

Welcome to Jacob's Well. When someone hears that I started Jacob's Well, a lot of times they'll ask me if I am Jacob. This series will settle this question once and for all by teaching about the real Jacob. The name Jacob's Well comes from a story from Jesus' life found in the gospel of John chapter 4 about reconciliation that happens through a conversation around a well. It was called "Jacob's Well," named after the son of Isaac and father of the 12 tribes of Israel written about in Genesis 25-35.

Tonight we look at when Jacob's life was in shambles he met Rachel, the woman of his dreams. He had lost his family and his inheritance and was filled with so much guilt and shame for the things that he had done, that he packed up everything and moved across the Fertile Crescent where he hoped at least to survive. Chapter 29 with Jacob wandering "through the wilderness" since his encounter with God at Jacob's Ladder and it leads him to a well. He's been on a journey to Haran and he has finally arrived, and he runs into some shepherds, employees of Laban. And Jacob, the one who has always been out to get his, always concerned only about himself and getting his blessing, asks about someone else. "Is he well?" he asks. And that's when he sees Rachel for the first time and tries to get the shepherds out of there so he can have some alone-time with this hottie. And it says she showed up with sheep. They represented wealth, affluence, a good life. So, it's like the fine girl rolls up in a cool car. Wow, my prayers have been answered, right? So what's Jacob going to do to make that important first impression? He's homeless, unemployed, classic underachiever. You guys know that the first impression is so important, because if you're going to trick her, you need to do it early. So Jacob has an adrenaline surge and pushes the boulder away from the opening to the well, a job usually for 4-5 big guys. How many guys are like this? You're at the gym and when the hot girl walks by, you're like "grrrrrhhhh!" Then when she walks away you're like, "owww! I pulled every muscle in my body!" Men are so smart. We know that lifting heavy things will turn her on ever time. It's like, "Me strong. Me can pick you up." Then he starts watering the sheep like he's a hard worker. You can fool some women some of the time and that's how you get a wife. That's where this is going. But seriously, Jacob is actually starting to act like a man! Maybe its because Jacob's mom isn't there to tell him what to do and he is actually able to do something on his own. He is able to move out of the passivity and robot-like obedience into doing something heroic and impressive.

Then he kisses Rachel and starts crying. What is this? I lifted something heavy, now can we make-out? And then I'll burst out into tears. I mean, for Jacob to start weeping loudly seems a little dramatic right? But check this: Rachel doesn't ask why he's crying and Jacob doesn't offer an explanation. Apparently they don't think its so weird. So why the tears? Earlier, Esau wept loudly, but his was coming from grief, rejection, and disappointment. But Jacob's tears seem to spring from joy, acceptance, and gratitude. Tell a man near you, "It's ok to cry when you're happy." God made a promise to Jacob that He would be with him. And in the midst of his sin, and when things didn't seem like they would ever turn around, God showed grace and gave a sign that He was with Jacob. Anyone need to see some grace? Anybody seen God's grace in their lives lately?

I had an experience like this on Wednesday. Some of you know that I went to Clarksville to visit our friend Dave, former staff member at a local rehab. What many of you did not know is the twisty turvy journey on the way and the way back. I was planning to ride the bus to Clarksville Tuesday, then the bus to Nashville Wednesday to hitch a ride with a guy I hadn't met yet but was going to the conference I was. I didn't know exactly where he was in Clarksville and how I would find him, but I figured I would figure it out. I had to be at the Greyhound station on Airways and Brooks at 4:30 a.m. Tuesday morning. Unfortunately I couldn't fall asleep the night before until about 2:00 and wasn't able to get much sleep on the ride there. I got to Clarksville and began my seek and find mission. It was early, so no one with tattoos was awake yet. But I walked to Dave's brother's Tattoo Shop and about an hour

