

Messy Life: The Story of Jacob

Part 17


Common Struggles of Covenant Living

TALKING WALKINGPOINTS

Leader's Guide

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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. —Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. —Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- ① From Sunday's sermon, what did you **like best**, or what **caught your attention most**—and **why**?

Observation—*What do I see?*

- ② Jacob's life was at risk because he stole his brother's blessing. As he fled, God appeared to him in a dream, **promising** to take care of him, and in response, Jacob **promised** to be faithful to God. Jacob named the location where God met him "Bethel", literally "God's house" (Genesis 28:18–22). Later, in Genesis 31:11 & 13, **how** did God identify himself and **what** did he command Jacob to do?
- ③ In Genesis 31:13, God called himself "the God **of Bethel**", and then emphasized that location twice—"where you anointed a pillar, **where** you made a vow to Me". But then his command got less specific. When Jacob returned, he settled in pagan Shechem—where his daughter got raped—rather than Bethel. It went downhill from there. After **ten years** in Shechem, God got more specific: "**Trash your idols and go to My house!**" (35:1-4). How would you describe Jacob at this point in his life?

Interpretation—*What does it mean?*

- ④ Ten years earlier, God had told him to abandon his deceptive identity (32:28). Had he done so? Compare each phrase of Genesis 32:28 with those of 35:10. What does the additional line in 35:10 ("Your name **is** Jacob...")—ten years **after** he was told to abandon that identity! (32:28)—suggest to you?
- ⑤ According to Deuteronomy 7:7–9, what was God's motivation for choosing Israel as his special possession? According to Exodus 32:9, how faithful was Israel at fulfilling their calling?

Did this surprise God? (See Isaiah 46:9-10.) Did Jacob's apathy and worldliness surprise God?

Application—*What do I do with this?*

- ⑥ Since God's plans are not thwarted by human apathy, does it matter? Why or why not?
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- ⑦ { How was Jacob negatively impacted by his own apathy and worldliness?
- How was God negatively impacted by Jacob's apathy and worldliness?
- ⑧ What safeguards can we put in place so that we don't follow Jacob's dishonoring example?

① This is just an ice-breaker, a discussion-starter. Enjoy it, but don't spend too much time on it.

② **God identified himself as** “the God of Bethel” and **commanded Jacob to** “arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.”

③ Jacob had been blessed with matchless promises—“I’m your God, I’ll protect you, I’ll bless you, and I’ll bring you home safely”—and in return Jacob **promised to be faithful** to God. **But he hasn’t been!** Jacob has appreciated God’s blessings, but he seems to be taking them for granted. He certainly has not fulfilled his promise to God. In Genesis 28:20–22 Jacob **vowed** God that “Yahweh will be my God...and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.” He **certainly** failed to fulfill the first part of his vow! He had idols—which is breaking the first and second commandments! Exodus 20:3–5 commands that: “You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God...”. Whether Jacob followed through and gave 10% to the Lord is unlikely, for that would suggest that he had been sacrificing to the Lord all those ten years in Shechem. There’s no indication of that. So, it seems that Jacob has failed miserably to fulfill his vow and his responsibilities to God (Matthew 5:33–37).

④ Has Jacob “abandon his deceptive identity”? While it seems that his deceptive manipulation of others is reduced, he certainly is **self-deceived!** He made an explicit vow to be a worshiper of Yahweh alone, and yet he has household idols. The fact that in Genesis 35:10 God says: “Your name **is** Jacob...” leads me to the conclusion that he’s still quite “Jacobesque”! Deception still has a hold on his heart. James 1:26 says: “If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless.” Jacob’s tongue has still been praising idols. So sad.

⑤ God’s motivation for choosing Israel as his special possession was **not** “because they were numerous” (ie. impressive or strong), **but rather** “because he loved them” in a sovereign, salvific way (Deuteronomy 7:7–9).

How faithful was Israel at fulfilling their calling—they were an abject failure (Exodus 32:9)!

⑥ God’s sovereignty in no way minimizes our obligations to him.
Even though he knows that we will sin, we are obligated not to sin.

⑦ How was **Jacob** negatively impacted by his own apathy and worldliness? He not only was not living faithfully himself, he did not pass on the faith to his family—his own son raped his father’s concubine!

How was **God** negatively impacted by Jacob’s apathy and worldliness? God deserves that we love him with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength. Jacob robbed God of the honor he deserved.

⑧ Be prepared with your own answers, but wait for group members to speak first.
Make sure that responses are concrete. *“Change doesn’t happen in fuzzy-land!”*

Sermon Summary Genesis 35:8-29

As we learned in our last lesson, Jacob's family repented and put away the foreign gods they had come to worship and made their way to Bethel where they worshipped the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. But would Jacob's family continue to walk with God or would they revert back to the ways of their pagan neighbors? It's always an open question—for them and for us. That is why Jesus commands us to take up our crosses and follow him daily. Every day is a new day—with new opportunities to trust and serve him, or with opportunities to turn away and pursue the things of this world.

