has put in your life.

John Louis

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Introduction - Understanding The Blessing

Throughout Scripture man has always sought after some kind of blessing from God. While God longs to bless each of us spiritually (Jeremiah 29:11-13), He often works through others to help us feel His blessing. Nowhere in the Bible is this more physically evident than in the book of Genesis, which chronicles, among other things, how the early patriarchs gave such blessings in their homes. In the Hebrew language, the word “to bless” means to “bow the knee”. This makes sense visually, since when someone was being blessed, they often kneeled in respect. However, the personal blessings given in Genesis meant more than just a physical bending of the knee – they also carried the weight of bestowing a great honor, of recognition and value. In biblical times, receiving a blessing was arguably one of the most special events in a person’s life. In most cases, the blessing was mandated by God and was prophetic – in other words, when a patriarch uttered a blessing about his son, it would come true!

These special blessings encouraged the children who received them, made them feel valued and accepted, and conveyed protection from God that their future would turn out well. Since this was evidently a part of their culture, the children growing up in that region would have naturally looked forward to this deciding point of their lives with great anticipation, hoping to hear positive, heart-felt words from their parents. Conversely, if, for some reason, a child missed out on getting his or her blessing, it could have then resulted in anger, resentment, bitterness, avoidance and many other unhealthy attributes.

Take Esau as an example – upon realizing that he had been outwitted from inheriting the blessing of the firstborn, he wept aloud. He pleaded with his father to bless him as well.

34 'When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, "Bless me—me too, my father!" 35 But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.." 38 Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!" Then Esau wept aloud.' (Genesis 27: 34-35, 38)

Esau was desperate to be blessed. The words from Esau, “Bless me too, my father” must have haunted Isaac for the rest of his life. Esau wanted to be blessed, but his father could not deliver it. Esau had not lost something physical, or even theological, but rather, something very emotional and personal. And it was from his dad. This left a deep emotional wound on him. As a result, Esau held a grudge for many years after this incident. He left home, and the journey took him to far away places – spiritually, emotionally and physically. Jacob was not much different. He resorted to his cunning ways because he wanted the blessing due his older brother. Both were seekers of the blessing, and in a real way, both did not receive the blessings they so desired in the measure that they had wanted.

This is no less true today. We are all seekers of the blessing. We all wish to be affirmed by our parents. In the words of Esau, we are also crying out, “Bless me too, my father.” When we do not feel that we have their blessing, we go to “another source” to try to meet that need and fill that void. For some of us, it is at work, for some, academics, for others, we want approval from our peers. Some of us spend our entire lives searching for a way to receive “the blessing” that we missed out on earlier. Others resort to more destructive ways to fill the void created as a result of not having a blessing: addiction, workaholism, obsession with sports, acquiring possessions, academics, and the list is endless. Often the consequences of going to the wrong places for the blessing are worse than the lack of blessing itself!

The good news is that while we may have missed out on the blessing from our homes, God, through the church, is able to make up the difference. As members of the body, we are able to provide the blessing for one another, hopefully starting in our nuclear families. Receiving the blessing through God and through the church will end the search for a blessing from the world. God understands that many of us are from “less than desirable” homes – homes that deprived us of the blessing – and he has every intention to meet those needs. When we are blessed, we, in turn, will be able to minister to others more effectively. In other words, when we are blessed, we are able to bless others.

A Twelve-Chapter Journal (Genesis 24-33, 35-36)

In the pages to follow, we will immerse ourselves in the stories of Isaac, Esau and Jacob, along with their wives and sons, which are described in Genesis 24-36. We will walk through them, reflect on them, ask questions, and see how the lack of blessing played a part in the lives of this early patriarch's family. We will examine their captivating stories. We will see their ups and downs, their sufferings and blessing, their interactions with one another, and learn from their good and bad examples. More than anything else, we will be encouraged to see how real these people were. Though chosen to be patriarch's of God's people, they struggled with real life issues of envy, greed, deception, acceptance, love, fear, and worry, to name a few.

Let us think of this Quiet Time journey as if we were going through a museum: the more time we spend reflecting and asking questions, talking to the tour guide, and enjoying what we are seeing, the more fascinating the experience will be. (Conversely, if we treat this as an assigned field trip that we are only attending because it is "mandatory", the results yielded will not be nearly as positive or meaningful.) Let us walk through God's museum, with a spirit of openness and togetherness. We surely will be enriched with life lessons that will spur us on to put more trust in our Loving and Almighty God, whose hand is always at work behind the scenes, as we grow closer to Him and experience the blessing. Esau's words, "Bless me too, my father" returned void. However, our heavenly Father knows how to bless us when our souls cry out the same desperate message, and it is to Him that we turn for this blessing.

