

## **The Struggle is Real**

**Genesis 25:19-24**

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### Introduction:

- This morning, we're starting a new sermon series called, *Finding Peace in the Struggles We Face*.
  - It's a sermon series looking at the life of Jacob.
  - Jacob was a man who struggled throughout his life.
  - He struggles with conflict. He struggles to find love. He struggles to succeed. He struggles as a parent. He struggles to trust God.
  - And as we look at Jacob, my hope is that you'll learn to find peace in God, no matter what you're facing today.
- And if you're enjoying the peace of God in your life right now, my hope is that you'll see how you can help others find peace in their life.
  - When you face affliction in your life and overcome it, God will use that to comfort others.
  - In fact, a big part of the Christian life is about comforting others, as God has comforted you.
  - God commands us to consider the interest of others.
  - And through this series, you'll see how you counsel and comfort others in their struggles so they can find peace.
- Now, I've titled the sermon for today, *The Struggle is Real*.
  - You may not know this, but this phrase showed up on social media between 2010 and 2014.
  - It was a phrase used to complain about small problems in life.
  - For example, you'd see a clip of someone trying to plug in their USB cord over and over the wrong way.
  - And then you'd see the phrase, "the struggle is real."
  - Or you'd see someone snoozing their alarm 5 times on Monday morning.
  - And you'd see the phrase, "the struggle is real."
  - You'd see someone pour cereal into a bowl, only to find they didn't have milk.
  - And you'd see the phrase, "the struggle is real."
  - We can all laugh at this, but in reality, we can all confess that the struggle truly is real.
  - Real life isn't easy. And as we begin, I want you to see, 4 real struggles we'll all face in this life, and how God can bring peace to those situations.

### Point 1:

- First, we see in our passage, our struggle in waiting.

- There will be times in our lives when the answers aren't clear and we need to wait on God's timing.
- We may be praying for healing, for God to provide, for God to bring fruit in ministry, for reconciliation, for change in our circumstances.
- All of us will need to wait and be patient.
- And oftentimes waiting can be hard.
- It can be a struggle.
- And that's what we see in our passage today.
- We see how Isaac had to wait for God's timing.
  - In Genesis 25:12-16, we see how God gave Ishmael, many children.
  - If you remember, Ishmael was Isaac's older half-brother.
  - And he was blessed with many children.
  - *"These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's servant bore to Abraham. These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael; and Keder, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These are the names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes,"* (Genesis 25:12-16).
  - But when you get to Isaac and Rebekah, we read that Rebekah was barren.
  - It's like a gut punch to the stomach.
  - Verses 12 to 16 is shouting:
  - "Look at all of Ishmael's children!"
  - But when you get to verse 21, instead of a longer list of children.
  - We read: *"But Rebekah was barren."*
  - God promised to bless Abraham through Isaac.
  - But in our passage, Ishmael had many children, but Isaac, the son of promise, has no children.
- When God called Abraham out of Ur, Sarah was also barren and couldn't have children.
  - And do you remember what they did?
  - Sarah told Abraham to sleep with Hagar, her servant.
  - They tried to manipulate the situation.
- But that's not what happens in our story.
  - Listen to verse 21:
  - *"And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived,"* (Genesis 25:21).
  - Isaac was 40 years old when he got married.
  - And in verse 26, we're told Isaac was 60 years old when Jacob and Esau were born.
  - Isaac and Rebekah had to wait 20 years.
  - Instead of trying to manipulate the situation like his father, Isaac prayed and waited for God to fulfill his promise.

