



GENESIS

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FOUR OAKS CHURCH

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Genesis 25:19-34

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

—James 4:2-3

Count Your Blessings

God is in the business of blessing his covenant people. In this section of scripture, Isaac displays the fruit of trusting in God's promises by earnestly praying for 20 years for his bride to conceive children. Instead of one child, they were finally given twins—a double blessing. This gift, however, came with deep meaning. God tells Rebekah that her twins and their families would not be best of friends, but worst of enemies. The twin's appearances and lifestyles will represent the stark difference between trying to earn God's favor and the scandal of being given grace.

Esau's strength and skill and first-born rights all paint the picture of someone who earns and works for everything he has. His father Isaac was pleased with his abilities and sinfully favored him. Nothing in Jacob's life or appearance or birth order says he was a winner. He was second best and unworthy; a deceiver even. He didn't deserve his father's blessing or the birthright. But God showed his sovereign choice in picking Jacob to receive the blessings.

Esau gives up his birthright for a bowl of soup. He represents the world in all its carnality, thinking what is most important is the here and now, not thinking about generational blessings for his posterity. Jacob zealously and shrewdly seeks after the promises and blessings of God in this story and many more in the coming chapters of Genesis because he does not deserve them. He desires for them to be given to him. Oh, how we can relate to these twins!

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.

Grow

1. In what ways do you relate to Esau in your walk with God? Jacob?

2. Is there any worldly desire that you currently want over the blessings of God? Have you forsaken it yet and sought Christ? Why or why not?

Go

1. Which have you desired most this week: the eternal salvation of someone you know (or just met) or a tasty meal/beverage?

2. How would you respond if someone offered you three million dollars to never share the Gospel again?

Group Discussion Questions

1. For those with siblings, share a story that captures your relationship with one another growing up.
2. Esau and Jacob were very different! What are some of these differences (physical features, personality, skills, interests, etc.)?
3. For those with children, talk about some of the differences between your children. How are these differences a reflection of God's wonderful design? How are they challenging in parenting such different children?
4. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a pot of stew. Where might you be tempted to get a "quick fix" instead of holding out for God's best?
5. Rather than graciously serving his brother, Jacob served himself by getting Esau to give up his birthright. Where might you be tempted to serve yourself rather than others?
6. While Jacob and Esau are responsible for their actions, we see that God is in control from the very beginning (verse 22). How might this truth encourage your heart in your current situation?

Additional Reading

from *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* by Craig L. Matthew¹

A Despised Birthright

"Esau said, 'I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?' Jacob said, 'Swear to me now.' So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright." —Genesis 25:32-34

¹"A Despised Birthright." *Ligonier Ministries*, www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/despised-birthright/.

Genesis 25:29–34

Early on, God established the importance of being in the line of those chosen to inherit the promises of salvation (Gen. 17:18–21; 21:8–14). To possess the divine birthright and be part of this chosen seed was the greatest blessing anyone could hope to receive.

As the firstborn of Isaac and Rebekah, the heir of the Lord's promises (26:1–5), Esau should have clung to his status tenaciously. The birthright of the eldest male child in the ancient Near East conferred upon him the headship of the clan and a double share of the inheritance (Deut. 21:15–17). How foolish, then, is Esau to reject this prize (and redemption) when he sells his birthright for stew?

Genesis 25:29–34 depicts Esau as a man who lives only for the moment and does not take the cost of his decisions into account. He stumbles into Jacob's tent, exhausted and looking for food. Esau even says that he is at death's door. While his actions do not substantiate his exaggerated claim, Jacob should not have taken advantage of him. Still, Esau shows just how unthoughtful he is. Surely he was aware of the wonderful promises made to Abraham that could have been his if, by faith, he did not place his temporary hunger pains over the eternal satisfaction tied to his birthright. But Esau lets his belly entice him away from life in God's presence, and therefore, Moses rightly adds that "Esau despised his birthright" (v. 34). John Calvin writes, "It would have been his true wisdom rather to undergo a thousand deaths than to renounce his birthright; which, so far from being confined within the narrow limits of one age alone, was capable of transmitting the perpetuity of a heavenly life to his posterity also."