Day One:

God Doesn't Want Us to Sweep Things Under the Carpet

Reading: Genesis 24: 1-4, 10-11; 25: 1-6, 19-34; 26: 34 - 27: 17

Questions for Reflection:

1. How long did Isaac and Rebekah wait before they had children? (see Genesis 25: 20, 26)
2. What were the strengths and weakness of both Jacob and Esau?
3. Do you struggle in lack of self-control and/or being deceitful, even in small ways at work, or with your small group or with your spouse?
4. How did rivalry between them manifest itself? What could have been done to avoid this?
5. What blessing was each of them deprived off growing up?

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6. Was there respect for one another? Would that have made a big difference in that family?

 7. Was there a time when you fell out of favor with either one or both of your parents? How did you deal with it growing up? How do you respond to them now as an adult?

Insights

1. Favoritism Will Deprive Us of the Blessing

Right from the start there were problems between Isaac and Rebekah. There was favoritism - Isaac gravitated towards Esau and Rebekah towards Jacob. Obviously, this did not help the two brothers to get along. There was envy from the beginning on Jacob's part because he was born only minutes apart from his twin brother, but he had to settle for less as the younger sibling as far as the blessing was concerned. This must have bothered him growing up. Did this unfairness get dealt with? Did Jacob receive any blessing from Isaac? Did Esau receive anything from Rebekah?

As a result of favoritism, each of the sons developed their own rationale, their own "world view". Rebekah was a shrewd woman. If she had shared a decent relationship with Esau, she probably could have influenced him to not marry the Hittite women. She could have balanced out Isaac's influence, who was left alone to influence Esau. Instead, Isaac was the only parent really influencing Esau, and Isaac had a blind spot with his favorite son! Since Isaac was a bit of an unperceptive sort, he wasn't able to see trouble coming before it was too late. So, even though Isaac was godly, he wasn't able to pass his godliness down to his son. Perhaps this lack of perception got passed down to Esau as well, since he only learned that his

mom wasn't happy with the Hittite women AFTER he married them. No matter what the exact details, it is obvious that favoritism was not helpful to their family!

Favoritism also blocks effective communication at the heart level. It prevents people from being vulnerable with each other about their feelings when they feel they are disliked or that they have fallen out of favor. For this patriarch's family, much was lost in the early years. They lost out on what might have been fantastic times together. They could have had so many great memories together as a family. Each of the sons could have turned out much more all- rounded if they had tapped into the strengths of both of their parents. Favoritism breeds jealousy and results in tiffs with our siblings, which in turn create scars and gets carried into our adulthood.

2. Short Term Pleasure, Long Term Price

Notice that on account of food, Esau lost his birthright (Genesis 25: 29-34). Also, on account of food, Isaac was tricked (Genesis 27: 19-23). Like father like son. They both had the same inclination.

For Esau, he never learned self-control. He struggled with it growing up. He essentially got what he wanted and did what he wanted. In Hebrews 12: 16-17, it says:

¹⁶See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. ¹⁷Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.

Esau was singled out as being godless, and possibly immoral. Perhaps the charge of "immorality" refers to his marriage to two women early on as an adult, in Genesis 28: 34, and three by the end of life, in Genesis 36:3. In any case, he was definitely godless, and he did not imitate his father, Isaac, who was loyal to Rebekah, nor his grandfather Abraham, who was devoted to Sarah until she died. His lack of self-control surfaced up not just in his appetite for food, but also in his sexual desires. His lack of self-control came at a great price. It cost him the blessing, and he had to settle for less.

Day Two:

God Says, “If You Save Yourself, You Will Lose”

Reading: Genesis 27: 18-45

Questions for Reflection:

1. What were each other's real motives? In answering this, reflect on, for example, why Rebekah wanted Jacob to get the blessing, why Jacob went with her plan, why Esau wept bitterly, why Isaac wanted to give the blessing to Esau alone?

