

Hello. My name is Esau, and I'm a recovering People Pleaser. Some people call it Approval Addiction. Others dub it The Disease to Please. Now that I'm free, I just call it "bondage." Growing up, I stuck close with a dad who loved me very much—he took me hunting and fishing, we worked out together and did man stuff while my pansy brother Jacob hung around the house watching cooking shows with mom. Father is someone I admire and respect greatly, so I would go to him any time I needed anything. If I was thinking about doing something, I'd bounce it off of dad. Jacob was the same way with mother. She would order him around and he would do whatever she said. Sometimes she would even dress him up, they have issues. But our parents didn't seem to mind having us constantly coming to them for advice, even as grown men, and we liked having access to their wisdom. Sounds great, right? Well, it was, for a while.

Dad bought me my first truck and I always felt indebted to him. Plus I'm the firstborn, the inheritor of the blessing, so I wanted to learn everything I could. But then, in a weak moment when I was having a bad day and I was really hungry, my sneaky and sinister brother deceived me out of my birthright. So from that point on I figured that I needed to please my parents that much more. Maybe if I did everything right, just as they wanted, I would receive the blessing. But it didn't work. I did everything dad asked me to and I still missed out. He gave all of his blessing to Jacob and left none for me! That experience of rejection sent me into a downward spiral where I started questioning everything. Do my parents really love me? Is God even real?

Over time, I started doubting my own ability to make sound decisions without first weighing them against what my parents wanted, or "the committee," as I like to call them. And "the committee" started sharing their opinions more often and more adamantly than I requested. If I agreed with the committee and took their advice, they were happy with me. I liked when they were happy with me. It felt good. If I expressed disagreement with the committee, I would sense their disapproval, and I didn't like that at all. It felt terrible. Because they were older, wiser and godlier than me, I often deferred to them and their opinions for fear of making poor decisions, even if I didn't really want to. I didn't like to disappoint them. I didn't like to be wrong. And I wanted them to admire and respect me as much as I did them. I soon found out, the way to achieve their admiration and respect was to go to them for every decision and simply do what they said. I always made sound decisions, and they were pleased with me. It was a win-win. I thought I was following God's word by obeying those who had authority over me.

Soon, I realized this was getting bigger than just me and the committee. I didn't like the way it felt to disappoint anyone. Even people who didn't know me well or didn't care much about me or how my decisions would affect my future. I didn't like the looks or the tones I received when I had to tell people "no," even about small things. I didn't like to think I let people down in any way. So I said "yes" a lot—I said "yes" to everything anyone asked me to, even when I didn't want to. I thought I was obeying God's word by being a servant. Over the years, I continued to say yes. I was scared to tell people no. And as a result, I became very tired; and very stressed; and very conflicted; and very resentful. I was a full-blown Approval Addict. And that's what set me up for what happens in tonight's story.

Welcome to Jacob's Well. I'm not really Esau and I'm not Jacob either. When I named this thing "Jacob's Well," it wasn't because it's my well or to feed my ego. It's a place where anyone, regardless of background, income, race, what you believe, or whatever, anyone can come and drink deeply of the living water that we all thirst for. Like Jacob, all of us are searching for something and all of us need rehabilitation. And at Jacob's Well many of us have found what we've been searching for in Jesus. Tonight we're in the midst of a series on the founder of the Well and his family. If you have your bible, please follow along in chapter 28 of the first book in the bible, Genesis.

Control & Manipulation

It starts out with Rebekah trying to fix the situation. Her sons are warring with each other (mainly because of her manipulation and scheming) and now she's trying to save them. She's looking for a win-win so instructs Jacob to go to his uncle Laban in a faraway land while Esau cools off. This is at the heart of codependent tendencies, always wanting to fix others and control the situation around you. But does it work? Are we gods to carry out our divine plans and pull it off without a hitch? Does Esau cool off in a couple of days? Does Rebekah ever get to see her precious son again? No. She dies an old woman without seeing Jacob or her grandchildren. And it's her fault.