Having been passed over by the Lord, Isaac's eldest son remains in his sin and cut off from salvation. However, Jacob begins rising to the place of privilege, taking advantage of his brother in order to secure Esau's birthright. The Hebrew of this passage shows us Jacob's cunning act was premeditated and will lead to much strife before he learns the errors of his cleverness. Yet though God did not endorse the way in which Jacob laid claim to his inheritance, He used it nonetheless to make His word to Rebekah come true (Gen. 25:23).

Coram Deo

Matthew Henry comments: "The gratifying of the sensual appetite is that which ruins thousands of precious souls." If we claim to be in Christ, we must be on guard lest the lusts of the flesh become settled in our hearts and give birth to death (James 1:14–15), thereby revealing our profession is false. Consider where you are apt to be most tempted to despise your birthright through sin. Seek accountability to overcome your sinful appetites (Gal. 6:1–3).

For Further Reading

Blomberg, Craig L. *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (The New American Commentary)*. Downers Grove: B&H Publishing Group, 1992.

Genesis 26:1-33

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises . . . —II Peter 1:3-4

God Keeps His Promises

Isaac lived his entire life experiencing the promise-keeping steadfast love of God. He was born miraculously to elderly parents and a barren mother—because God promised them a child. And as Isaac, the promised one, laid himself willingly on an altar, God provided a ram to take his place—because God had promised that his father Abraham’s offspring would outnumber the stars. God moved in Rebekah’s barren womb to bring Isaac children—because God keeps his promises.

In this week’s passage, we see God continuing to make and keep promises to Isaac in difficult circumstances. When famine strikes, God tells Isaac to “sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and I will bless you” (Gen 26:3). He reminds Isaac of His promises to multiply his descendants, to give them the land, and to bless all nations through them (Gen 26:4). But trouble continues. After the famine, Isaac fears he will be killed by the men of the land because of his beautiful wife. Isaac lies (just like his father did) and tells the men Rebekah is his sister. Trials come again when the king sends Isaac away, and the men of the land keep forcing him to move as they quarrel over wells of water. And all of this adversity is happening in the land that God had promised to give Isaac and his offspring.

From a human perspective, things don’t look great, but through it all, God is with Isaac and He keeps His promises. When the famine comes, God shows Isaac where to go. When Isaac fears for his life and even sins by lying, God protects him, restores his wife back to him untouched, and blesses him with a hundredfold of what he had sowed. When the king sends Isaac away and he can’t seem to find water, God provides a well and peace for Isaac in His perfect time. And through it all, God continues to affirm His promises: “Fear not for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham’s sake” (Gen 26:24).

Just like Isaac, we are sojourners who need to cling to the promises of God. We need to open His word and remember His promises every day. When we don't know exactly how our needs will be met, when scary circumstances arise, when we lack courage and fall into sin, when the path that God leads us on is full of bumps and apparent setbacks, we need to remember we walk with a faithful God who has promised us His love, His Son, His Helper—Himself. And our promised land awaits. Somehow, God is working all things together for our good. May we cling to Christ as our Savior through whom God has granted to us His precious and very great promises (II Pet 1:4), and may we remember that all the promises of God find their Yes in Him (II Cor 1:20).

Sermon Notes

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.

Grow

1. What situation(s) in your own life comes to mind when you think about Isaac's struggles in this passage?

2. What promises of God do you need to remember as you walk through trials in this particular season of life?

Go

1. In what ways is God calling you to obedience for the sake of others in ways that feel uncertain or scary?

2. What promises of God can help you share the gospel and love others for Him?

Group Discussion Questions

1. Share some similarities between you and your parents.
2. Isaac gives into fear and lies about his wife Rebekah. What does this say about Isaac's faith in this situation? How might this relate to his father Abraham?
3. Just like God rescued his parents, God rescues Isaac and Rebekah from their sin. What does this say about God's character towards His people? Also, how do God's actions fulfill His promises towards Abraham and his offspring in Genesis 12 & 22?
4. How might you be tempted to give in to fear rather than trust in God? How might God rescue you? How might your group pray for and help you in this area?
5. After God rescues Isaac, Isaac worships the Lord just like his father Abraham did when God rescued him. How might you worship the Lord tonight? How might you teach your children and those around you to worship the Lord?