Isaac _____

Rebekah _____

Esau _____

Jacob _____

2. What was Jacob's personal relationship with God at this point like? (note how he related to God in Genesis 27: 20). Was he connected to Him in a personal way?
3. What was Esau's blessings like compared to Jacob's? (compare Genesis 27: 27-29 and Genesis 27: 39-40). Did you receive a different “blessing” as compared to your other siblings (especially sisters)? How did that make you feel growing up?

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4. If you didn't feel blessed by your parents, where did you go to get "the blessing" before you became a Christian?
 5. Are you still going to these places/people now as a Christian? Have they been able to bless you adequately?
 6. How much of the outcome in Jacob and Esau's lives was God's doing, and how much of this was man's? If God was involved, could any of them be excused for their sinful ways?

Insights

1. Sibling Rivalry That Was Passed On

Esau descendants were known as Edomites (see Map 1). They were at odds with the Israelites (Jacob's descendents) throughout history, although their forefathers were siblings. This was why Moses instructed them this instruction:

⁷Do not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother... (Deuteronomy 23: 7)

However, for generations this was never taken to heart. During the time of the monarchy, for example, King David conquered them, seen in 2 Samuel 8: 12-14. Psalm 60: 1-12, was written by David, describing this victory. Then later in 2 Kings 14: 7, Amaziah, king of Judah, also went to war with them. Eventually the Edomites took revenge and were free. When the Babylonians captured the Southern Kingdom in 587 B.C., the Edomites did not take pity but rather used Israel's misfortune to gain the upper hand.

An entire Old Testament book, Obadiah, was about the denunciation of the Edomites for their acts against Israel, seen in Obadiah 12:

*¹² You should not look down on your brother
in the day of his misfortune,
nor rejoice over the people of Judah
in the day of their destruction,
nor boast so much
in the day of their trouble.*

*¹³ You should not march through the gates of my people
in the day of their disaster,
nor look down on them in their calamity
in the day of their disaster,
nor seize their wealth
in the day of their disaster.*

A family like Isaac's that had a lot going for it initially was torn apart by each of the family members putting their own interests above everyone else. Esau went out in rebellion and married Hittite women, who were a source of grief to both Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 26: 35). In Genesis 28: 8, Esau only later realized that this displeased his parents. Or it may have been that he was deliberately rebellious – after all, in Genesis 28: 1, Isaac told Jacob not to marry a Hittite women. If Isaac told this to Jacob, he must have told this to Esau, but Esau was rebellious, and did not take Isaac's admonition seriously. Whatever actually took place, we can see that very little transfer of values about a very fundamental matter took place between father and son. However, they were able to bond somewhat over athletic pursuits. For example, as father and son, they went hunting, a frequent activity that both Isaac and Esau both enjoyed. Rebekah favored Jacob - perhaps she wanted him to succeed because she could identify with his temperament and

recognized that Jacob had inherited her attributes. Perhaps she thought that if Isaac died, and if Jacob inherited the blessing, then it would be easier for her well-being to depend on Jacob than on Esau. Jacob, in turn, was plagued with envy - being the younger son, he was deprived of the special rights set aside for the first born.

2. God's Foreknowledge Does Not Excuse Our Responsibilities

In Romans 9: 10-12, God says:

*¹⁰Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. ¹¹Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹²not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger."
¹³Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*

Here Paul argues that before Esau or Jacob were born, God already purposed for Jacob to inherit the blessing. Does that mean that we are able to excuse Jacob's deceptive actions or Rebekah's, and put it down to God's providence? If this were the case, then all of our sinful actions could also be justified this way. However, the key to these two seemingly contradictory philosophies lie in that fact that God's foreknowledge of an event does not excuse us from our responsibility. God knows all things, but it does not mean we have no freedom. No doubt it is mystery - God is not bound by time, and he knows what will happen, but we are still responsible for our own actions. In just the same way, we may know very well what our children's decisions may be in a certain situation, but it does not exclude their freedom of choice.

Day Three: *God Cannot be Mocked*

Reading: Genesis 27: 46-29:14

Questions for Reflection

1. Compare the advice given to Jacob from Rebekah (Genesis 27: 43-45) compared to that given by Isaac (Genesis 28: 1-2). What does this reveal about Isaac's weaknesses and Rebekah's motives?
2. Rebekah thought that her plan would last for only a "while" (Genesis 27: 44). Did it turn out that way?
3. Do you take events into your own hands, knowing that your temporary plans are outside the will of God? (Marrying or dating non-Christians, not resolving attitudes biblically, resorting to your own "wisdom").
4. When Jacob eventually saw Laban and told him all the "things" (Genesis 29: 13), what did he actually disclose? Do you think he mentioned how he and his mother plotted and schemed? What does this show about Jacob?