This section of Scripture is a reminder that the life of God's children isn't always about dramatic deliverances or tense tales of fear, faith, and failure. It also deals with pretty basic earthy matters (Gen. 35:8). Jacob had known Deborah all his life, and when she died it was a sad day in Jacob's household. Death is something we all must contend with.

God calls Jacob by the name of Israel (vv.9-10). The idea seems to be, "You are not who you used to be, so you must not live like you used to live." If you are a follower of Christ, that is true of you as well (Gal. 2:20). We are to live out of our new spiritual identity. After reminding Jacob of his new identity, God reminded Jacob exactly who it was he was now serving (vv.11-13). God is able to accomplish all these things for Jacob because of who he is. He is God Almighty—in Hebrew it is El Shaddai.

In the midst of his grief over the death of Deborah, Jacob worships God (v.14-15). Worship and grief and not antithetical. We can worship God in the midst of our grief because of who God is—he is all powerful, he is faithful and gracious. He always keeps his promises! And on the trip from Bethel to Ephrath, tragedy strikes again. This time it is totally unexpected and the target is Jacob's beloved wife Rachel (vv.16-20). Struggles are common to all. Tragedies strike every home. None of us are immune. This is a fallen world. With the entrance of sin into the world came death.

Verse 21 is a great reminder of the need to move forward in life after experiencing a tragedy like this. It is easy to become stuck in time—fixated on the pain of a loved one's death. That's understandable, but it's not healthy. Staying stuck doesn't promote personal healing. Perhaps worst of all, it robs others of your love and attention. You must choose to move forward, as difficult as that may be.

After Rachel's death, Reuben, Israel's firstborn son, had an affair with Bilhah, his mother's rival's maid (v.22). Whatever the motivations, it was a horrible offense. But while it appears that Israel took no action against either Reuben or Bilhah, this only added to the family tension and dysfunction. This act cost Reuben his birthright—his inheritance (Gen. 49:3-4).

How often do we make decisions in the moment that cost us so much in the end? If we repent, God will forgive the sin, but he does not always protect us from the consequences of our decisions. One poor decision can permanently change the course of your life, and the lives of others. Free will is a beautiful thing and a dangerous thing. We must continually give attention to our spiritual lives. The Bible warns that Satan prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Satan knows your Achilles heel, your weakness, spiritually speaking, and he will patiently look for opportunities to exploit it. He is crafty that way. Where are you most susceptible to Satan's advances? In that area, you must prayerfully ask for God's strength and protection. Every day we must take up our crosses and follow Jesus, die to self and determine to live for God, put on our spiritual armor and ready ourselves for battle.

At this point in the story, the Biblical writer felt it appropriate to recap the names of the sons of Jacob because they were to become the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel (vv.22-26). In verses 27-29, we learn of Isaac's death. You ever noticed how sometimes it takes a funeral to bring the family back together? Distance and tensions can keep us apart—but death can bring us back together.

Relationships are the most important thing in life. (Not work, not money, not things.) Make time for one another. Don't just talk about going on that family vacation, do it while you still can, because we have no promise of tomorrow. Tell those you care about how much you appreciate them. Express it, verbally. We all need to be encouraged. We all want to feel like we are making a difference in the world. Because relationships are so important, make reconciliation a top priority. This is especially true among family members, but it applies to every relationship. Life is too short for us to nurse grudges. We need to learn to forgive each other so that we can rebuild those damaged relationships while we still have the opportunity.

With whom do you need to seek to make things right? The Bible says that we are to be at peace with all men, as far as it depends upon us. It takes two to reconcile, but it only takes one to initiate that reconciliation. Why not let that one be you?

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

In the Book of Proverbs, Solomon—the wisest of men (see 1 Kings 4:29–34)—wrote 3,000 proverbs, giving wisdom for common struggles of covenant living.

Let's use the "Five Question Bible Study" method to explore a few of them...

Monday— Study Proverbs 3:5-7.

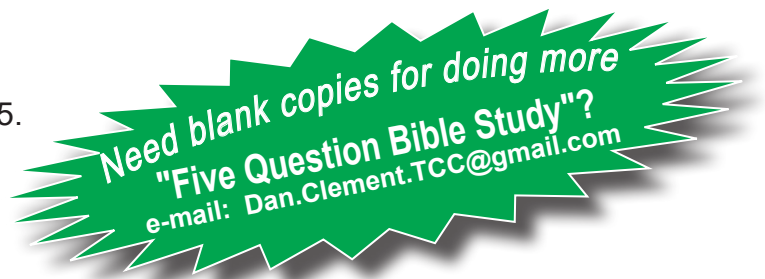
Tuesday— Study Proverbs 4:23.

Wednesday— Study Proverbs 6:10-11 & 12:15.

Thursday— Study Proverbs 10:9 & 11:2.

Friday— Study Proverbs 12:17-18.

Saturday— Study Proverbs 16:28-29.



Bible Text: _____

Date: _____



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would **this text** answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]