

Welcome to Jacob's Well. We're in the midst of a series called *Jacob: Searching for God... knows what*. We're walking through the stories of Jacob and Esau in the first book of the bible verse by verse and tonight Jacob is going back home. He's been away for about 20 years and is not the same little cowardly wuss that he was when he left. When he ran away from home for fear of his brother he had nothing but God's blessing and a walking stick. He was poor and now he's rich. He was so poor that he only had one stick to his name. The guy who had two sticks was richer than Jacob. But now he has two wives, two servant wives (or girlfriends) on the side. And he had 11 kids from these women. Let me take a step back and offer a warning. Kids, do not try this at home, even though it's in the Bible. Some you guys are thinking, "Wow 4 chicks, cool church..." No! There are a few sex addicts like Abraham, Jacob, David, and the most sex-crazed of them all, Solomon, who had multiple wives and girlfriends. This is one of many failed experiments in the bible and that and I don't need to repeat. The bible also talks about the importance of monogamy. One husband, one wife. Shoot for that. If you're already past that, then there's grace. But don't sin with plans for God to forgive you because Romans 6:15 says Jesus don't play that. But you didn't come out tonight to be shoulded on. . . do you know what I mean? "You shouldn't do that. . . You should've done this. . ." Tell your neighbor, "Don't should on me!" Follow along in your bibles if you've got them. We're in Genesis 32. Again, Jacob has been gone for a very long time and is heading back home. And he knows the first thing he's got to do is deal with his past and face his brother.

### Face your Fears

*Then Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother, Esau, who was living in the region of Seir in the land of Edom.* **Genesis 32:3**

If we read this in the original Hebrew, we would be reminded of why Jacob might ought to be afraid of Esau. Seir sounds like the Hebrew word for hairy, reminding us that Esau was a buffed up macho manly man with lots of hair. He's the guy who has to get an estimate from his barber before getting a haircut. Birds are attracted to his burly beard. Esau is a hairy man! He's masculine, especially in comparison to Jacob, who listens to boy bands and wears pastels. But his twin brother is the kind of guy who wears boots and listens to death metal and is not to be messed with. But wait, there's more. We read that Seir was in the country. Esau wasn't from the suburbs, he was from the country. He thinks subdivision is part of a math problem. Directions to his house include "turn off the paved road." Esau burns his front yard rather than mowing it. Being from the country, you know Esau is a hunter. He drives a big truck with 2 or 3 gun racks in it loaded up with weapons, and he's got a belt full of Rambo knives that he uses for skinning animals. Esau is a big scary dude and he and Jacob have some major problems to work out! He lives in Seir, in the country of Edom. Edom means red, which reminds us of the story. When the twins were born, Esau came out full of red hair, he looked like Elmo, and Jacob came out grasping at his heel. They were fighting from day one so it's probably hard for Jacob to imagine that they would stop fighting now, because they have a lot of history. Red was the color of the stew that Jacob made to trick Esau out of his birthright and blessing. And last time Jacob saw his brother, was right after he ripped him off. And if you remember, Esau was comforting himself by plotting Jacob's death. Some of you have done that. You're depressed and you start to feel better as you go through the list of ways and weapons that you could use to beat down that low-down, good-for-nothing. . . that's what Esau was doing last time Jacob was with him. Time heals some wounds, but makes other wounds more infected and full of puss. Jacob is full of fear. He's a scared little boy and has a lot of reason to be! But Jacob has come a long way. Instead of running from his problems, he runs out to them, rather than seeking to escape from danger, he is facing his fear. Tell your neighbor, "It's time to face your fears." So Jacob sends a message to Esau that goes like this:

## Make Amends

*“Give this message to my master Esau: ‘Humble greetings from your servant Jacob. Until now I have been living with Uncle Laban, and now I own cattle, donkeys, flocks of sheep and goats, and many servants, both men and women. I have sent these messengers to inform my lord of my coming, hoping that you will be friendly to me.’”* **Genesis 32:4-5**

First of all, any time you call someone “master” and start listing all of your possessions it is a good step in avoiding a fight. If someone is like, “What’d you call my mamma!!!” And you’re like, “My master, I have a plasma TV, a wallet full of cash, a Benz with a full tank of gas. . .” You might not get beat up as bad. But Jacob doesn’t list all of his possessions, in the Hebrew the things he lists are in the singular, not the plural. Is he giving Esau a hint of what could be his without revealing all that is in his hand? Regardless, in v 5 Jacob is clear about what he wants, to find favor with Esau, to make amends to his brother whom he has harmed. Jacob wants to be forgiven and start again. But the thing about forgiveness is that you cannot control it. And this brings us to Step 8.

