



Frisko First

JACOB: THE STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY, ACCEPTANCE, AND BELONGING. • JACOB •
GENESIS 25-33 • 2/6/2022

MAIN POINT

Parental attachment and family dynamics. (Gen 15:19-28) Jacob and Esau demonstrate different pictures of masculinity. Jacob and Esau demonstrate different images of masculinity and two very different experiences of parental attachment. Both Isaac and Rebecca practiced favoritism and sowed the seeds of distrust– the dysfunction ends up costing everyone.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Do you have siblings? What three words best describe your sibling relationships growing up? Why?

What was the worst thing you ever did to one of your siblings? What was the worst thing done to you by a sibling?

For those with siblings, disagreements and fights inevitably pop up. Fortunately most relationships turn out positively despite the poor choices that are made. Jacob and Esau were biblical siblings who had a rocky relationship, but one that by the grace of God saw restoration. Jacob's relationship with Esau directly paralleled his relationship with God. This week's Scripture passages from the life of Jacob provide a vivid picture of the extent God will go to in order to teach us dependency on Him and the sufficiency of His grace.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 25:19-34.

**What kind of a person (character traits) do you attribute to Jacob? How about Esau?
What kind of person was he?**

Like many brothers, Esau and Jacob had different interests. Esau enjoyed the outdoors and became a skilled hunter, often bringing wild game to supplement the family's diet. Jacob preferred the family business and was a skilled farmer and herdsman (Gen. 25:27). Esau also happened to be the firstborn, which carried great weight in their culture. The firstborn received a double portion of the inheritance. The firstborn also became the judge of the family after the parents died, and his life was characterized by a sense of blessing that accompanied these birthrights.

What stands out to you most about the interaction between Esau and Jacob in verses 29-34?

Why would Jacob strive to obtain Esau's birthright? What does this tell us about him?

Jacob took advantage of his brother to get what he wanted. Jacob's action violated rules for honest business dealings. God would later set forth His standards in the Law (Lev. 25:14,17). He also would condemn those who cheated others in business (Mic. 2:1-2) and would encourage people to care for those who were hungry and thirsty (Prov. 25:21). Neither Jacob nor Esau exhibited honorable behavior, and this would continue throughout the next several years.

| HAVE A FEW VOLUNTEERS READ GENESIS 27:1–28:9.

What tactics did Jacob use to get the blessing from Isaac? What did Jacob's blessing mean? Why was it powerful?

What do Jacob's actions reveal about his true character? About his relationship with God at this point in his life?

Earlier, Jacob's taking of the firstborn's birthright from Esau had necessitated little, if any, deception. To get the blessing from Isaac, however, Jacob brazenly deceived his aging father and piled lie upon lie. By honoring his mother's wishes and obeying her, he dishonored his father and defrauded his brother. Rebekah and Jacob demonstrated a complete lack of integrity. They both acted knowing they were lying to and hurting others. When Isaac gave Jacob an opportunity to identify himself truthfully, Jacob continued the deception. The blessing Jacob received was a powerful blessing of familial authority and of favor in God's eyes. Jacob received a significant identity through this blessing.

Describe the difference between Jacob and Esau after the blessing. Who followed their father's calling? Why did they follow their father's law?

What type of blessing have you received from your parents? How has this affected your identity or decision making?

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 32:22-32.

Why did God engage Jacob in a wrestling match? What was the purpose of God injuring Jacob?

Has God ever forced you to confront conflict after you have continually tried to avoid it? Describe the experience.

Jacob's encounter with God at Peniel marked a turning point in his life. In a wrestling match, God confronted Jacob's preoccupation with control. We struggle to learn the same lesson in our spiritual lives. We, too, attempt to handle many things in our own strength and by our own effort, rather than relying on God to accomplish His purpose through us.

What is so appealing about self-reliance? Why is it dishonoring to God? What aspects of a relationship with God do we miss out on when we are focused on ourselves?

A dislocated thigh didn't prevent Jacob from further engagement in the struggle. But Jacob agreed to release his opponent only if the man would bless him. Jacob must have suspected that his adversary was no ordinary man, because Jacob demanded something he couldn't provide for himself. Jacob's plea arose out of his sense of desperate need and his knowledge that he was in the presence of the One with power to meet that need.

