

Thursday, January 14, 2021—Genesis 43-46

Difficult situations require difficult decisions. Many times, avoiding those difficult decisions is easier than addressing them. Jacob's son had gone to Egypt to get food and came back minus one brother. If they wanted the Egyptian ruler to release him, they had to bring their youngest brother with them when they returned. Jacob let them eat all the food before he decided he could risk his youngest for one of his oldest (43:14).

Jacob's brother Esau had exchanged his birthright for a bowl of stew, so Jacob knew the danger of making decisions when hungry. He didn't want to trade his future because of pressing needs in a famine. He prayed for God's mercy, having no idea of the bounty God had in store. In order to receive that bounty, however, Jacob himself needed to be in Egypt, so Joseph arranged for Benjamin's stay in Egypt to force Jacob's arrival.

God was sovereign. He was making all things work for the good of those He had called. Joseph was wise and faithful. He knew he had to test the character of his brothers before he could trust them. These brothers had been willing to sell him to traders, so he wanted to see how they treated their youngest brother under duress. Their brokenness made Joseph cry.

Joseph revealed his identity and the plan of God to save them all by sending Joseph to Egypt (45:7). Difficulties are sometimes consequences of bad decisions and other times the training grounds for righteousness and abundance. Seek God's face in both to know Him and to grow.

Wednesday, January 13, 2021—Genesis 40-42

God weaves the stories of our lives with unimaginable intricacy. People come into and out of our lives for a variety of reasons. Events occur noticed and unnoticed which affect direction and outcome. All the while He remains sovereign and loving.

Joseph was in an Egyptian jail because his brothers sold him into slavery, and a woman falsely accused him of assault. God was with Joseph, but what was He doing? After some time, Joseph became the overseer of two unique

prisoners—the cupbearer and baker for Pharaoh. While under his charge, both men had troubling dreams. The dreamer now became the interpreter, and he asked the cupbearer to ask Pharaoh for his release.

For two more years, Joseph remained in prison. All the while, God was weaving the tapestry. One day, Pharaoh had a troubling dream, and no one could explain it. The cupbearer remembered the help Joseph had given him two years earlier and the promise he made to Joseph. He told Pharaoh of Joseph's ability, and Pharaoh sent for the prisoner. Joseph told Pharaoh God was the one who would give the answer (41:16), and Joseph told Pharaoh a great famine was coming, and he needed to prepare. Pharaoh decided Joseph was the man to do this.

Thirteen years after becoming a slave, Joseph became second-in-command of Egypt. He married. He had sons, and his brothers came to him so he could help them. Only God can weave a pattern like that. Praise God for His wisdom, love, and power to write your story.

Tuesday, January 12, 2021—Genesis 37-39

Family can include some of the closest connections and bitterest rivals. Spending great amounts of time together and experiencing the highs and lows of life can develop deep ties or harsh feelings. Jacob knew well the rivalry between himself and his brother, so one wonders what he must have thought about the hatred his sons felt toward Joseph (37:4, 11).

God gave Joseph two dreams that pointed to his authority over his parents and his brothers, and he shared those with the family. Some think he was arrogant in doing so. Others believe he was simply sharing what God told him. Either way, the news was not well received. The brothers plotted to kill him but settled on selling him to some traders headed to Egypt. They went home and told their father an animal had killed him.

What kind of jealousy leads to such behavior? When God is at work, He uses methods and outcomes that often are not expected or usual. He calls his people to faith and obedience even when the situation is confusing or difficult.

Judah's behavior with his daughter-in-law demonstrated the common way most people think of themselves rather than others. Joseph, on the other hand, while living in captivity, demonstrated the righteousness and hope only God can give.

Judah was selfish and faced seemingly minor consequences. Joseph was righteous and ended up in jail. Trusting and obeying God may seem detrimental in the moment, but God was with Joseph (39:21). His presence is more valuable than any earthly pleasure.

Monday, January 11, 2021—Genesis 33-36

Humility is a powerful part of any relationship. The willingness to lower oneself and to serve another regularly brings unity and warmth that would otherwise be missing. Some will take advantage and turn humility into humiliation, but that risk is one worth taking.

Jacob had the blessing of God and of his father, yet as he approached Esau he bowed down and humbled himself before his older brother. Twenty years of separation, hard work, and character formation had changed the deceiver into a humble man. Imagine Jacob's surprise when Esau ran to Jacob, hugged him, kissed him, and wept (33:4).