Additional Reading

From *The Masterpiece of All Promises* by Marshall Segal¹

What promise makes a heaven wherever it goes? Spurgeon goes on to say, "Here is a deep sea of bliss, a shoreless ocean of delight; come, bathe your spirit in it; swim an age, and you shall find no shore; dive throughout eternity, and you shall find no bottom: 'I will be their God.'"

If you're like me, this was not the first verse that came to mind when I first read "the masterpiece of all promises." But the longer we think over this promise — the more we waded out into the waves of this mercy — the more stunning it becomes. The words are short and familiar enough for a two-year-old, and yet no one dies having reached the bottom of this ocean or the height of this heaven. Even when we have spent ten thousand years wandering the new creation with God himself, we will still wonder that he is ours and that we are his.

If we have lost the ability to swim in this promise, it's likely because we have been

¹Segal, Marshall. "The Masterpiece of All Promises." *Desiring God*, 7 Aug. 2019, www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-masterpiece-of-all-promises.

thinking too much on ourselves and not enough on God. We have not let ourselves be lost enough in “the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God” (Romans 11:33). Again, likely because we have thought too long and too hard about ourselves — our needs, our trials, our work, our desires, our relationships, us. In our desperate search for clarity, comfort, and control, we forget how awesomely unsearchable our God is — the God who works for those who wait for him (Isaiah 64:4).

That word — God — gives the other four words in this promise their grandeur. His sovereign power and infinite wisdom and unrivaled creativity and scandalous love and unrelenting justice and inexhaustible compassion and mercy — his God-ness — make any of his promises beautiful and trustworthy, but especially this one: “I will be their God.” Your God.

Genesis 27

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. You are good and do good; teach me your statutes. The insolent smear me with lies, but with my whole heart I keep your precepts; their heart is unfeeling like fat, but I delight in your law. It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments. Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word. I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me. Let your steadfast love comfort me according to your promise to your servant. —Psalm 119:67-76

Taunting Twins: From Birthright to Blessing Through Deception and Deceit

Meditating on Genesis 27 can leave you wondering, “who is the hero in this story?” None of the members of Isaac's family seem to be above reproach here. This account reminds us that anytime God’s people trust more in their own ways and timing than in his, afflictions are sure to follow.

Notice what starts out as a mother wanting God’s will for her son (Gen 25:23), via the

wrong means, ultimately leads the whole family into chaos. We see the shameful sight of Jacob dressed up like a goat, lying and deceiving his father. We see a wounded marriage and a broken sibling relationship lasting decades to come. We see Esau plotting revenge through murder, and Rebecca sending Jacob away, perhaps never seeing him again.

God is the hero of Genesis 27. God's plan, despite our sin, is never thwarted. His grace, glory, and divine purposes continue on. God did not need Rebecca and Jacob to lie and deceive to accomplish what He foretold. He simply desires our faith and obedience.

Sermon Notes

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
 2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.
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Grow

1. Rebecca knew what God foretold, yet attempted to control the situation to ensure Jacob's blessing. Where are you tempted right now to doubt God's power and ability to accomplish His will in your life or family?

2. Often we view our afflictions as God looking down on us as an angry father. What view of God does the psalmist in Psalm 119:67-76 have in the affliction that followed his sin?

Go

1. How are you doing at lifting up Christ at home? How can you be pressing down the peace of Christ into your family's (or roommate's) chaos?
2. How are you doing at lifting up Christ at work? Are you taking opportunities to open up to coworkers about an affliction God in His goodness and love has led you through?

Group Discussion Questions

1. For those who are familiar with personality tests (Enneagram, Myers-Briggs, etc), share about your personality type and what might be some of your inherent weaknesses/temptations towards sin.
2. In this story, we see each person's physical and spiritual weaknesses on full display. Talk about each character and how you might identify with their challenges.
3. Talk about the effects of lying and deception found in this story. How might it serve as a warning to you?
4. We also see God's blessing. How is God's sovereign grace and complete control revealed in this story (remember God's promise in Gen 25:23)?
5. How might God's blessing upon very sinful people encourage your heart and remind you of the gospel today?

Additional Reading

From *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges¹

The Christian living in disobedience also lives devoid of joy and hope. But when he begins to understand that Christ has delivered him from the reign of sin, when he begins to see that he is united to Him who has all power and authority and that it is possible to walk in obedience, he begins to have hope, and as he hopes in Christ, he begins to have joy. In the strength of this joy, he begins to overcome the sins that have so easily entangled him. He then finds that the joy of a holy walk is infinitely more satisfying than the fleeting pleasures of sin. But to experience this joy, we must make some choices. We must choose to forsake sin, not only because it is defeating to us but because it grieves the heart of God.

