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Genesis 28

“Lessons from a Ladder”

Pastor Gary Hamrick

Our study in Genesis 28 centers on the ongoing story of Jacob’s journey to maturity. Last week Pastor Gary helped us understand – using the messy story of Jacob and Esau – what it’s like to be held in the grip of a grudge. We learned that Jacob had fled some 500 miles to Haran,¹ in Paddan Aram, and that he found a wife and settled down to have a family. The 500-mile journey to Haran² turned out to be a whole lot more than just a journey of miles; it was also a journey toward maturity.

Even though he was maturing, God still had a lot of work to do in his life, especially considering the major character flaws he had, which included deception, selfish ambition, and what seems to have been no relationship with God (there is no record in the Bible of Jacob praying, building an altar, making a sacrifice, etc.).

What we learn from Jacob’s dream has nothing to do with climbing our way to heaven. This account is about God being accessible for us, familiar with us, and faithful to us.

The Pursuit Of God

1. Make no mistake about it; it’s God’s pursuit of us, not our pursuit of God.
2. The Bible is clear about the fact that people don’t pursue God, God pursues us and we respond to his love.
3. **Romans 3:11** – *“... there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.”*

¹ On the border of what is modern-day Syria and Turkey.

² God met with Jacob in a dream when he was about 50 miles into the trek to Haran.

4. The hymn, *Victory in Jesus*,³ includes these lyrics:

I heard an old, old story,
how a Savior came from glory,
how He gave his life on Calvary
to save a wretch like me;
I heard about His groaning,
of His precious blood's atoning,
then I repented of my sins;
and won the victory.

O victory in Jesus,
my Savior, forever,
He sought me and bought me
with His redeeming blood;
He loved me ere I knew Him,
and all my love is due Him,
He plunged me to victory
beneath the cleansing flood.

5. Jacob is not seeking God, and the fact is that he isn't even remotely interested in God.
6. God has chosen to have relationship with a deceitful, far from perfect, 70-year-old man, for the purpose of turning him in to the father of a great nation.
7. God has chosen Jacob not on the basis of who he is, but on the basis of who he can become in the Lord.
8. **Romans 4:17** - “[He is] the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.”
9. There is nothing about any of us that impresses God, and it's a sure thing that God, not even for one moment, looks at any one of us and says to himself, “Now there's someone I've been waiting a long time to get to know!”
10. **Ephesians 2:1, 4-5** - “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.”

³ http://nethymnal.org/bio/b/a/r/bartlett_em.htm NOTE: This hymn is copyrighted and nethymnal.org does not have permission to include the midi file and lyrics on their Web site.

11. **1 Corinthians 1:26-29** - *“Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”*

The Presence Of God

12. When Jacob awoke from his dream, he had a new awareness and appreciation for the fact that God had been with him all the time.
- a. **Genesis 28:16** - *“When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.’”*
13. There are a lot of people who feel like they are far from God, but the reality is that it’s not because God is distant; it’s because sin separates us from God and makes us feel far from him, even though he’s been right there with us all the time.
14. **Psalm 145:18** - *“The Lord is near to all who call on him...”*
15. **Psalm 34:18** - *“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted...”*
16. **Psalm 46:1** - *“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”*
17. David, in **Psalm 139:7-10**, wrote about God’s constant and abiding presence, when he wrote: *“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”*
18. Jacob memorialized this place.
- a. **Genesis 28:18** - *“Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it.”*
 - b. Samuel, the prophet, set up a stone ⁴ (Ebenezer means “stone of help”) to memorialize the place where God gave the Israelites victory in battle over the Philistines. (**1 Samuel 7:12**)

⁴ Samuel named the monument, Ebenezer, which means, stone of help, because it was to be a marker of God’s faithfulness.

- c. The marker Jacob set up was meant to be a reminder of God's faithfulness.
19. Jacob renamed this place.
- a. [Genesis 28:19](#) - *"He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz."*⁵