But she doesn't see it that way! She tells Isaac, *I'm sick and tired of these local Hittite women! I would rather die than see Jacob marry one of them.* Really? Is everything really all of those other ladies' fault? If we just got rid of all those (fill in the blank) then everything would be ok. Sounds ridiculous, right? But that's what we do. Shift blame, point the finger, condemn others. Its where racism, prejudice, and discrimination comes from, avoiding our own guilt and assigning it to others. But I wish this is where it stopped. Rebekah is using her racism for more deception. That's right, she is up to her scheming, manipulative ways again. Rather than just coming out and saying what she wants, or what she thinks best, she seeks a backhanded, back-road route to get what she wants without having to let go of control. It's time to be up front with what you want! It's time to let go of those controlling and backhanded ways. It's time to tell the truth about our motives and get real with our intentions. Before you get honest with others, we need to get honest with ourselves. Before you get real with God, tell your neighbor, "You gotta get real with yourself." It's time to let go of those double-dealing, disingenuous, crafty, calculating ways. If you want something, say you want it! Don't go behind his back and try to manipulate him into doing it. If you want Jacob to go to Paddan-Aram, then talk to your husband about it, don't make up some story about Hittite women! Touch 3 people and tell them, "Be up front with what you want!"

But I'll give her this, Rebekah's heart desire was to save the life of her child. She was just going about it in a totally back-handed way. The motive was pure, but the method was messed up. God cares about our motives, but the road to hell is paved with good intentions. We might think that its just a means to an end, but we will be judged for our means when we get to the end. The desire of Rebekah's heart was granted, but she didn't get what she wanted. Jacob's life was spared, but she never saw him again. Her over-focus led to fight or flight. Some kids rebel, others run away. And this wouldn't be the last over-bearing mom that drove her son away. I was just reading about a middle-aged couple full of anxiety about their daughter Jill who had gone away to college and was getting involved in the club scene and had been experimenting with some party drugs. The mom especially had always tried to keep the family close and was doing everything in her power to maintain control over her daughter even though she was now miles away. But everything she did seemed to be driving her little girl further away. The parents went to see their pastor and and mentioned that grandma seemed to have a better relationship with Jill than mom did. The pastor set up a family session where grandma, mom, and Jill all came together, and there he managed to defocus the daughter and keep most of the family's attention on mom's relationship with her own mother. Soon after, Jill decided to move back home and finish up college at a local school. When the pressure was off, and she was allowed to live her life, she chose to draw closer rather than further away. There have been so many books/workshops/blogs/PhDs designated to the problems that kids have: phobias, addictions, suicide, eating disorders, etc. The number one reason that someone I do not know emails or calls me is to ask if I can help fix their child. I wish I had the answer!

But this is one thing I do know, the child is not the problem. The child is showing symptoms of an underlying family problem of which the parents are just as much, if not more part of. When a kid starts doing drugs, it appears that the parents' attempts at control are *caused* by the drug-use, but experts say that it predates the symptoms and that the overbearing parenting was actually part of what drove the child away. Just look at Rebekah and Jacob! She's been coddling him and babying him and dressing him and smothering him from day one to age 50. And now he's gone.

She told him that time heals all wounds and that in a few days his brother would cool off and everything would be hunky-dory. The mistress of all emergencies was always able to fix everything in the past, but there always comes a breaking point. Jacob came to find out that painful memories and wounds inflicted by family don't die quickly, if ever. We've been talking about mom for long enough, it's time to look at problem child. Jacob flees from the scene thinking that a few days away from the problem will solve it. Do you think everything is going to become picture-perfect just because you went to rehab? Do you think everybody will just forget all about what you've done to them because you went away for 6 months or even a few years? Wounds create scars, and time alone does not bring healing. And they definitely don't go away by geographical changes. But a change of place was just what Dr. Rebekah prescribed to fix everything. So in the midst of chaos and turmoil and the whole family falling apart, Jacob escapes. He runs. He puts on his apron, gets in his Volkswagon Jetta and heads for the hills. Maybe a change in location will change everything, right? You can change the people, places, and things, but if you don't change yourself, then the problem is still with you wherever you go. But Esau on the other hand thought all of his problems resided in Jacob. Last week we saw how he blamed his brother for all his troubles. But then, at the end of our reading we see Jacob gone and Esau still full of trouble.