- In the story of Abraham, there's verse, after verse, after verse, of pain because Abraham didn't wait.
- But in our passage, there's just one verse speaking about Rebekah's situation.
- They waited for the Lord.
- This is a great reminder for us.
  - We need to pray as we wait for God.
  - Prayer shows our trust in God's timing.
  - Prayer shows that we're depending on God.
  - You may feel tempted to force change or to give up, but the Bible reminds us that it's good to wait for the Lord.
  - *"The Lord is good to those who wait for the him...It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord,"* (Lamentations 3:25-26).
  - It may be a struggle to wait.
  - But let's remember to pray and wait for the Lord.
  - Because it's good to wait on God.
- And notice how it's Isaac who prays for Rebekah.
  - Rebekah was the one who was barren, but it was Isaac who took the initiative to pray for his wife.
  - Husbands and children, on this Mother's Day, we need to remember to pray for our wives and for our moms.
  - The enemy wants to discourage them, to burn them out, to make them feel they're not good moms, to make them feel helpless, to make them feel like they've failed.
  - So, children, pray for your moms.
  - And husbands you need to pray for your wife.
  - That's your duty.
  - That's your responsibility.
  - Verse 21 states, *And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife...*
  - The greatest gift you can give to your wife, or to your mom for Mother's day is to regularly pray for them.
  - Here we see our struggle in waiting.

Point 2:

- Second, we see in our passage, our struggle with conflict.
  - After Isaac prayed for Rebekah she was able to conceive.
  - But the Bible says how the children struggled in her womb.
  - Literally, it means they were smashing one another.
  - It was so unbearable and painful, Rebekah says, *"Why is this happening to me?"* (Genesis 25:22).
  - And she cries out to God.
  - And God answers and says:

- *“Two nations are in your womb, and two people from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger,”* (Genesis 25:23).
- There’s going to be division throughout their life.
- Here we see how conflict with others causes pain to those around us.
  - When nations fight against other nations, it’s the citizens who suffer.
  - When you have conflict with a friend, it’s your other friends around you who suffer.
  - When parents have conflict with each other, it’s the children who suffer.
  - And when children fight against one another, it’s the parents who suffer.
  - And here we see Rebekah in pain, because her sons are struggling in the womb.
  - That’s why it’s important we resolve conflict in our lives.
  - Your conflict will cause pain, not only for you, but for others around you.
  - It’ll make others say, “Why is this happening?”
- And so, if you’re struggling with bitterness and anger and selfish ambition, you need to let it go.
  - If you don’t, it’ll lead you down a horrible path.
  - It’ll hinder your decisions.
  - It’ll choke your love.
  - It’ll cause pain for those closest to you.
  - *“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice,”* (James 3:14-16).
  - We need to let go of any bitterness.
  - Nothing good will come from it.
- This passage also points to God’s amazing grace in resolving conflict among his people.
  - In Genesis, Cain and Abel struggle with conflict. Abraham and Lot struggle with conflict. Isaac and Ishmael struggle with conflict. Leah and Rachel struggle with conflict. Jacob and Esau struggle with conflict. And then finally Joseph and his brothers struggle with conflict.
  - The message of Genesis is that sin causes conflict in the world.
  - Sin makes people struggle against each other.
  - But do you know what you read at the end of Genesis?
  - It shows how God brings peace through his sovereign grace.
  - Listen to what Joseph’s brothers say to him. The brothers who left him for dead the brothers who sold him into slavery.
  - *“And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil*

*against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today,” (Genesis 50:17-20).*

- Sin brings conflict.
- But God brings peace in the conflict.
- God brings good in the midst of evil.
- And in the end, God’s amazing grace will rid this world of all sin and all conflict.
- Here we see our struggle with conflict.

Point 3:

- Third, we see in our passage our struggle against the world.
  - When Esau was born, we were told that he was red.
  - *“When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau,” (Genesis 25:24-25).*
  - And later on, when Jacob tricks Esau, he tricks him with red stew.
  - That’s why Esau is called Edom, which means red.
  - But why in the world does the Bible refer to Esau as someone who was red and ate red stew?
  - Who cares that he was red?
- It’s showing how Esau was a man of the earth and not concerned with God and his blessings.
  - In other words, Esau was an earthly man, not a spiritual man.
  - In Hebrew, the word red, is very similar to the word, “man” and “earth.”
  - The words: “man,” “earth,” and “red” sound very similar.
  - A-DAM, A-DA-MAH, and A-DOME.
  - They’re all part of the same word group. They all share the same Hebrew letters.
  - And the Bible is teaching that Esau was an earthly or fleshly man. He was someone who desired to feed his sinful appetite.
  - He’s like an animal that hunts for food.
  - That’s why he’s not only red but also covered in hair.
  - He was born like a beast, with a hairy cloak that lives in the field.
  - And when Jacob offers stew, Esau doesn’t even think.
  - He gives up his birthright like an animal wanting to feed.
  - He literally says, “Give me that red stuff, that red stuff. I want to stuff it down my mouth.”
  - That’s a literal translation of verse 30.
  - Esau was a carnal man, filling his belly. And without any thought, he gives up his birthright.
- The birthright was reserved for the firstborn son.
  - The firstborn son was given a double portion of the father’s estate, and the position of leadership and authority after the father’s death.

- The eldest son would become the head of the family.
- Even more, in this case, the birthright also came with God's promise of blessing.
- As these brothers grew older, their parents would've told them about God's promise to bless their family.
- I imagine Isaac told Esau and Jacob about how God intervened on the mountain, and provided a sacrifice so that he wouldn't die.
- And how God promised to make his father into a great nation and bless him.
- All these blessings were part of the birthright.
- But without a thought in his mind, Esau gave it up for a bowl of stew.
  - Here's what you read in verse 34.
  - *"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 got up and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright,"* (Genesis 25:34).
  - Esau heard the promises of God.
  - He had a grandfather and father who experienced God's presence.
  - But instead of hanging on to the promise, he signs the contract, makes an oath, and gives up his birthright.
  - And then notice the verbs.
  - He ate, drank, got up, and went.
  - No thinking, no regret, no feelings, no regard for God.
  - He's just filling his fleshly appetite, with no desire for spiritual life.
  - One of my favorite Old Testament scholars, Dale Ralph Davis writes:
  - *"Esau was secular; he had no interest or concern about covenant matters, about divine promises or divine privileges. That "Despised" is a strong verb. And there have always been Esau's who've said, 'No thanks, I really prefer the outer darkness,'"* (Davis, God's Rascal, pg. 20).
- Later in the story, in chapter 27, we'll see Esau realize what he's done and try to get his blessing back.
  - He cries and asks if there might be one blessing for him.
  - But instead of being blessed, he's cursed.
  - And listen to what the writer of Hebrews says about Esau:
  - *"Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears,"* (Hebrews 12:14-17).
  - Bitterness, sexual immorality, rejection of God's grace; all these are things of this world, of this land, it's the red stuff of the world.
  - And because Esau despised his birthright, he couldn't get it back.

- This is a warning that if you despise God's grace, you're in danger of forfeiting God's blessing of salvation forever.
- Now, I imagine, there are some of you here on this Mother's Day, and it's been a long time since you've been to church.
  - Or you may be someone who's stopped following Jesus Christ.
  - And now, you may have no interest in the church, and no interest in God.
  - Or you may be thinking, "Well, I'll get more serious about God later on, but not now. I'm too busy now."
  - If that is you, I want to speak to you and I want to ask you:
    - What if your life is shorter than you think?
    - What if you don't have more time?
    - You don't know what tomorrow will bring.
  - And after you pass from this world, though you seek the blessing of salvation with tears, it'll be too late.
  - Let me read the rest of Hebrews chapter 12.
  - *"For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears,"* (Hebrews 12:17).
  - And then here's verse 25.
  - *"See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven,"* (Hebrews 12:25).
  - All this red stuff on earth amounts to nothing, but what matters most is God's offer of salvation.
  - And I really hope you can choose today, to follow Jesus Christ.
  - And let me just say if you have any questions about God or faith, please come and talk to me.
  - I'd gladly meet with any of you, to talk about any questions you have.
  - Here we see our struggle against the world.