after the sign said they were open, I met Dennis who told me where Dave worked. So I walked the half mile to his shop, which said it opened at 1pm, but at 2pm all the lights were still out. I went across the street to Wendy's to get a Frosty and tried back in an hour. . . and I found Dave! I think I felt a little like Jacob. I didn't kiss him, but I hugged him and almost cried. We had a great day and night where I had a chance to meet his people and share Christ with them, including a guy who was ready to get clean who we prayed with. He worked on my arm until 3am at which time we crashed on the sofa until it was time to catch my bus in the morning. I set everything out the night before knowing I would be dog-tired and prone to forgetting something. My alarm went off 4 hours later, I got up, got dressed, got my bus ticket, and headed for the station. I arrived on time and reached in my pocket for the ticket. . . which was not there. But I had a backup! I had taken a picture of it on my phone! They could scan the barcode, right? Not in Clarksville. Apparently a paper copy was mandatory. I was told that I had 10 minutes and a motel down the street had a printer, so I grabbed my bag and hauled butt up a really steep hill a few blocks away. Apparently I looked pretty pathetic and a guy stopped to offer me a ride. I jumped in and got out at the hotel, plugged in my macbook, but it wouldn't download the driver. So I save it on my USB drive, but the windows piece of crap computer wouldn't read it. They sent for someone to help me . . . (whistle jeopardy tune) . . . after about 15 minutes I knew that I'd missed my bus so gave up. I headed back to the bus station to sort out my options. Good news was they had a bus heading to my final destination, Lexington, KY, departing in an hour. Bad news is that it was a 19 hour bus ride zig-zagging through a bunch of states and lots of layovers promising another night or restlessness. I didn't have the money, but decided to check on rental car possibilities. After walking to one place and calling two more I realized there was not even one rental available for one-way travel in the city.

Anybody been there? Is there anybody in here whose dug yourself in a hole you couldn't climb out of? Anybody painted yourself into a corner you couldn't walk out of? Anybody fallen and you just can't get up? Anybody? Well I was. I was in a hole, backed in a corner, I was in deep. . . darkness without a light. But how many know that God is light and can penetrate the darkest night? How many know about Jacob's ladder that came from heaven to earth to make a way when there is no way? How many know that we serve a God of grace? So I didn't know what I was going to do, but I needed to let my ride in Nashville know that I wouldn't be meeting up with him, so I called to explain. He insisted on driving to Clarksville to pick me up. I told him I would figure it out, but he wouldn't take no for an answer! Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! Now this is someone I felt like kissing and crying in front of. He told me to meet him at I-24, which I happily agreed. Then, looking at my map I realized that the interstate was like 15 miles from where I was downtown. So I grabbed my suitcase and began hiking again, looking for a bus stop. Apparently I still was looking pretty pathetic because someone else stopped and offered me a ride. I told him that I was heading all the way to the interstate and come to find out, he was too. I saw he had an Army sticker on his truck, so I figured it was safe. At least I knew he was a trained killer and was probably armed. I jumped in and met a new friend on the way to be picked up by my other new friend. I made that connection and we drove safely to Kentucky. But I had the worst pounding headache from lack of sleep and body aches from the fresh ink, the kind that ibuprofen and aspirin won't touch. But again, after my long journey, I got to my friend's house in Wilmore, KY and asked if I could lay down. As I rested from my travels in that safe place, I had an overwhelming feeling of grace and peace.

And there are many weary travelers all around us where this kind of story is not an odd occurrence. There are so many around us who don't know how they getting to where they need to go next and rely upon others for the next step in the journey. Are we going to greet them with judgment and criticism, or will we show grace, the same grace that has been shown to us? Many of us long for Jacob's Well to be a place of this kind of grace. To where people and come who are weary and heavy-laden, and here they can find rest. What if we had sleeping pods, like they do in airports? Or a place to charge your phones and take a shower. What if we were a place of hospitality, a safe place, a center of refuge for our homeless neighbors and friends across the city? I'm just casting the vision, it's up to you to step up to implement it.

Jacob had been on a long and arduous journey and he needed a place of rest, and he found it in Laban's hospitality. Jacob kissed and wept, Laban kissed and embraced his long-lost nephew. He provided a place to stay, food to eat, and hospitality. Jacob had always felt like he needed to keep a step ahead of his brother, earn approval from his parents, and work hard, often using manipulation, deception, and force to get what he wanted. But now he was experiencing grace and rest. Jesus says to you, *Come to me, all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. My yolk is easy and light.* Come to Jesus to experience grace and rest. But Jacob wouldn't be resting for long.