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5. While Jacob was guilty of lying and deceit, he ran into an encounter with God in Bethel, Genesis 28: 10-22. In looking at the way God dealt with him, what does this reveal about God?
 6. Does this remind you of the way God found you? How is it similar?

Insights

1. We Put Up a Front to Hide Our Vulnerability

Isaac seemed completely blinded by Rebekah's schemes. To heighten the urgency to have Jacob leave, she talked about the "legitimate" grief of the Hittite women to whom Esau was married to (Genesis 26: 35, 27: 46). She put up a front and brought up another issue but it was used to hide her inner feelings of fear. Does Rebekah's relationship with Isaac seem intimate?

Do we sometimes dramatize "legitimate" issues only to use it as a front for something else that we are too ashamed to be vulnerable about? For Rebekah, she acted in haste to have her son leave in order to protect him from Esau, who wanted to kill him (Genesis 27: 41). She plotted the whole scenario. Perhaps she did all this out of fear since Isaac seemed to be close to death.

2. God Cannot Be Mocked

Given her fears, Rebekah devised a plan to outwit her unperceptive husband, and to an extent, she got away with it. However, as the scripture says in Galatians 6: 7:

7Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

In the long run, they all ran into problems and reaped what they had sowed. Here are some gripping consequences of their deceit and selfishness:

- a. Rebekah thought she would be separated from Jacob for only a while. Little did she know that that would be her last goodbye. For the next twenty years, Jacob was held captive by Laban in exchange for marrying his daughter Rachel. Jacob would have surely missed his mother terribly, but guilt must have also pricked his conscience as he pondered numerous times about what had really gone on. Our sins of selfishness will eventually come back and bite us. God cannot be mocked.
- b. Rebekah's calculations went awry. Isaac who seemed weak and near death, (Genesis 27: 1-2), ended up living for another twenty years! He was able to see Jacob in his dying days, Genesis 35: 27-29. Rebekah however, died earlier on! Her death was not even mentioned in the bible. She died lonely, not close to her husband and having lost both her sons. God cannot be mocked.
- c. Jacob didn't see his brother or his dad for a period of about twenty years. Instead of being with family, he was stuck with Laban. God cannot be mocked.
- d. Instead of seeing the blessing fulfilled in his life, Jacob actually began to struggle, working like a servant for Laban. This seemed different from the blessing that had been bestowed upon him by Isaac. The good life never really came (until much later on in Egypt). Jacob paid the price for his own sins. God cannot be mocked.
- e. Esau's lack of self-control is seen in him giving up his birthright for a single meal. He thought he could rely on his blessing, but lost that too. He then married two Hittite woman, who became a source of grief to his parents (Genesis 26: 35). His lack of self-control in marrying someone that was not approved by his parents made his mother despise him even more. This made her gravitate to Jacob even more,

and added to her desperation to make a plan work for her favorite son, even if it meant outwitting her husband and Esau. However, taking matters into your own hands will come back to haunt you in the end. God cannot be mocked.

- f. Rebekah thought that Esau would forget about his grudge (Genesis 27: 45) at some point. However, it wasn't until twenty years later that they got reconciled. During that time Jacob carried fear and guilt with him. God cannot be mocked.
- g. Jacob, the cunning con-man, was himself conned by Laban. Just as he had tricked his father in a tent, he himself was tricked in a tent, into marrying Leah instead of Rachel. God cannot be mocked.

3. An Extraordinary Awareness in an Ordinary Encounter

Jacob met God in one ordinary day of his travels. However, that encounter changed his life. He was able to "see" God. Genesis 28: 16,

¹⁶When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it."

From a third person's point of view, that scene was simply a man sleeping with a stone pillow in the middle of a deserted area on an ordinary night. However, from Jacob's point of view, it was an extraordinary day! (The picture of the angels ascending and descending was also mentioned by Jesus in John 1: 51 when he spoke to Nathanael.)

Are you able to see God in your everyday life, in ordinary events? Are you aware of him? Think about the exact place you were met, baptized, studied with. Was God working behind the scenes that day? Has he stopped working? Do you take opportunity to get connected with him regularly?