How does Jacob's new name reflect both who Jacob was and who he would be in the future?

| HAVE A FEW VOLUNTEERS READ GENESIS 33:1-20.

How would you describe the different emotions that Jacob and Esau were feeling?

What was the motivation for the blessings and generosity that they had for one another? How might their interaction have been different if Jacob had not encountered God the night before?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What about Jacob's experience with God reminds you of the gospel?

How is the current state of your relationship with God impacting your relationships with others? What is one step toward maturity you can take this week?

PRAYER

Close in prayer, asking God to allow us to exhibit the courage, persistence, and humility in our times of crisis that Jacob discovered in the midst of his. Ask God to remove our self-reliances and change our identity to make us more like Him. Pray that He will remind us of His sufficiency and grace this week.

COMMENTARY

| GENESIS 25:19-34

25:27-28. The differences between Esau and Jacob, already apparent at birth, became more pronounced as the boys grew up. Esau was a rough-and-tumble hunter and outdoorsman; Jacob was quiet and stayed at home. The differences between the boys highlighted a division between the parents: Isaac, something of an outdoorsman himself (24:63), loved his rugged son Esau, while Rebekah loved her more domestic son Jacob, even teaching him how to cook.

25:29-34. Esau's impatient, appetite-driven life contrasted sharply with Jacob's shrewd, calculating character. Esau willingly traded his birthright—the right of the firstborn son to a double portion (or perhaps two-thirds) of the inheritance (Deut. 21:17)—for the chance to eat some... red stuff. Because of his fateful decision, Esau picked up the alternate name Edom ("Red"), which would be carried by the people group stemming from him (32:3). And because Jacob had made him swear to sell his birthright, the decision could not be undone.

| GENESIS 27:1–28:9

27:1-4. Isaac was now over 100 years old. Though he would live to 180—at least 20 years beyond this point (35:28)—Isaac may have been sick at the time, since his vision was obviously poor and he was so concerned to bless his older son Esau before he died. The blessing given by a clan patriarch to his heir was of great significance since it formally conferred the right to rule over the clan following the patriarch's death. As with covenant-making (26:28-30), a patriarchal blessing was accompanied by a delicious meal.

27:5-17. Following Near Eastern tradition (18:9-10), Rebekah could not be in the immediate company of males—even family members—who were conducting business. However, she was listening to the men from nearby. After learning of Isaac’s intentions for Esau, Rebekah came up with a scheme to overturn the plans. Perhaps she did it because she remembered the decades-old prophecy about Jacob dominating his older brother (25:23). With this the Bible paints a picture of a troubled family: Rebekah using her son (not “their son”) to destroy her husband’s plans, and Jacob agreeing to lie to his father and cheat his brother. A curse of an unexpected sort did result for both Jacob and Rebekah: their scheme forced Jacob to leave his father and mother (28:5), and the Bible gives no indication that Rebekah ever saw her favorite son again.

27:18-29. Isaac was blind, but he could still use his other senses in addition to his reasoning. To overcome this, Jacob used at least five different things to deceive his father; goatskins to make his hands seem rough and hairy (v. 23), the cooked goat his mother prepared (v. 25), his brother’s clothes in order to smell like Esau (v. 27), alcohol to impair his father’s judgment (v. 25), and blatant lies (vv. 19,20,24). Jacob’s craftiness paid off since his father blessed him. Isaac’s blessing included four elements: agricultural prosperity (v. 28)—even as God had done for Isaac (26:12); international respect and success (27:29); a command directing Jacob to be master over the entire clan; and the transference of the protective provision of cursing and blessing that God had once given Jacob’s grandfather Abraham (12:3).

27:31-38. Esau apparently had to awaken his blind father, who was confused at first, but began to tremble uncontrollably when he realized he had given someone other than Esau the right to rule the clan. Esau complained that Jacob had now cheated him twice, first gaining the double portion of inheritance (25:31-33), and now the clan’s headship. Jacob, whose name sounds similar to words meaning “deceitfulness” and “to supplant/replace,” had lived up to his name. Having lost every desirable blessing, Esau begged his father to find some way to bless him, too.

27:39-40. Isaac’s response to Esau was much shorter than Jacob’s blessing and was more of an “anti-blessing.” Creating an ironic wordplay with phrases from Jacob’s blessing (v. 28), Isaac stated that Esau would live away from the richness of the land and from the dew of the sky. Jacob would “be master” (v. 29), but Esau would serve. Living a life of violence by the sword, Esau’s only consolation was that he would someday break Jacob’s yoke from his neck.

