

GENESIS

RockPointe Church Small Groups

Patriarchs of Scripture • Jacob and Esau • Genesis 25:27-32:32 • Fall 2018

Main Point

God's kindness is consistent in the lives of His children, regardless of their circumstances.

Background

Video: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/VideoElement/182904>

Note: Requires Access to Right Now Media; if you have issues with accessing the link, copy and paste directly in your browser

Introduction

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

Everyone wants to be considered a kind person, but what are some of the factors that make kindness easier said than done?

When you think about kindness as an attribute of God, what are some examples that come to mind?

Kindness is an admirable quality that all people seem to be drawn to. For many of us, though, it is a trait that is hard to live out. If you are a Christian, then kindness is also a part of the fruit of the Spirit, characteristics of God that the Holy Spirit develops in your life. Throughout Scripture, we see God's kindness on display in the lives of His people. The story of the nation of Israel tells of God's steadfast lovingkindness, despite a pattern of rebellion and sin. We see this clearly in the relationships between Isaac and his sons Jacob and Esau.

Understanding

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

| have a couple of volunteers read 27:27-40.

What do you know about Jacob and Esau? What events led up to Isaac blessing Jacob? Refer back to Genesis 25:27-34.

What did Jacob's blessing mean? Why was it powerful?

How did Esau feel? Have you ever been in a similar situation? How did you respond to such deceit?

Esau was not the brightest boy and Jacob very cunning. Jacob took advantage of Esau's simple desires to lay claim to his birthright. Then following the advice of Rebekah, Jacob tricked Isaac and also managed to secure

Esau's blessing. When Isaac thought Jacob was Esau, he blessed Jacob. This was a powerful blessing of familial authority and of favor in God's eyes. Jacob received a significant identity through this blessing. A relationship between two brothers that began in conflict escalated to the point of great divide in their family.

| have a couple of volunteers read Genesis 27:40–28:9.

Describe the difference between Jacob and Esau after the blessing.

From Genesis 28:1-9, how do we see God's kindness evident in Jacob's life, despite his sins?

What does this teach us about God and our relationship with Him?

Esau raged when he found out that he would not get a blessing. He wanted to murder Jacob. When Isaac instructed both his sons to stay away from Canaanite women, Jacob listened and went to Laban's house. Esau took a Canaanite wife. Jacob followed his father's law and calling. Without a blessing, feeling cheated and probably confused, Esau lived a life of disobedience. As their story unfolds, we learn that God's kindness was evident in Jacob's life, despite his sin and his broken relationship with Esau.

Genesis 28–30 describe Jacob's departure from his home and family following Isaac's blessing. He eventually settled in Haran at the home of his uncle Laban, where he fell in love with Laban's daughter Rachel. Laban deceived Jacob into marrying Leah, Rachel's sister, but eventually Jacob was married to Rachel as well.

| have a volunteer read Genesis 30:1-24.

Summarize the relationships between Jacob and his two wives.

How do you see God's kindness on display through this part of Jacob's story?

Jacob had planned to marry Rachel, Laban's younger daughter after he fell in love at first sight. Laban, however, tricked Jacob, giving him Leah instead. Jacob was selfish and prideful in his marriage, loving Rachel and not Leah. But the Lord loved Leah. He gave her strong sons to comfort her in her distress. The Lord did not give Leah children to win Jacob's approval; He gave her children for her. By the time Judah was born, she was past hoping her children would win Jacob's affection. By then, she was content simply to thank the Lord for another son, at least for a little while. Eventually, God also gave a son to Rachel, and that son—Joseph—would be instrumental in the next part of God's covenant people's journey.

| have a volunteer read Genesis 32:1-28.

Jacob swindled Esau out of a birthright and stole his blessing. Esau at one point declared his desire to kill Jacob. Esau was a strong man with a large following, so Jacob sent servants and gifts to try to please Esau so that he would not have to face him.

How had Jacob's separation with his family shown itself in his relationship with the Lord?

Have you ever felt like Jacob? Have you ever had a moment when you had to confront the truth about yourself? What were the circumstances?

Why do you think God brings us to points like that? How is He being kind to us in doing so?

In fear, Jacob retreated. He began wrestling with someone, not realizing that it was God. In his encounter with God Jacob was changed. He was forced to first be restored to God before he could reconcile with Esau. Jacob's spiritual victory, symbolized by his name change, wasn't accomplished by overpowering God but by holding on to God until God chose to bless him. Spiritual blessings are received through staying close to God and clinging to Him even when we are experiencing pain and difficulty. We advance toward maturity in Christ only through struggling to be transformed into His image by His grace. That He brings us through this process shows us His lovingkindness at work in our lives.

Application

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

How have you seen God's lovingkindness on display in your life recently?

What is the appropriate response to God's kindness?

What is one relationship in which you need to reflect God's kindness this week? How can we encourage you and hold you accountable?