Day Four : *God Works in Mysterious Ways*

Reading: Genesis 29: 15-30: 24

Questions for Reflection

1. For Jacob working for seven years seemed like only a few days to him (Genesis 29: 20). When you do something you love, does it not seem like only a few days? What did you do that seemed like only a few days? (Your dating life, studies, childhood days, hobby)
2. Does the work to bless others (helping others to know God) seem like a burden to you after a few years as a Christian? Could this reflect your level of love for God and His people?
3. The battle *in* the womb when Rebekah was pregnant with Jacob and Esau now turned into the battle *of* the womb (Genesis 25: 22-26, 30: 1, 8). Leah has six sons and a daughter. Rachel was envious and allowed that to get the better of her. She became competitive. Then Rachel asked Jacob to sleep with one of her maids in order to have children through her servant, Genesis 30: 4-8. The names of some of the children, such as Reuben, Simeon, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Joseph, have a sense of rivalry to them (Refer to Table 1).

Table 1: Jacob's Twelve Sons

From Leah	Meaning of the Names
1. Reuben	See a son / He has seen my misery
2. Simeon	One who hears
3. Levi	Attached
4. Judah	Praise
5. Issachar	Reward
6. Zebulen	Honor
From Zipah (Leah's servant)	
7. Gad	Good Fortune
8. Asher	Happy
From Bilhah (Rachel's servant)	
9. Dan	Vindicated
10. Naphtali	My struggle
From Rachel	
11. Joseph	May he add
12. Benjamin	Son of my right hand

-
4. How does Leah react to this? (Genesis 30: 9-13). Then what measures did Rachel resort to? What properties did mandrakes have?
 5. What do you put your faith in? Medals, promotions, degrees, salary, status?
 6. Then God opened Rachel's womb, and "re-opened" Leah's. Was that due to the "medication" or because of His power? (Genesis 30: 20-21). God works in mysterious ways.
 7. The twelve sons of Jacob became the twelve tribes of Israel (Benjamin was born later and was the twelfth, Genesis 35: 16-18). So did the nation of Israel come from a dysfunctional family or a functional one?
 8. The physical family that you are from, was it functional or a dysfunctional one? If God is able to work mysteriously through the family of Isaac and Jacob, will he be able to work mysteriously through you? What does this say about God and how he selects His people?

Insights

1. Dysfunction is a Gift That Keeps on Giving

Like it was with the two brothers, so it was with the two wives of Jacob, the sisters, Leah and Rachel. Jacob surely had a sense of déjà vu watching his wives both compete with one another. He saw his own cunning and tricky nature come back to him like a boomerang. It hit him back in his face, hard. He watched Rachel and Leah fight regularly. The names of their children even sent a not-too-subtle message to the other. There was constant tension. Jacob was sandwiched between the two of them. However, dysfunction is the gift that keeps on giving. Jacob continued to play favorites like his parents, by loving Rachel much more than Leah. Leah went through her whole life trying to get love from Jacob. Her motive of giving birth to six sons and one daughter was to get the attention of the husband, but to no avail. Rachel wanted to not feel defective, so it drove her to have children so desperately that she uttered the words in Genesis 30: 1.

¹When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!"

Rather than letting life take its natural course and trusting in God, life became a fierce competition of the wombs till the end. Rachel probably experienced little enjoyment, as much of her life was consumed with proving that she was not defective as a wife by being barren. Jacob's wealth was increasing by leaps and bounds, but on the family front it was a different story. Wealth was not able to bring the peace and acceptance that he surely wanted. If each of them had only been vulnerable, they would have identified each other's wants, which would have then enabled them to make amends. Having a father like Laban, who was selfish to the core, had not helped either. Both Leah and Rachel never got the blessing they desperately needed as daughters. So there was rivalry – first, related to who married Jacob, second, related to having children. This was reflective of Laban's own character, seen in his relationship with Jacob. Further, if we study the family patterns that were passed on from Abraham to Isaac, Isaac to Jacob, and Jacob to his sons, we see how clearly dysfunction is passed on from generation to generation.