27:41-46. For a second time in this chapter, Rebekah intervened to change Jacob’s destiny. Her latest plan was for Jacob to stay with his uncle Laban in Haran—hundreds of miles away—until Esau’s anger subsided. Otherwise, she feared, she would lose both her sons in one day—Jacob by murder, Esau by capital punishment (9:6). The few days, however, turned out to be more than 20 years (31:38).

28:1-5. As with Abraham in the previous generation, Isaac was concerned that his youngest son not take a wife from the Canaanite women. Before Jacob's departure Isaac extended to him two major covenant blessings: offspring and land. The blessing of being fruitful was previously given to Adam (1:28), Noah and his sons (9:1,7), Abraham (17:6), and Ishmael (17:20). Isaac invoked it using the name "El Shaddai" (God Almighty), a name first revealed to Abraham. The second blessing was possession of the land God gave to Abraham, a blessing that only God could give. Having received these blessings, Jacob left for his mother's ancestral home of Paddan-aram.

| GENESIS 32:22–33:20

32:24-30. Now Jacob experienced his third and final encounter with God while on a journey. A man, understood by later Israelites to be God or an angel possessing the authority of God (Hos 12:3-4), wrestled with the elderly patriarch until daybreak. The fight ended when the divine being dislocated Jacob's hip. Jacob, injured but still unwilling to release his grip on the being, demanded that He bless him. Asserting His authority over Jacob, the man changed Jacob's name to Israel, linking the name with the fact that the patriarch had struggled with God, as well as with men, and had prevailed. The renamed man now renamed the place Peniel—or Penuel—lit "the face of God," because he had seen God face to face and yet was spared from death.

33:1-11. Following his transforming encounter with God, Jacob went from hiding behind his wives and children (32:22-23) to boldly taking the lead in protecting his family. In his encounter with Esau and his 400 men, Jacob went on ahead of the group, arranging his family behind him according to their status. In a display of respect unparalleled in the Bible, Jacob bowed down to Esau seven times as he approached. Even as Jacob had been changed the previous night, it seems that Esau had changed too. The once-estranged brothers hugged... kissed, and wept together in gracious reunion.

| GENESIS 35:1-15

35:1-5. In his time of trouble God called Jacob back to Bethel, the spot where he had first met God. There Jacob was to build a more formal altar to God than the marker he had left there 20 years earlier (28:22). God's command in Genesis 35:1 represents the only time in Genesis that He ordered an altar be built. The patriarch ordered his family and all who were with him to prepare themselves for an encounter with the living God. This preparation involved three things: first, getting rid of the foreign gods among them. Second, the people were to purify themselves, a command that normally involved washing the body and clothing as well as avoidance of sexual

contact. Third, they were to change their clothes. Having purified themselves, they experienced God's protection on their journey to Bethel. Jacob's sons were marked for death by the Canaanites in the region, but God sent a terror on the nearby inhabitants, and no one pursued the clan.

35:6-8. At Bethel, known to the Canaanites as Luz, Jacob built "El-bethel" (God of Bethel), his second named altar (33:20). Rebekah's nurse Deborah, a woman who probably was like a beloved second mother to Jacob, died at Bethel. Her death, along with Isaac's in verse 28, marked the passing of a generation.

35:9-15. God's final recorded words to Jacob came as He spoke to him for the second time since the patriarch returned from Paddan-aram. In this proclamation the Lord revealed Himself as God Almighty, a name for God revealed first to Abraham (17:1) and later known to Isaac (28:3). The 26 Hebrew words in God's speech reaffirm promises previously made to Jacob (28:13). At the same time God blessed Jacob with words that enlarged previously given promises. The blessing previously given to Adam, Noah, and Noah's sons (1:28; 9:1)—be fruitful and multiply—was now extended to Jacob. For the first time also it is stated that kings and an assembly of nations would come from the patriarch. After the revelatory words God "went up" (withdrew) from the place. To memorialize the event and bring closure to his vow to make Yahweh his God (28:21), Jacob set up a stone marker, pouring a drink offering on it (2 Sam. 23:16) and anointing it with oil.