Pray

In a time of group prayer, thank God for His loving-kindness, which is ultimately shown to us through the life and sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus. Pray that kindness would be an attribute of His character that other people see reflected in us.

Commentary

| Genesis 27:27-46

27:27-29. Isaac's blessing included four elements: agricultural prosperity (v. 28)—even as He 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 (21 vs. 34 Hebrew words), 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)!

| Genesis 28:1-9

28:1-2. As with Abraham in the previous generation, Isaac was concerned that his youngest son not take a wife from the Canaanite women (lit “daughters of Canaan”; cp. 24:3).

28:3-5. 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 (17:1; see note there). 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.

28:6-9. When Esau noticed that his father Isaac disapproved of the two Canaanite women he had married (26:34), he did not divorce them. Instead he added to them, taking his cousin Mahalath daughter of Ishmael as a third wife. Mahalath was also known as Basemath (36:3). Mahalath’s brother Nebaioth was Ishmael’s firstborn son (1 Chron. 1:29).

| Genesis 30:1-24

30:1-8. Rachel’s extreme unhappiness created serious tensions in the marriage. Jacob reminded her that it was God, not he, who has “withheld” children (lit “fruit of a womb”) from her. Partial relief came through the practice of surrogate motherhood as Rachel gave Jacob her slave Bilhah so she could bear children “upon [Rachel’s] knees” (for me). The phrase suggests that the adoption process involved placing the newborn child on the adopting mother’s knees (50:23). When Bilhah gave birth to Dan, Rachel felt that God had vindicated

her. When Bilhah conceived again and gave birth to a second son, Rachel, who had frankly struggled in her relationships with God and Leah, felt that she had finally prevailed and won. Accordingly, she named her second adoptive son Naphtali.

30:9-13. Leah, who had once used her fertility to try to win her husband's love, now resorted to the desperate act of giving her slave to Jacob as a surrogate wife to produce additional sons, Gad and Asher. Leah signaled their adoption by being the one who named them.

30:14-21. During the late springtime harvest, Leah's oldest son Reuben found some wild "mandrakes." A plant possessing tuberous roots resembling human torsos, the mandrake was thought to enhance one's sexual powers and fertility. Leah, still lonely and desperate for her husband's affection, bartered some of the mandrakes with Jacob's favorite wife Rachel for the right to sleep with Jacob for a night. Because God listened to Leah—and not because of the mandrakes—she conceived and bore a fifth son, Issachar. When Leah bore Jacob a sixth son... Zebulun—her last—she gave God the credit. Jacob's only named daughter, Dinah, would play a tragic role in chapter 34.

30:22-23. For the third time in Genesis God is said to have "remembered" someone (cp. 8:1; 19:21), an event that always indicates the onset of a beneficial act by God. In this case He gave Rachel her firstborn son... Joseph, whose name (Hb yoseph) is actually a verb that expressed Rachel's prayerful hopes—"May He [the Lord] add" another son. The Lord would give Rachel her desire, but with bitter results (35:16-19).

| Genesis 32:1-30

32:1-2. For the second time while on a journey, Jacob saw God's angels (cp. 28:12). As before, he named the place where he encountered them. In this case he called it Mahanaim, "Two Camps," probably in recognition of the fact that both people and angels were at the same location.

32:3-12. Remembering Esau's death threats from 20 years earlier (27:41-42), Jacob now made a special effort to gain Esau's favor with the assistance of messengers. The first prong of his strategy was verbal: Jacob had the messengers call Esau "lord" and himself "your servant," thus honoring Esau's position as firstborn—even though he had previously taken Esau's birthright and blessing. Jacob also made sure he was the first to initiate contact between the brothers, in order to seek Esau's favor.

To prepare for the coming confrontation with his brother Jacob did two things: first, he divided his group in two so at least some of his people could escape if necessary; second, he offered a prayer with three elements: an admission that he was unworthy of the many blessings God had given him, a prayer for rescue, and a reminder of God's promises to prosper and multiply Jacob.

32:13-21. Jacob, who had been so adept at taking from others in the past, now arranged to give a generous gift to his brother Esau. Only after Esau had received all the gifts would Jacob meet him.

32:22-23. As a final measure of self-protection that night, Jacob put one more barrier between himself and Esau, moving his family and possessions across the “Jabbok,” a westward-flowing tributary emptying into the Jordan River 15 miles north of the Dead Sea. Perhaps Jacob believed that Esau would have compassion on his wives and children, and so end his pursuit.

32:24-30. Now Jacob experienced his third and final encounter with God while on a journey (cp. v. 1; 27:12-15). 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 (see note at Gen. 1:5), 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.

Jacob was the third person to be renamed by God, joining Abraham and Sarah (17:5,15). The patriarch’s inferior status is reflected in the fact that, unlike the divine being, who asked for Jacob’s name and got it, Jacob was unable to learn the being’s name. 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.