After being there a month, Laban decided that in addition to the free food and lodging that he wanted to pay Jacob for his labors and he asked to name his price. Jacob had one word: Rachel. The Hebrew text says, literally, that Rachel had a great figure, and on top of that was beautiful. She had it all, great body, pretty face, Jacob was lovesick. Rachel's name means "ewe," a female sheep, soft and cuddly. The Hebrew for Leah is "cow!" Aaugh! Bible says she has dull eyes. Some commentators think it means she's cross-eyed, others that she has a lazy eye, some just that she's unattractive and doesn't have enough money for plastic surgery. Bottom line is that Leah fell off the ugly tree and hit every branch on the way down. We're not supposed to talk about this, but some women are created in a way that attracts men in a more magnetic way than others. And Rachel will have an easier life than Leah. Does this still happen? Yes. But becoming bitter about it and hating all men doesn't solve it. Throwing yourself out there and having sex with anyone who will look at you won't make it better. But looking to one who loves you unconditionally for who you are as His beloved daughter, your Father in heaven. Looking to God for your identity, your acceptance, and your love, is a good start in gaining the kind of confidence that exudes and goes beyond physical attraction. A woman beautiful on the inside, willing to faithfully love her man out of the love she receives from God can beat any neurotic hot chick any day. Am I right?

But Jacob wasn't interested in inner beauty, he was interested in Rachel. But how was he going to get her? He didn't show up with 10 camels and gifts for the dowry like his grandfather's servant had, so he needed to do something to win her affections. And Jacob offered seven years' wages for her, which was, in the currency of the time, an enormous price for a bride. *But they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.* When a man is interested in you, ladies, he will work hard for you, fight for you. Don't settle for a free-loader! If he doesn't do what it takes to provide for you and win you over, then he must not be that interested! The right man is worth the wait, so kick that guy off your couch or out of your bed and tell him to go get a job. For you mothers worried about your sons who look too much like Jacob in their underachieving, unmotivated lives, good news, a good woman is a great motivator! Jacob never got off his butt to do anything until he had a woman to work for. But now Rachel changed everything.

Then Jacob said to Laban, *Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her.* Every guy in the room is like, “that’s biblical.” No playing games, no gassing go, Jacob is ready. But seriously, a little graphic and inappropriate to be saying to her father huh? Imagine saying to a dad, especially one who is your employer, even today, “I can’t wait to have sex with your daughter!” This is a man obsessed with emotional and sexual longing for one woman. He wasn’t concerned about the marriage, but the sex. He didn’t care about the wedding, it was the wedding night he was looking for. And a wedding night he got. No response is recorded from Laban, his silence masking the sinister plot he was devising. So Jacob marries his veiled bride, has plenty to drink at the feast, and goes into the dark wedding chamber to consummate the relationship. But when he turns on the light it hits him, “It’s the cross-eyed cow!” “It’s Leah not Rachel!” This has got to be an awkward moment. Jacob, once the the deceiver is now the one deceived. The perpetrator becomes the victim. He had pretended to be Esau, and now Leah pretends to be Rachel. Tell your neighbor, “What goes around, comes around.”

We may wonder how Jacob could have been so gullible or how Leah could have had such high hopes in a guy like Jacob, but I believe they were operating out of a mental and spiritual disease called addiction. There are many ways that romantic love can act as a kind of drug to help us escape the reality of our lives. What about the woman trapped in an abusive relationship who believes the lie that only with him can she face life and feel good about herself? It’s not as easy as just getting out of the relationship. He is her dope! Another example is an older man who abandons his wife for a younger woman, in a desperate effort to hide the reality that he is getting old. Then there is the young man who finds a certain female attractive only until she sleeps with him a couple of times—then he loses interest. For him, women are just objects to help him feel desirable and powerful. Our fears and emptiness inside make love a narcotic, a way to medicate ourselves, and addicts always make foolish, destructive choices.