¹ *The Pursuit of Holiness*, by Jerry Bridges, Navpress, 1978, p. 125.

Genesis 28

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. —2 Peter 3:9

In a chapter chock full of patriarchal history and heavenly revelation, the events occurring to Jacob here culminate in an amazing vow in verses 20-21. An initial reading of Jacob's vow can make it seem as though he's saying, "Well, *if* God will be with me, and *if* he will keep me in this way, and *if* He will give me bread to eat...*then* the Lord shall be my God"

Instead, what Jacob is doing is accepting the terms of what God stated in verses 13-16. Jacob is not expressing uncertainty in what God will do in promising His presence, His preservation, and His restoration, but is both affirming God's past caretaking and anticipating a future fulfillment of God's promises. Isn't this exactly what an encounter with God should produce in us?

Too often, my encounters with God lead me less to worship and more to selfishness, like the way we can mistakenly read Jacob's response—I provide conditions for my faith, I forget what He has done for me in the past, and I doubt His provision for my future. Jacob's first instinct after God revealed heavenly truths to him was to acknowledge his lack of awareness that God had been and already was present.

In the midst of our own personal journeys with Jesus, let us continually be aware of His promises to us. Just as God promised His presence to Jacob, so too does He promise He will always be with us (Hebrews 13:5). Just as God promised His preservation of Jacob, so too does He promise that to us (Psalm 41:2). Just as God promised that He would restore Jacob to the promised land, so too does He promise to one day restore us to our true home in heaven (Hebrews 13:14).

May our individual walks with Christ this week be enriched by the remembrances of what our loving Father has done in the past, what He is doing now, and the promises of what He will do for us in the future.

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.

Grow

1. Verse 17 records that Jacob is afraid. Do you think his fear is about being scared of God or in reverence for God? What would your response be in that situation?

2. What does Jacob's dream seem to mean? What does the dream tell us about God?

Go

1. Which of God's promises from our additional reading speaks to you most in your season of life?

2. Where does God want you to submit in humility?

Group Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you ran away from the Lord (or from home). What was the situation? How did God meet you there?
2. After the fiasco with his brother, Jacob is on the run. What might have been going on in his heart?
3. God appears to Jacob in a dream and restates his promise to Jacob the way He did to his forefathers. What does this reveal about God's character?
4. In the dream, Jacob sees angels ascending and descending on a ladder. What do you think this means? (See John 1:51 for further help.)
5. After God comes down to Jacob, Jacob worships Him and commits to follow Him. In what way has God come down to you? How might you commit to follow Him today?

Additional Reading

From *Revisit God's Promises* by Erik Raymond¹

What are the most significant events that happened in your life? Graduating school? Getting your first job? Getting married? Having children? (If you are younger, what are the big events you are looking forward to?)

You can faithfully endure hard seasons because you know God keeps his word.

God promises to forgive your sins

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. —1 John 1:9*

¹Raymond, Erik. "Revisit God's Promises." *The Gospel Coalition*, 23 Jan. 2018, www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/revisit-gods-promises/.

God promises to never forsake you

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”

—Hebrews 13:5–6

God promises to hear your prayers

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

—1 John 5:14–15

God promises to meet all of your needs

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

—Matthew 6:31–33

God promises to work all things for your good

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

—Romans 8:28

No matter what you are going through you have to know that you can keep going because God keeps His word. Do what God has told you to do. And as you are doing it, revisit what He has promised you.

Genesis 29:1-30

. . . if we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.
—2 Timothy 2:13

An Un-Fairytale Wedding

Genesis 29 finds Jacob far from home and hopelessly love-struck. Preying on his vulnerable state, Laban deceives Jacob, cheating him into years of unwanted labor. It may have been common for men to pay a “bride price,” but seven years of labor was an extended period compared to what was typical. Fourteen years was another story. Just when Jacob had a chance to repay Laban’s dishonesty with redemptive kindness, he did the opposite by neglecting Leah and favoring Rachel, furthering his family’s cycle of jealousy and tension.