**Step 8:** *Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.* This comes out of the inventory that we talked about last week from Step 4. Out of just about every relationship where we have resentment and bitterness, we have played a part in the conflict. Except for in situations of abuse, both parties are responsible for wronging the other. Tell somebody, “It takes two to tango.” We can’t change that other person and we can’t change our past, but we can identify our part in the problem and begin working to change how we act and react to that person. There are some wrongs in our past that we need to make amends. People and businesses that we need to pay back what we’ve broken or stolen, saying we’re sorry and how we can make it up to people we have harmed, but all we can do is our part.

*By the time we reach this step, we have become ready to understand rather than to be understood. We can live and let live easier when we know the areas in which we owe amends. It seems hard now, but once we have done it, we will wonder why we did not do it long ago. (Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text Chapter 4)*

So Jacob seeks to make amends. He addresses his brother as Lord and lists his possessions that are up for grabs. Then the messengers return to inform him that Esau isn’t waiting for him to come to visit, but is coming out to meet Jacob, with 400 men! This phrase, “meeting up” used here has two different uses in the OT. One is when an army meets up with another to fight. The other doesn’t have anything to do with violence, but Jacob hears that his big bad brother is coming and bringing 400 men with him and he assumes bloodbath! Jacob can’t get the lid off of a pickle jar, much less whoop 400 men. He doesn’t have an army, but he does have a bunch of women and children to take care of. Verse 7 says that Jacob was *greatly afraid and distressed*. And this is the natural human reaction when we are encountered with more than we can handle.

Like when we get in the car and it’s on E and we’ve got 40 miles to drive, or we look in the pantry that’s bare and we’ve got 40 mouths to feed, or we’ve been climbing this mountain and we are at the end of our strength and we’ve got 40 more feet to go. The mountain seems to be too high, the journey seems too long and the needs out there are far too great for us to handle, so we react in fear. The natural human response is to cry about it, shake a little, and whine to somebody. . . But don’t come whining to me, because I believe in a God who is greater! Tell somebody, “My God is greater.” There is no mountain high enough and no pantry bare enough to make something too hard for God to do! He may not lower the height of the mountain but He will give you the strength to climb it! He may not

shorten the journey that you've got to go, but my God will fill your tank so you can finish, because my God is greater! There are some in here who are discerning a vision from God to do some great things, like start a job-training and job-connecting business incubator for our homeless neighbors, or a half-way house and bath-house for people trying to make it through another day, or a Team Laeth or Ruth's Heart, or something I haven't heard about yet, maybe you haven't told anybody yet because you know what they're going to say. "You can't do that. . . You're not experienced enough, you're too young, you don't have your college degree. . . or You're too old, you missed your chance." You hear those things and you look in the mirror and you know they're right. And it's good to identify the potential obstacles and challenges. But I hope you will keep looking in that mirror and see beyond what they can see. I hope you will look beyond yourself and into the power of God in you! And the one in you is Greater than the one in the world! He is your strength and your shield! He the Alpha and Omega, and what He is birthing in you, He will bring to completion! There are no obstacles too high and it is never too late for God to break in at the last minute. Rather than focus on the big problems, tell those big problems about your big God. So, does Jacob turn to his big God? Not at first. He's got to work some things out on his own first.

### Two Camps

Jacob creates a survival plan and breaks up the family into two camps. This is what you might call cutting your losses. Esau and his 400-man army is coming to seek and destroy. My slow-moving caravan of camels, donkeys, 12 kids, and two wives are no match. We can't run and we can't hide, so might as well create a diversion, so he divides them into two camps. But Jacob has always lived with the two-camp mentality. In his growing up, it was the mom camp vs. dad camp. It was Isaac and Esau vs. Rebekah and Jacob. Then when he moved to Paddam-Aran and started a family of his own, there was a Leah camp and a Rachel camp. But then when their dad confronted him, they had to choose whether they would stay in Jacob's camp or go back to daddy's camp.