Point 4:

- Fourth and finally, we see in our passage, our struggle for blessing.
  - Unlike Esau, Jacob greatly desired the blessing of God.
  - He believed the promise given to his father Isaac.
  - He longed for it so much; he tricked his brother into selling the birthright.
  - In verse 31, without any regard for his brother, without any respect for his brother, he says, *"Sell me your birthright now,"* (Genesis 25:31).
  - He aimed for something good, but his approach was all wrong.
- And what's so sad about Jacob's actions is that he didn't have to do what he did.
  - God already promised him the blessing.
  - God gave his mother the prophecy.
  - The older would serve the younger.

- Jacob wasn't in the position to receive the blessing, as the younger son, but God chose to give it to him.
- Here we learn that God's blessings aren't earned by how good we are or by what we do.
  - Rather, the blessing of salvation is given only by grace.
  - Even before the twins were born, God chose Jacob.
  - He didn't have to prove himself. He didn't earn anything. He didn't sacrifice hundreds of bulls. It wasn't his position. He was chosen by grace, and grace alone.
  - And this is the exact point the Apostle Paul makes in Romans 9:10-12.
  - *"And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, 'The older will serve the younger,'" (Romans 9:10-12).*
  - And when you get to Romans 9:16, Paul says, *"So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy."*
  - So many times, we're so busy trying to earn God's blessing, but don't you see?
  - If you believe in Christ, his blessing is already yours.
  - God's blessing isn't something you earn; it's something you receive through his grace.
- And if Jacob was mature enough, Jacob would've remembered God's full promise.
  - Not only did God tell Abraham, that he would bless him.
  - God also told Abraham he would be a blessing to others.
  - He tells him that all the families of the earth would be blessed by him.
  - So, instead of trying to manipulate his brother, he should've tried to help his brother and share the blessing with his brother.
  - But instead, he used his brother's carnal desires to his advantage, rather than trying to help his brother see the importance of the blessing of God.
- And isn't this how we act sometimes as well?
  - Instead of seeking to bless others, we spend more time thinking about how we can get ahead, how we can succeed, why others aren't helping us.
  - But if you're a Christian believer, God has called you to be selfless, and loving, and kind, and giving to others.
  - That means, when you're with others, instead of waiting for others to welcome you, you're called to take the initiative to welcome others.
  - Instead of asking why we're not being helped, we first need to consider how we can help others.
  - Instead of withholding your love, you give your love.
  - Instead of holding on to pride, you humble yourself to serve others.



- You've been blessed by God's grace, not so you can use others or to take advantage, but so you can bless others.
- Recently, our youth group had a movie night.
  - And Pastor Eric, our youth pastor challenged our youth students to invite their friends to church.
  - And he told me how many of the students brought friends to our church so they could not only have fun but also hear the gospel.
  - I heard there was a student who brought 6 friends from their school to attend this night.
  - One of the moms picked up all the kids, and I heard her car smelled of AXE body spray for a week.
  - In Christ you have all you need; you have all the blessings of salvation.
  - And that means, it's not time to be selfish. It's not time to scheme to get more out of life, it's not time to spend more on ourselves. It's time to bless others as God has blessed us.
  - And so, let me ask, how have you blessed someone else this past week?
  - How can you bless someone this week.
  - Let's seek to bless others, as Christ has blessed us.
- The struggle is real.
  - In your life, you'll struggle with waiting and being patient.
  - But you can find peace when you pray and wait on the Lord.
  - You'll struggle with conflict with someone you love.
  - But you can find peace when you learn to let go of bitterness.
  - You'll struggle with worldly desires, all the red stuff in this world.
  - But you can find peace, when you see that faith in Christ, is all you need.
  - And you'll struggle or doubt God's blessings over your life and wonder why others are succeeding and you're not getting very far.
  - But you can find peace, when, instead of questioning God's blessing, you give to others with a selfless heart.
  - We've only scratched the surface today, and so I really hope you'll come back next week, as we learn how to find peace in the struggles we face.

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<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all references to the Bible are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

<sup>2</sup>Davis, Dale Ralph. *God's Rascal*. pg.20. 2022.