*Esau knew that his father, Isaac, had blessed Jacob and sent him to Paddan-aram to find a wife, and that he had warned Jacob, "You must not marry a Canaanite woman." He also knew that Jacob had obeyed his parents and gone to Paddan-aram. It was now very clear to Esau that his father did not like the local Canaanite women. So Esau visited his uncle Ishmael's family and married one of Ishmael's daughters, in addition to the wives he already had. His new wife's name was Mahalath. She was the sister of Nebaioth and the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son. **Genesis 28:6-9***

People-pleasing

Until now, Esau hadn't realized how much he had disappointed his parents. When it hits him, he seeks to redeem himself, to please his parents by marrying someone from their race. He thought his parents were cool with the two bi-racial marriages he'd entered into, but apparently they were not! So what does he do? Does he pray about it and ask God whether He accepts his marriages? Does he stand up to his parents and stand up for his wives, affirming his love for them and sticking with the decision he made as an adult? No, Esau obsesses about how Jacob always gets the blessing and how maybe, just maybe if he married the right girl, it would please his parents and they would finally accept him and he would have the approval his heart had been longing for. So he compulsively goes to the club, finds the first girl who's nice to him, and marries her. Problem is that she's not good enough either; no one will ever be good enough for these ever-demanding parents. It's just not about love for them, but control and power. And it's not about love for Esau. It's not about love for his parents or love for his wives. It's more about fear and pride. Sandy Cooper writes that, "The root of people pleasing is not love; it is fear and pride. Fear that people won't like us. Fear of rejection. Fear of failure. And pride in the sense that, although we are breaking our backs "doing" for

other people, we are feasting solely on the payback of their approval. We need people to focus on us, and we will go to exhausting lengths to have that need met. It is entirely self-serving...the opposite of what the Bible instructs. "People pleasing" and 'Biblical serving' cannot be same thing." Author and former people pleaser, Nancy Kennedy says, *It's one thing to humble yourself as a servant; it is quite another to reduce yourself to doing anything just to be thought of as nice. The truth is [people pleasing] isn't nice. It isn't genuine. It's narcissistic and dishonest. It's other-centered actions with self-centered motives. "I'm nice so you'll like me." That's not nice; that's sick.*

When we look up to other people as a god, we set ourselves up for failure. When we look to our parents or our husband or our children as the one who fills that need for acceptance and approval, we will always be lacking! The Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well did that and it took her 5 marriages to realize she had a problem and to become ready for the only thing that would give her that acceptance she thirsted for. Do you know what satisfies our soul? Do you know the way to true salvation? Are you thirsty? Tell your neighbor, "Then drink some living water!" The living water comes from the heart of God for those who believe the gospel. You will never add up and fully please the people around you, but the good news is that you don't have to! God, in His infinite love, accepts you for who you are, as His beloved child! Somebody shout out, "I am accepted! I am accepted!" Not because of how hard you work. Not because of how pretty you are. Not because of what you drive or where you live. You are accepted because you are a son or daughter of God, adopted into his family by grace through faith.

People-displeasing

But there are some people in here who could care less what your parents or anybody else think. People-pleasing is not your issue and you wouldn't even consider marrying someone based on what your parents thought. Some people find out what their people want and you do the opposite. You're what we might call people-displeasers, people-annoyers, or rebels. Are there any rebels in the house tonight? Any rebels without a cause, just to annoy the fudge out of the people around you? Yeah, you drive your parents crazy. Is there a parent in the house with one of these jerks for a child? Whatever you say, they do the opposite? This was me. My mom likes to say that I came out of the womb with my hand on my hip saying, "Make me." Some parents try reverse psychology with these kids. . . "Run out into the street without looking both ways! Don't eat your fruits and vegetables! Date whoever you want, the more tattoos and earrings, the better!" How many people thinking messing with your children's heads is a good form of parenting? They're still going to do what they want, and their hearts are going to become bitter and resentful towards you. They're smarter than they look and rebel kids know how to push your buttons don't they? Like the teenage girl who brings a boy home knowing that it will drive her dad through the roof. She's like, "Hey Dad, this is Spike and I am in love with him!" "Well, where does he go to school, does he keep his grades up?" "Yeah, he made straight A's. . . in rehab!" "Does he have a job?" "Yes, he sells stuff in bags to kids in school." "NO!" How many are raising this openly defiant rebellious child? How many know that focusing on behavior and control only makes matters worse? Your child's needs are far deeper than their rebellious behavior. That's only scratching the surface. In Mark 7:21 Jesus says, *From within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness.*