Why? If we’re anything like Jacob, our lives are empty. He never had his father’s love, he had lost his beloved mother’s love, and he certainly had no sense of God’s love and care. Then he laid his eyes on the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, and he must have said to himself, “If I had her, finally, something would be right in my miserable life. If I had her, it would fix things.” All the longings of his heart for meaning and affirmation and approval were fixed on Rachel. Millions of people are doing this today. Most chick flicks dish out the message that “you’re nobody until somebody loves you.” We believe the fantasy that if we find our one true soulmate, everything wrong with us will be healed. But when our hopes and expectations are that high, no lover, no human being, can possibly live up to that, not Rachel and definitely not Jacob. Only God can fulfill this love-void in our life. Yet we still turn to a person as a counterfeit god like Jacob did. And when that person doesn’t meet our divine expectations, we become depressed or angry or worse. One of my favorite books, Counterfeit Gods, by Tim Keller shows how we turn to things like wealth, status, and relationships for what we can only receive from God. Keller talks about how Rachel was not just Jacob’s wife, but his savior. He wanted and needed Rachel so profoundly that he heard and saw only the things he wanted to hear and see. Jacob wasn’t just a husband, but the answer to all of her problems. We learn that through all of life there runs a universal theme of *disappointment*. You and I will never experience life in the Spirit until you understand that—it’s the essence of the first step. Jacob believed, “If I can just get Rachel, everything will be ok.” And he goes to be with the one who he thinks is Rachel, and literally, the Hebrew says, “in the morning, behold, it was Leah” (v. 25). No matter what counterfeit god we put our hopes in, in the morning, *it is always Leah, never Rachel*. And when we put our hope in lesser things they will always let us down.

The void in Jacob's heart made him vulnerable. When he offered to work seven years for Rachel--nearly four times than the ordinary price for a bride--the businessman Laban saw how lovesick he was. He decided to take advantage of his condition. Jacob had a dream about a ladder and now is living his worst nightmare. And so now, realizing the gravity of what happened, Jacob runs out to find Laban, probably still in his boxers and pretty hung over, but this cannot wait. And Laban defends himself with a rule of his culture about marrying the older daughter first, but shouldn't he have mentioned this some time in the last 7 years? To use a rule to defend your sin is only fooling yourself. But Jacob doesn't have much room to talk. Jacob's name means deceiver. All he has done since coming here has been to trick, manipulate, and steal, and now it's being done to him. Can't exactly call Laban out for this. Stung and trapped, Jacob submitted to seven more years in order to marry Rachel as well as Leah.

And that brings us to the first mention of God in the chapter. The last time we heard from Him was at Jacob's Ladder and here we are 7 years and 2 wives later. Is God stay in Bethel on the Stairway to heaven that whole time? NO! God went with Jacob as He said he would, but behind the scenes, being the gentleman that He is and not forcing himself in someone who thinks they can do things better themselves. Yet God is always closely watching out for those who are weak and vulnerable, for the poor and needy. And something happens that is strong enough to bring God onto the scene. He notices that Leah is feeling unloved. Her father Laban doesn't notice. Jacob definitely doesn't notice. But God notices and opens her womb to have children. Yet she doesn't notice the Divine intervention at first. Like Jacob is fixated on Rachel, Leah is hyper-focused on Jacob. All of the longings of Leah's heart were fixed on Jacob. She saw the way he looked at her sister and envied his affection. She looked in the mirror and saw "not enough" day after day, so much so that when her dad proposed this evil plan of getting her into Jacob's arms she jumped at it. And having kids made it even worse. Each one brought the hope that maybe, just maybe she would be accepted. Instead of thanking God, she used these children as leverage to win her husband's affection. Does this work? No! And finally, after three, Leah hit her bottom and turned to the only one who could satisfy her deepest needs. She turned to the One who had brought her and her children into the world, her bridegroom and lover of her soul. She simply says, *This time I will praise the Lord.*

Have you been let down too many times by people you've put expectations on? Have you felt unloved and tried to buy affection from unresponsive people? Tell your neighbor, "This time praise the Lord." He is the only one who will love you no matter what, no strings attached, not based on how pretty your eyes are, how much you've worked, how smart, dumb, pretty, ugly. . . He loves you! Unconditionally! You are His child! Now praise Him. Stop worshipping those counterfeit gods that will never satisfy and praise the One true God who will. Turn from those things that make big promises and never fulfill and turn to the One who promises to never leave you or forsake you, to bless you and care for you. Worship Him! Give Him a hand clap of praise! He is our Redeemer and buys us back from slavery, so praise Him. He is our Father who adopts us into His everlasting family so praise Him. He is the Mighty One who breaks the chains of addiction and sets us free, so praise Him! Our Lover who showers us with affection and loves us when we have trouble loving ourselves, so praise Him.

Influences, Inspirations, & more Information

Mark Driscoll. *Jacob Marries Leah & Rachel*. Preached at Mars Hill Church on 4/24/2005.

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

Paul Borgman. Genesis: The Story We Haven't Heard. pp.

Tim Keller. Counterfeit Gods.