There are always two camps. Which camp are you in? There is the camp based on self-will, do-it-yourself, don't trust anybody, I can handle it, and then there is the camp based on God's will, put it into His hands, put your trust in Him and His people, knowing that I cannot do this on my own. There are only two camps. Jesus said that you're either for him or against him, so which is it? What's it going to be? When you're faced with overwhelming pressure and problems, where will you turn? Will you run like a coward to the dopeman, or will you turn to your Father in heaven who cares for you? Will you lash out in anger towards the ones you love or receive the comfort you need from the God who loves you? There's only two camps and only one gets out alive. And if, like Jacob, we keep putting matters into our own hands, acting first and praying last, we might be in the wrong camp.

In the early days of Jacob's Well there was a guy who had just gotten out of prison after serving several years. He was on parole, living in a half-way house, had a pretty good job, and was coming Jacob's Well. One of our staff had connected with him and was driving him to work one day a week and having some really cool conversations. One thing that he said was a confession that he was finding that his main problem was that he would turn to God as a matter of last resort, instead of first resort. He admitted that if he could only learn to turn to God first, instead of trying to work it out on his own, then everything would be ok. A week later he got arrested for car jacking and is serving 20 years in the state penitentiary. Sometimes our 2nd chances run out and we have to face the consequences of our actions. But tonight you can make a decision to turn to God in prayer when you're full of fear.

## Prayer

When Jacob finally gets around to it, his prayer is a good one. Let's study it line by line to inform our own prayers. *O God of my grandfather Abraham, and God of my father, Isaac.* It begins and ends with God, not Jacob. Too often our prayers are all about me. We whine to God about all of our problems instead of meditating on who He is. If we did, then instead of telling God how big our problems are, we'd be telling our problems how big our God is. Next, Jacob goes back to what God's word said: *O Lord, you told me, 'Return to your own land and to your relatives.' And you promised me, 'I will treat you kindly.'* Too many times we cry about how we're not hearing from God and that we just don't know what to do when God has already spoken! There are some things we don't need to pray about! Jesus said "Go and make disciples," so if you're not being discipled or you're not discipling someone else and the opportunity arises, don't pray about it, just do it. Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself," so if you're praying about letting go of some of your hatred towards people of other races or nationalities, stop praying and start loving! There are some good verses in here, and there are some good stories in here. You should read it! Meditate on God's word, and do what God says to do. If there is opportunity to do good, then do it. Stop praying about it and get out there and do something. Ask God for a stop sign if it's not His will. Tell your neighbor, "Go unless you get a no."

The next part of Jacob's prayer is huge. The elements within form a classic acronym to help us to pray called ACTS. Do you know what they stand for? Have you incorporated this into your prayer life? A - Adoration. C - Confession. T - Thanksgiving. S - Supplication. *I am not worthy of all the unfailing love and faithfulness you have shown to me, your servant.* God's love is not like human love because it never disappoints, it never lets us down. God's love never fails. He is worthy of adoration. What is adoration? It's the reciprocation of His love. He loves us, so we love him back. Rather than respond to circumstances with fear, we respond to our God in love. Yet in the midst of his adoration we find confession. *I am not worthy* of it. This is the opposite of our entitled, spoiled, egotistical, self-centered ways. It's also not flying to the other extreme of low self-esteem, beating yourself up, suicidal thoughts either. What we have here is a healthy humility that leads into confession and repentance. It's not an unhealthy self-image that results in shame and depression, but a repentant heart that realizes his sin separates him from God and is grateful for grace. Do you see the difference? Repentance is not saying, "I am not worthy because I'm a terrible person." Repentance says, "I am not worthy because my God is worthy of more." And that will lead us to some thanksgiving and praise, which is at the heart of Jacob's next statement: *When I left home and crossed the Jordan River, I owned nothing except a walking stick. Now my household fills two large camps!* Who in the house is grateful tonight? Who fills their prayers with thanksgiving and praise? I used to be this Lord, but now I'm that. I used to have a stick and now I have camps. I might be stuck, but at least I don't just have a stick! An attitude of gratitude is what we need to keep pressing on y'all. And it leads to the final aspect of ACTS, Supplication. What does that mean? It's what the acronym spells. It's when we ACTS God for help with something. But too many of us think this is all that prayer is about! We ACTs like God is a big pinata and if we hit him with our one stick that we have he'll give us two camps. That's not what prayer is all about! It is one aspect of prayer, but keep it in perspective y'all. But Jacob knew what I hope you know: when you need to help, when your problems are bigger than what you can handle, ask for help. *O Lord, please rescue me from the hand of my brother, Esau. I am afraid that he is coming to attack me, along with my wives and children.* And when you ask, ask in faith. Stand on the promises that God has already made. *But you promised me, 'I will surely treat you kindly, and I will multiply your descendants until they become as numerous as the sands along the seashore—too many to count.'* God has promised to treat you with kindness. Tell someone, "Stand on those promises."