God's law, and parents' rules matter, but what matters much much more, is your heart. So when disciplining your children, whether they are people-pleasers or people-displeasers, don't just focus on the behavior, but on the heart. What is your child's heart longing for that he acts out in this way? What deep need is going unmet? This is the

same process whether the acting out is in rebellious, disobedient ways, or in people-pleasing, outward obedient actions. The Pharisees and religious leaders were not practicing the sins of sexual immorality, theft, or murder. But Jesus speaks this truth in response to these religious people, not in response to criminals. Jacob and Esau have done their fair share of greed, wickedness, deception, envy, and a little foolishness, but in this passage they're both trying to do what's right. But *why* are they trying to do the right thing and *what* is the source of rightness? *Who* are they turning to for their righteousness? These are the heart issues. If you're trying to figure out if something is right, ask yourself, Why am I pursuing it? Who am I seeking to please or displease?

The bottom line of this story is that Esau's last-minute ploy to redeem himself through people-pleasing fails. And Jacob's ploy to redeem himself through escaping the problem fails. Esau thought that if he followed all the rules, then he would be accepted, but you can't follow all the rules all of the time! He married someone of his race, but he picked her from the family of the hated brother of his dad! Isaac resented and deeply despised Ishmael! But the other uncle Laban was not any better of a choice to find a wife from! This shyster has two daughters, a fine one and one with a lazy eye. Laban promises the fine one in marriage after 7 years of work, then after 7 long years he goes into the dark tent to consummate the marriage and wakes up in the morning and . . . augh! It's the lazy-eyed one!!! And Laban is like, "Haha Jr. Varsity!" And Jacob doesn't have much moral high ground to stand on. I mean, what's he going to say, "Hey you tricked and deceived me, that's no fair." "Yeah, that's exactly how you got here," would be Laban's reply. "So work another 7 years and you can have her." And he did! It's like one time when I traded a bag of weed for a stolen bike, then someone stole it from me. I couldn't exactly call out the thief for his sin! When you're not living by the law, you can't hold others accountable to the law! But I digress. . . the point is that neither people-pleasing, nor people-displeasing, nor escaping from your problems will get you where you want to go. But the good news of the gospel is that God makes a way when there is no way! As the band comes up I'll read the final scripture: *May God Almighty bless you and give you many children. And may your descendants multiply and become many nations! May God pass on to you and your descendants the blessings he promised to Abraham. May you own this land where you are now living as a foreigner, for God gave this land to Abraham.* **Genesis 28:1-4**

Children of the Promise

This is the promise of Abraham that God made with His people thousands of years ago and He intended for it to be fulfilled in your life. Turn with me in your bibles to Galatians 3. You see, God has a plan, and He is working it out despite what the circumstances look like. In the face of all the manipulation, all the deception, all the family dysfunction, Isaac passed on the Abrahamic blessing to Jacob. And he passes it on to you. Even with our best efforts at running away from God or our best efforts to earn acceptance. Galatians 3:6-7 say this, *Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith. The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God.* Who are what are you putting your faith in? Is it pleasing your mom or your husband or someone else? Or tonight, will you put your faith afresh in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who redeemed this dysfunctional family and brought blessing to the earth through them?

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you. **Galatians 3:26-29**

You don't have to inherit the curses of your dysfunctional family, or the messed up family of Jacob! When you put your faith in Christ, you are adopted as a son, as a daughter of God! You are the true children of Abraham and are his heirs to receive the blessing that you can never earn on your own. And this is possible because of a God who paved the way. He came from heaven to earth to show the way. He went to the cross to make a way where there is no way. And he rose from the grave to provide a way for you. A way out of any situation you find yourself in. Because of Jesus there is no hole too deep, no mountain too high, no mother too controlling, no child too rebellious for Him! Through the love of Christ all things are possible!

Influences, Inspirations, & more Information

Sandy Cooper. <http://thescooponbalance.com>

Mark Driscoll. *Jacob Steals Esau's Blessing*. Preached at Mars Hill Church on 4/10/2005.

Edwin Friedman. Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue. pp. 100-101

Victor Hamilton. NICOT: The Book of Genesis Ch. 18-50. pp. 230-236

Tedd Tripp. Shepherding a Child's Heart. pp.