Jacob found God to be faithful, so Jacob was faithful to his promise. He erected an altar to God, the God of Israel. Then God told Jacob to move to Beth-el and build an altar, as he said he would do (see Genesis 28:21). Worship was of first priority in his new home.

Jacob knew his family had cultural connections and items of worship from the place where they had lived. He had them purge themselves of all these old things because God was their only God (35:4). Their new life was not without conflict (34:1-31), sin (35:22), and sadness (35:8, 19, 29), but God was undoubtedly at work fulfilling the promise He made to Abraham to make him into a great nation.

Jacob and Esau longed for the blessing of their father, but they flourished because of the grace of God. Knowing our lives are nothing without Him leads to humility before Him and confidence in Him alone.

Sunday, January 10, 2021—Genesis 30-32

History is full of highs and lows, and the recording and retelling of history tell those stories and teach the lessons of what wise people should repeat and avoid. George Santayana rightly said those who fail remember history are doomed to repeat it. God's people are poor "remember-ers."

Abraham and Sarah decided they needed to manipulate things to get the son God promised, so Sarah gave her servant Hagar to him. That produced far more heartache and jealousy (to this day) than imagined. Their grandson, Jacob, should have known this story and learned from it. When Rachel suggested giving him her servant so she could have a son, he should have told her that story. Jealousy and fear are extremely motivating but poor foundations for building a future. The jealousy between Rachel and Leah produced 12 sons but did nothing to bring unity to the sisters.

Jealousy grew between Laban's sons and Jacob as well. They did not appreciate the way God was blessing Jacob's efforts, so God told Jacob to make his way back home (31:3). Along the way, Laban and Jacob were able to come to an agreement, placing God as the authority over their relationship and trusting Him to be their provider and judge (31:44). Jacob also sought to reconcile with his brother Esau and submitted himself in humility to God as the meeting approached. In the process, Jacob wrestled with God, and God changed his name to Israel. A new day was dawning.

Thank God for the lessons of history. Learn them and live by faith.

Saturday, January 9, 2021—Genesis 27-29

God does things according to His plan. That may take more time than we want or occur in unusual ways, but those irregularities are what point to His hand as the cause and not ours and bring Him the glory. Because His will is not ours, we often try to help Him do His work.

God had told Isaac and Rebekah their older son would serve the younger. No culture followed those rules, so God would have to do something unusual to make this so. Rebekah decided to assist. When Isaac asked Esau to fix him a

meal, Rebekah had Jacob pose as his brother so he could receive his father's blessing. She felt Isaac's blessing had more weight than God's promise.

Rebekah and Jacob secured the blessing, but they also cemented the hatred of Esau toward his brother. Isaac then purposefully pronounced blessing over Jacob (28:1) and sent him away to find safety and to find a wife. He received with his father's pleasure what he had manipulated with his mother's strategy. Faith and patience are the path to God's bounty.

On the way to Haran, Jacob had an amazing dream in which God promised to give Jacob the land where he slept for his descendants (28:13). Jacob built an altar and promised to follow Yahweh as his God. Soon, he met Rachel and fell in love and went to work for her father. Laban proved himself to be equally as deceptive as Jacob and swindled the swindler.

Praise God for His promises and power to fulfill them Trust Him.

Friday, January 8, 2021—Genesis 23-26

God creates the body and the soul, so both have value to Him. He wants each soul to come to life through faith in Him, and He wants each person to use their bodies as vessels of honor. In life, body and soul are precious, and in death they remain valuable.

The soul remains alive, and the body is set aside with honor. What one does with the body at the time of death is a testimony about the future. Abraham bought a burial place (23:1-20) so he could bury Sarah's remains in the Promised Land. He believed his descendants would one day inhabit that land, so his burying her there was a testimony of faith. Believers today inter the remains of the deceased as a testimony to their belief that Christ will return and transform those remains as God did when He raised Jesus.

Marriage is a testimony about the future as well. Man and woman covenant with one another in the present to live faithfully in the future no matter the circumstances they face. Abraham sought a wife for Isaac (24:1-67) so Isaac could live out the promises of God with a woman who would pursue faithfulness with him. Family is the fruit of the marital union and a further testimony of blessing in the

present and faith in the future. It was Esau's lack of future-thinking that led him to a rash decision (25:32).

Thank God for his faithfulness in life and death. Praise Him for the blessings of marriage and family. Pray to be a vessel of honor.