Look at the following:

a. Favoritism and Rivalry

Abraham's first born was Ishmael, through their servant Hagar. In time, Sarah could not stand being around Hagar because of her jealousy and impatience, and the result was that Isaac was favored over Ishmael (Genesis 16: 3-5). This pattern of dysfunction was repeated in the generations that followed. Isaac himself favored Esau over Jacob (Genesis 25: 27-28). Rachel, in turn, favored Jacob. Jacob, when he married, also favored Rachel over Leah (Genesis 29: 30). Later, when he had his twelve sons, he favored Joseph and Benjamin (Genesis 37: 3).

b. Giving into Fear

Abraham instructed his wife Sarah to pretend to be his sister (Genesis 20: 2). The same scenario was repeated with Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 26: 9). Jacob, out of fear of being left out from the blessing, lied to his father, Isaac (Genesis 27: 1-29).

c. Handling of Conflict

As a result of jealousy and resentment, the families never learned to talk about their conflicts or sort things out amicably. Rather, when the tension got severely strained, both physical and emotional separation took place. Although it was Sarah's idea for Hagar to become pregnant by Abraham, Sarah eventually harbored bitterness and jealousy. It got to a point that Abraham had to send Hagar and Ishmael physically away (Genesis 21: 8-14). Similarly, with Isaac's offspring. When Esau was tricked out of his birthright, he begrudged Jacob. Tension between them grew and finally Jacob had to be sent away physically by Rebekah (Genesis 27: 42-45). Likewise, with Jacob, he himself left Laban when they were not able to sort matters between themselves (Genesis 31: 1-3). This carried on with his sons – Joseph was sent away by his own brothers as a result of their jealousy towards Joseph (Genesis 37: 25-28).

Dysfunction is the gift that keeps on giving.

2. God is Working Behind the Scenes

Still, through a family rife with deceit, competitiveness, envy, and greed, God worked through them. Jesus came through the tribe of Judah, born to Leah (Genesis 29: 35), a wife that Jacob did not even love. Judah was also not the firstborn. He was fourth (Genesis 29: 35), after Reuben, Simeon and Levi.

Isn't this typical of how God works. Sometimes he meanders and accomplishes his will through the most unlikely people and circumstances. If left to us, we would have predicted that the Messiah would spring up from the firstborn or from Joseph, the one who stood out from the rest. God is the real worker behind the scenes.

The nation of Israel eventually came from this dysfunctional family of Jacob and his sons. Can good come out of a dysfunctional family? Absolutely, because God is the miracle worker behind the scenes, and He works in mysterious ways.

Do you feel defective not being the favored son or daughter? Have you been labeled the "black sheep of the family?" Have you been disgraced and humiliated for not bringing worldly glory to your family? Well, here's some good news - you are now a likely candidate to be used by God. Do you take encouragement from God's way of working? It is so unlike man's!

Day Five : God Disciplines Those Whom He Loves

Reading: Genesis 31: 1-7, 38-55; 32: 1-21

Questions for Reflection

1. Later on in life, Jacob spoke about God differently, seen in Genesis 31: 5, 32: 9-12. Compare this with his earlier statement in Genesis 27: 20, some twenty years earlier. How are they different?
2. What happened to Jacob's life that changed his relationship with God? Was it because of the good life that came with the blessing or the discipline from a God who loved him? (Genesis 31: 38-42).
3. How do you see hardship in your life? Do you see His love or His curse through all this?
4. Given his deceitful streak, how did Jacob work being under Laban for twenty years? Did he carry on being deceitful? Was there any change at the core of his character?

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5. In Genesis 31: 26-30, 48-53, Laban described himself as a reasonable person and a victim of a misunderstanding between him and Jacob. What does this show about his perception of himself? How does a person become like that?

 6. How did Laban decide to sort the tension between Jacob and himself? (Genesis 31: 43-55). What does this show about his character?

Insights

1. Its All About Me

Even though Laban learned that he was blessed because of God's working through Jacob, in Genesis 30: 27, he did not change, nor did he turn to God himself. He was so attached to his idol (Genesis 31: 31-32). He was overcome with greed. He pursued a "peaceful" relationship with Jacob only to maintain the blessing that would flow into his territory because of Jacob. Even with all this, Laban still tried to cut corners in his dealings with Jacob. All Laban cared about was himself. Three examples of his "It's all about me" attitude: tricking Jacob into working seven years without pay just to marry one of his daughters, tricking Jacob a second time into working another seven years without pay in order to let him marry the daughter of his choice, and finally being completely conniving in order to get Jacob to stay on another six years, 20 years in all. He had little empathy for Jacob. (Perhaps God was working things out so that Jacob got a taste of his own medicine. After all, what better way for Jacob to see the down side of his own character than by seeing first hand what it felt like to be under the rule of a deceitful person with no empathy like Laban.) Bottom line, Laban cared little about other people. His own interests were first and foremost in his mind. Worst of all, he did not even see his own selfishness. People who

demonstrate this trait often lose their close relationships eventually because others get tired of being in a one-way relationship with them.