The Provision Of God

20. Many Bible commentators believe that Jacob was praying a conditional prayer and that he was making a deal with God, because the translation reads, *"If God..."* ([Genesis 28:20](#))
- a. Their understanding is that Jacob's saying, "God, if you do these things, then I will do this and that."
 - b. Pastor Gary, along with many other Bible scholars, believe what Jacob meant is, "Since God..."
21. [Genesis 28:20](#) - *"[Since] God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear..."*
- a. It's here that Jacob became aware that God had been his provider.
 - b. Jacob realized that everything he had come from the hand of the Lord, plus he came to understand that he didn't own a thing; he was just a steward.
22. Jacob made an immediate vow to give a tenth back to God.
- a. [Genesis 28:22b](#) - *"... and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."*
23. Jacob wasn't the first to practice "tithing."
- a. Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, gave a tenth as an act of worship, according to [Genesis 14](#), and the Bible tells us in [Hebrews 7](#) that he was commended for it.
24. Jacob didn't...
- a. Complain that giving 10% was an Old Testament thing, because this event happened 600 years before God gave Moses the Law!
 - b. Calculate whether or not the 10% should come from the gross or the net!
 - c. Consider it best to start out at 1% and work his way up to 10%!
25. Many Christians over the years have become skilled at trying to figure out how they can get by with doing the least for God while doing the most for themselves.

⁵ Bethel means "House of God," and Luz means "almond tree."

- a. Not so with Jacob, because he was instantaneously aware that what he had and how he managed it was a direct reflection on whether or not God was going to be the Lord of his life.
26. Giving 10% is...
- a. Something many people practice cheerfully.
 - b. Something some people practice reluctantly.
 - c. Something some people resist defiantly.
 - d. Something many people know nothing about.
27. The biblical concept of tithing operates under the following principle:
- a. Our ability to earn a living is 100% because of God's blessing.
 - b. Everything belongs to God, and he alone gives us the privilege of living off as much as 90% of what he gives us.
28. **Malachi 3:10** - “ *‘Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.’* ”
- a. The word storehouse, means the “House of the Lord.”
 - i. The Temple had storage rooms where priests would place the tithes, which were used to support the priests, minister to the people, and to build/repair the Temple.
 - b. God attached an incredible promise to the command.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read **Genesis 28:10-22** to provide an overview for this study.
3. Allow the people in your group to share their Sunday school or Vacation Bible School memories about the song *We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder*.⁶
 - a. Use this link to read the lyrics and listen to the song: <http://nethymnal.org/htm/w/e/wearecjl.htm>
 - b. Do you think the lyrics in this song indicate a “works-oriented” approach to finding God, “making it to heaven,” etc.?
 - c. As a child, did you have the same impression as Pastor Gary, that this was a Christian version of Jack and the Beanstalk?

⁶ Pastor Gary rightly noted that this song includes incorrect references to people climbing Jacob's ladder/stairway. The Scripture tells us that only angels are ascending and descending.

- d. Are you aware of other songs that have doctrinal error that are widely accepted in the church?
 - e. Are there secular songs that people embrace which include biblical error, like *Stairway to Heaven* by Led Zeppelin?
4. Spend time discussing the fact that Jacob's dream is not about climbing our way to heaven; it's about God being accessible for us, familiar with us, and faithful to us.
- a. How have you experienced God being accessible in your life?
 - b. Are there specific examples of ways you can know that God is familiar with the intimate details of your life?
 - c. How has the Lord been faithful to you?
5. Read and discuss (if possible, it would be a good idea to sing several verses of this well-known hymn of the faith) the lyrics to *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*.⁷
- a. How do words of Robinson and Wyeth's hymn help you recognize the pursuit of God in your life?
 - b. You may want to read and discuss another great hymn of the Church is *Victory in Jesus*. (See #4 above)
 - c. Read and discuss [Ephesians 2:1, 4-5](#) and [1 Corinthians 1:26-29](#).
6. What's been your understanding of the biblical principle of tithing?
- a. Read and discuss [Malachi 3:10](#).
 - b. Were you taught the principle of tithing when you were a child?
 - c. Did someone model and explain tithing to you when you became a Christian?
 - d. Would you say you've been one who uses a calculator to figure out how much you give God or do you give freely and without restraint?
 - e. Do you believe your giving comes from the gross or the net?
 - f. Should the tithe go to the church and all other giving (Christian ministries, etc.) be given outside of the 10%?
 - g. Would you say you are a cheerful giver?
 - h. Was there a time in your life when you were a reluctant giver?
 - i. How has your view of tithing/giving changed in the years since you became a Christian?
 - j. How have you experienced the promise of God's blessing in your life according to [Malachi 3:10](#).

⁷ <http://nethymnal.org/htm/c/o/comethou.htm>

7. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: find a place of remembrance that would help them never forget how, when and where the Lord saved them, and how faithful he has been to them; remember how much the Lord loves them and how he pursued them; sense the presence of the Lord in their lives; and to know the biblical truth of the provision of God and the opportunity every Believer, by giving back 10% or more of their income, has to worship the Lord.