The irony is that Laban only did what Jacob had done before him! He disguised one child as the other just as Rebekah and Jacob had done to Isaac a couple chapters previous. Perhaps Rebekah and Laban learned their tricks growing up under the same roof. Whatever the case, Jacob reaped what he had sown, the consequences of his actions changing the fabric of his family forever. The beauty of the story is that those consequences didn’t even begin to negate or thwart God’s promises.

The entire situation was a disastrous mess, but God used it powerfully to give Jacob twelve sons . . . and to begin the line of Judah through Leah. Leah, who probably felt incredible shame and rejection right at the onset of her marriage. Leah, who suffered for long years afterward, learning through pain and the disregard of her husband that her joy could come only from God. Leah, who bore Judah, the lion, the scepter, the line that carried all of our hope through the generations. The same line from which Jesus came and provided the most vivid picture in the history of God’s faithfulness in the midst of our faithlessness.

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
 2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.
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Grow

1. Jacob showing favoritism to one of his wives and her sons wreaked havoc on his family. Are there contexts in your life in which you show favoritism?
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2. This passage doesn't expressly mention God, but knowing that He is the protagonist of the entire Bible, what can we learn about His character from this passage?
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Go

1. How does the story of Jacob's marriages fit into the bigger story of redemption in the Word? Consider how God might desire to use your words/actions/relationships in the coming months to work redemption in the life of someone around you.
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2. Who is someone in your life that isn't aware of the redemptive power God's grace can have in their family? How could you begin to communicate the Gospel to them (whether in overt or subtle ways) this week?
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Group Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you were deceived. What were the circumstances? How did it feel?
2. Jacob “the deceiver” is greatly deceived by Laban. Talk about the circumstances and the cost.
3. We live in a very broken world full of sin & suffering. What are some areas in which you are currently living under the weight of sin & suffering? How might your group pray for you?
4. While God is not mentioned in this story, we can be confident that He is at work. How might you see God’s character and deeds in this story?
5. How might you seek to see God at work in your story? In the story of another group member? Pray for one another as a group to trust in the Lord in the midst of sin & suffering.

Additional Reading

From *God's Mercy in Messed Up Families* by Jon Bloom¹

Why is the Bible loud on sinfully dysfunctional families and quiet on harmonious families?

Well, for one thing, most families aren’t harmonious. Humanity is not harmonious. We are alienated—alienated from God and each other. So put alienated, selfish sinners together in a home, sharing possessions and the most intimate aspects of life, having different personalities and interests, and a disparate distribution of power, abilities, and opportunities, and you have a recipe for a sin-mess.

But there’s a deeper purpose at work in this mess. The Bible’s main theme is God’s gracious plan to redeem needy sinners. It teaches us that what God wants most for us is that we 1) become aware of our sinfulness and 2) our powerlessness to save ourselves, as we 3) believe and love his Son and the gospel He preached, and 4) graciously love one another. And it turns out that the family is an ideal place for all of these to occur.”

¹Bloom, Jon. “God’s Mercy in Messed Up Families.” *Desiring God*, 24 May 2013, www.desiringgod.org/articles/gods-mercy-in-messed-up-families.

For Further Reading

Guzik, David. "Genesis 29 - Jacob's Marriages and Children." Enduring Word, 13 June 2018, enduringword.com/bible-commentary/genesis-29/.

Lyons, Eric. "Traveling By Land in Biblical Times." ApologeticsPress.org, 1 Aug. 2003, www.apologeticspress.org/apPubPage.aspx?pub=2&issue=815.

Genesis 29:31-30:24

Cast all your anxiety on Him because he cares for you.

—1 Peter 5:7

The narrative at the end of Genesis 29 through chapter 30 is heart-wrenching. We feel the pain of Leah for being unloved by her husband. We empathize with Rachel's inability to have children. We grieve the nature of being sinful creatures when Rachel gives Jacob her servant. This story is one filled with jealousy, desire for status in a community, and yearning for affection from a spouse. In many ways, it's a bad story about the bad consequences of bad behavior. It is also a story of how God permeates the bad with His mercy, His love, and His tenderness toward His children. There is an utter lack of peace in Jacob's household: strife between husband and wife and strife between sister and sister, but in the midst of this chaos we are told that, "God looked upon my affliction" (29:32), "God listened to Leah" (30:17), and "God remembered Rachel" (30:22).