## Making Amends

So Jacob practices Step 8, then he prays, and now he is moving on to **Step 9**, *Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others*. Go back and read the list of gifts that Jacob is offering Esau. He is desperate and he has done a lot of wrongs, so he is offering a lot of amends. Sending gifts ahead to a person who has been wronged happens again in the bible. In 1 Samuel 25, David sent 10 men from his crew to the affluent Napal to collect his dues and when he didn't pay up, David and 400 men started to make their way to pay a little visit and if it wasn't for Abigail making amends on Napal's behalf, there would have been a massacre. Some of you know about this kind of scenario from your days running with a gang. It is the world's dog-eat-dog mentality based on a justice of economics and hinging upon retaliation and threats of violence. When you live according to the laws in this world, you're either strong or you're weak and only the strong survive. But Jacob is not exactly the strong man in this story! Always coming up from the rear, behind something or somebody. Jacob is the classic underdog. He came out of the womb grasping at his brother's heel, always behind yet somehow got ahead. He got ripped off by Laban, yet through God's grace ended up with more than Laban, yet now Jacob is still behind. Esau is still big and bad and Jacob continues to be weak and small. Thank God that Jacob doesn't have to be governed by the laws of vengeance and neither do you. Thank God that in God's Kingdom, Down is the new up and Jesus came to show how the first will be last and last will be first, and we get a glimpse of it here. In Jacob's prayer, *I am not worthy* literally means *I am little*. And as he seeks to make amends, it is not a power play, or some effort at manipulation, but a humble request for grace. He cannot control Esau's response, but he can do what he knows is right for himself. You can't change the past, but you can do something different in the present. And that is a living amends to the people you've harmed and the world as a whole.

The chapter ends with Jacob sharing why he's doing what he's doing: *I will try to appease him*. Literally this means that he will try to *cover himself*, or to *make propitiation*. But the reality is that once Jacob is out of hiding and Esau knows where to find him, he cannot cover his butt any more than you could if your pants fell down while you're hanging from the monkey bars. Jacob is naked. He's vulnerable, and he's in way over his head. He cannot appease Esau with any number of farm animals. He cannot make propitiation for his sins. And neither can you. But the good news is that there is one who can and there is one who did.

God created all that we see and created humans in his likeness to live with Him forever in a renewed earth. But sin has separated us from God and we have fallen way short of the mark. We've lied, stolen, compromised, and made a mess of His world. And yet His love for us is unfailing and his faithfulness is amazing, and so God has made a way to make propitiation for our sins. You see there has to be punishment for our wrongs, otherwise there would be no justice. There has to be a sacrifice made to atone for our crimes against humanity. And so in the fullness of time, God sent His only son into the world to redeem it. He lived a perfect life, then died a perfect death to pay for our sins, to cleanse us from iniquity, to redeem us and buy us back from the powers that enslave us, and to give us another chance to be the people of God. That's what Jesus was talking about when we sat at the table of the Last Supper. And it's what we remember every time we celebrate Holy Communion.

This is the table of Jesus Christ and all are invited who love God, earnestly repent of their sins, and seek to live in peace with their neighbors. Let us pray.