Are you a one-way person with others around you? Do you give as well as receive? Are you so business minded like Laban that God has little appeal for you? Is everything always about you? Ask those in your small group how they perceive you. Ask your spouse and those close to you outside the small group for feedback.

2. Do Not Get Bitter, Get Better

In Genesis 31: 38-42, Jacob talked about the manner in which God intervened in his life. This stood in contrast with how he had spoken about God some twenty years earlier. Through trickery he got the blessing from Isaac. Jacob may have expected an easy life to follow after stealing the blessing from his brother, but since God is the controller of all blessing, it turned out quite differently from what he had expected. He never saw his mother after the hasty escape from his brother Esau. His life became difficult under Laban. However, through all this, Jacob did not get bitter. Instead, he got better in his relationship with God. God became very personal and real to him. God was intricately involved in his affairs.

3. Shallow Reconciliation and Little Empathy Are First Cousins

When Laban saw that God began to bless Jacob and that he was benefiting from that, he was careful to not abort his relationship with Jacob. Being a cunning man himself, he negotiated a treaty with Jacob. He was so shallow. His approach was simply to “let bygones be bygones”. That was his idea of reconciliation, seen in Genesis 31: 26-30, 48-53. He was shallow in his relationship with Jacob, but was a shrewd businessman, caring for himself primarily with little empathy for others. People who are not able to empathize with others often have a shallow approach to reconciliation with others. Are you known for being shallow with others? Your inability to empathize with others might have something to do with this. These two traits go hand in hand like first cousins.

Day Six:

God Enables Us to Break the Cycle

Reading: Genesis 32: 22-33:20

Questions for Reflection

1. Why did Jacob insist on a blessing when he met the man of God in Genesis 32: 26? Why did he want a blessing when he had already obtained it through Isaac some twenty years before?
2. In Genesis 33: 4, Esau ran to Jacob and wept aloud. How does this compare with his earlier attitude when he found out that Jacob had cheated him of his blessing?
3. What are the essentials for a proper reconciliation, which can be seen in both Esau and Jacob?
4. How does this reconciliation compare to that between Laban and Jacob?

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5. What had happened during the twenty years that Jacob was away which had changed Esau? What do you think that Esau went through to get the blessing that he lost? Is time always the best cure?
 6. Let's look at two statements that Jacob made about seeing God's face, one in 32: 30, and another in Genesis 33: 10. What is the relationship between the two?
 7. With whom do YOU need to be reconciled? What is holding you back? Is there anyone helping you?

Insights

1. Wrestle with God, Not Resort to Short Cuts

It is hard to know why Jacob insisted on a blessing from a man of God in Genesis 32: 22-30. Perhaps all this while he knew that his earlier blessing was obtained through deception and fraud, but that this time he wanted a sincere blessing from God himself, without double-dealing, but through wrestling. The positive of Jacob's character was that he was the kind of man who pursued wholeheartedly what he wanted. This time, what he wanted was to be godly, and he did not resort to sinful means, or short cuts. Instead, he fought for what he wanted by wrestling with God, the way Jesus wrestled in Gethsemane. In the end, he was blessed, but it came with a limp, perhaps symbolizing that his blessing in life was to come with some trials.

2. Gain Self Awareness and Get Reconciled

Through God's providence, Jacob heard that Esau was coming. The former trickster was prepared to receive Esau's wrath, but instead he was welcomed into his older brother's arms. After twenty years of separation, they finally got united. Those twenty years had done them both a lot of good. They had both gone their separate ways, and graduated from the school of "hard knocks". They both gained some self-awareness. They saw their shortcomings. Jacob made restitution, and Esau accepted it. Esau himself had done well, Genesis 33:9. His demeanor with Jacob showed his willingness to forgive. Upon Esau's invitation to live with him at Seir, Jacob did not decline it outwardly, but quietly changed his mind and went to Succoth. Perhaps he knew that living with Esau would not be the best for his family, given Esau's connection with the Hittites through marriage. Still, there was a deep and wonderful reconciliation at the end.