What's clear from this story is that it's capturing aspects of Jacob's household over many years. We read about Reuben's birth in 29:32; then in 30:14, Reuben is working during the wheat harvest. Clearly time is elapsing and the issues related to family function and dysfunction occur over a long, arduous period of time.

Does anything in this Biblical account resonate with you (family arguments, favoritism, marital strife)? I want to encourage you today: whatever family life looks like, remember that God remembers you. More than that, God is not overwhelmed or exhausted by you. He wants to lavish His good gifts and His loving kindness on you. In fact, God has given us prayer as a tool by which we can directly commune with Him in an unfiltered manner.

Whatever struggle you are in, prayer is a means by which we can submit to the Lord and be refreshed by Him. This week, as you seek the Lord in quiet times and come together with your community group in not-so-quiet times, use the power of prayer to bring all you have before Him.

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how.

Grow

1. Genesis 30:22 says that "God remembered Rachel." What do you think that means (for example, did God forget? is it a figure of speech?)

2. What do the names of the each of the children mean and how do they signify important aspects of the mother's life?

Go

1. Where is an area of your life where God is calling you to pray to Him for your needs?

2. What is a Psalm that you can meditate on over the next few days as part of your prayer life?

Group Discussion Questions

1. Everyone has at least a little “dysfunction” in their family tree. Without going into detail, feel free to share a little of your dysfunction.
2. Jacob’s family is quite dysfunctional—4 women, 12 sons. What is going on in each of the women’s hearts as they fight for love and approval? How might the gospel speak to each of them?
3. While we may not have chosen this to be the way the 12 tribes of Israel are formed, God did! What does this reveal about God’s character?
4. While you might not have chosen your family dysfunction, how has God used it for good? How are you praying He will bring further redemption out of the brokenness in your family?
5. Rachel had waited for a very long time to have a child, and at the very end of the story, Moses records that “God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her, and opened her womb.” How do you long for God to remember and listen to you today?
6. Spend some time as a group praying for your families, your marriages, and your children (or lack thereof).

Additional Reading

From *A Prayer for Fresh Mercy and the Power of God* by Scotty Smith¹

To you, LORD, I call; you are my Rock, do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who go down to the pit. Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place.

—*Psalm 28:1-2*

¹Smith, Scotty. “A Prayer for Fresh Mercy and the Power of God.” *The Gospel Coalition*, 13 May 2011, www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/scotty-smith/a-prayer-for-fresh-mercy-and-the-power-of-god/.

Holy and loving Father, I praise you for the privilege of running to you right now with hands up, heart out in great need. You always welcome us in our weakness, brokenness and desperation. You never roll your eyes in aggravation, wondering when we're ever going to "get it." You will never turn away from us nor a deaf ear to us. You are the fountain of kindness and the giver of grace upon grace. O, the peace this brings in the chaos of any crisis.

Father, I really need you to show up, for me and for people that I love. I feel like I'm facing a Red Sea which needs parting, a strong army which needs routing, a huge crowd that needs feeding, a dead corpse which needs raising. All that to say, I acknowledge the finite limits of my resources, wisdom and strength. I abandon myself to your supply, timing and ways.

Indeed, hear my cry, and the cries of many of my brothers and sisters in Jesus. Though the details in our situations may vary greatly, our need is just the same. We need the wonders of Jesus' love and the power of his resurrection. We need the wisdom you have promised from above and the mercies you have promised without end. We need the hope of the gospel, the sufficiency of grace and faith to move mountains.

Gracious Father, for the glory of Jesus; for the fame of your name; for the advancing of your kingdom, rescue us from our unbelief. Do exceedingly beyond all we can ask or imagine in our situations, that many might behold the beauty and bounty of the gospel.

Keep us from the guilt of past failures. You don't remember our sins against us, forgive us when we do. Help us in the pain of present wounding. You haven't promised the absence of hurt but the gift of your presence. Free us from the fear of an uncertain future. You've never given us any reason to doubt your promise to complete every good work you have begun.

All through this day, may your Spirit reaffirm to our spirits that we are your beloved children and that you are a God who is doing all things well. We wait upon the rising of the sun and the coming of your Son. So very Amen, we pray, in Jesus' mighty and merciful name.



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