God will always work something out for us to come face to face with our past in order to deal with it and to then move on in life more secure, settled and sobered, and more humble. Ironically, Jacob passed his problems down through his twelve sons, showing favoritism with some of them, and causing the cycle to be repeated.

Dysfunction is the gift that keeps on giving...

As a church we need to let others know that God is able to bless them. When their needs are met through His blessing, they will be able to break their unhealthy cycles, and not repeat them. It is through the blessing that we will have the power to break unhealthy cycles and bless others.

References

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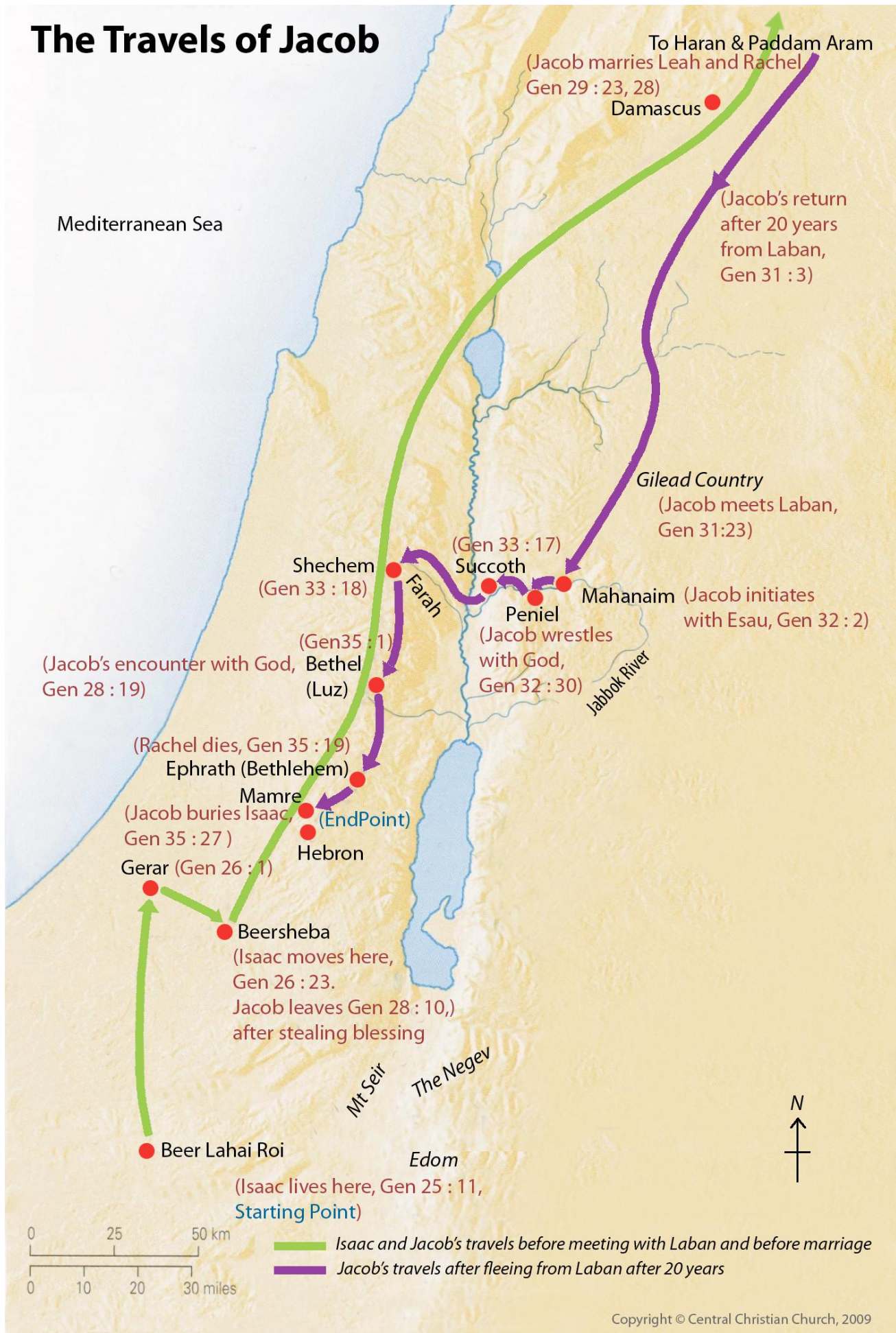
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MAP 1: THE TRAVELS OF JACOB





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