

Disciple Fast Track II Session 5 Assignment

Theme Word: Reconciliation

Title: Conflict Within the Family

Theme Verse:

“But Jacob stayed apart by himself, and a man wrestled with him until dawn broke”
(Gen. 32:34).

Daily Psalm:

“I’m worn out from groaning.
Every night, I drench my bed with tears.
I soak my couch all the way through.
My vision fails because of my grief.
It’s weak because of all my distress”
(Ps. 6:6-7).

Our Human Condition and Group Discussion Question

Conflict within the family seems almost universal, even among the people of God. Estrangement between spouses, rebellion by children, fierce rivalry between family members are as old as humankind. We do not want to accept responsibility or blame for discord. We wait for someone else to make the first move or pray that the discord will go away.

Please respond to the following question in the space provided. Return to this discussion thread often to read others’ responses.

At your worst, how do you tend to react to this Human Condition? (Avoid, blame, justify, wait for someone else to step up, pray it goes away, etc.)

Day 1 Assignment

Spiritual Practice – Prayer

As we hold on to God in prayer, we work with God’s healing, strengthening, and directing power.

What does it mean to be persistent in prayer?

How will you practice this spiritual discipline this week?

A Biblical Scholar’s Perspective - Video

A Biblical Scholar’s Perspective - Transcript

Reflections on A Biblical Scholar’s Perspective

Please note any comments or questions that come to mind after viewing the video.

Introduction to this Session

This week’s session focuses on family estrangements. Pay attention to how relatives are in tension with one another. Watch God carefully guard Jacob’s steps to maintain the covenant even amid deception.

Genesis 25:19-34 (Birth of two nations; Esau barter away his birthright)

Into the Word

Twins

The signs of family dissension appeared early. They wrestled in the womb, these twin boys who were as different as day and night. That struggle predicted a lifelong rivalry.

Rebekah named the firstborn Esau, meaning “hairy,” later nicknaming him Edom, meaning “red.” These words in Hebrew are plays on the words for Seir and Edom, which are the neighboring regions where Esau’s descendants settled. Father Isaac enjoyed this rough, easygoing son who was a skillful hunter, a man of the fields.

Rebekah named the younger son Jacob, which means “grabber,” because he grabbed his brother’s heel as he came from the womb. Rebekah adored Jacob, her quiet, serious son who was a shepherd, dwelling in tents. The two vocations, hunting and shepherding, portray two different ways of living off the land, inevitably in conflict. But the favoritism of the parents must have inflamed the sibling rivalry. Consider these sad words of Scripture: “Isaac loved Esau, ... but Rebekah loved Jacob” (Gen. 25:28).

Birthright

Jacob was smart; he was smooth. One day Esau showed up at Jacob’s campfire tired and hungry. “Grabber” blindsided his brother, turning down his request for a serving of lentil soup. “Sell me your birthright,” demanded the conniver.

Ancient laws of primogeniture gave a double portion of the inheritance to the oldest son. Jacob was demanding Esau’s firstborn rights. Esau, foolishly and impulsively, agreed to this outrageous demand, and this set in motion an even more heated rivalry between the two brothers. Later, Esau takes two Hittite wives, and we are told that they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 26:34-35).

Ending the Day's Assignment

Remember to end your study time in prayer.

Day 2 Assignment

Spiritual Practices – Prayer

Genesis 27–28 (Jacob steals Esau’s blessing; Jacob’s dream at Bethel)

Into the Word

The Father’s Blessing

When Isaac was old and nearly blind, he sent his favored son, Esau, out to hunt game and prepare his favorite meal. He then announced his intention to give Esau his blessing (Gen. 27:1-4). Rebekah was listening.

How long Rebekah plotted we do not know, but when Isaac thought he was about to die, she was ready. The father’s blessing had almost mystical properties. It possessed a kind of divine power to determine the future.

Rebekah’s scheme was based on Isaac’s blindness. She dressed her favorite in Esau’s clothes, put a goat skin across his smooth arms, prepared a meal using the herbs and spices Esau would have used on his game, and sent “Grabber” in to receive the blessing.

Jacob received Isaac’s blessing, which promised a rich future dominant over his brother. Esau arrived late only to discover that his brother had robbed him again, and he received only a secondary blessing from Isaac. Esau vowed to kill Jacob after his father has died. Both Rebekah and Isaac agree that Jacob should flee to the house of their kinsman Laban, Rebekah’s brother, in Paddan-aram (Gen. 27:46-28:5).

Separation

“Grabber” packed quickly and left in a hurry, leaving behind an enraged brother, a bewildered father, and a lonely mother. As Esau noted, Jacob had pilfered it all—the promise of Abraham, the blessing of Isaac, the inheritance of Esau. Rebekah, knowing that she had lost the love of Esau, hurried Jacob off with these words: “Why should I suffer the loss of both of you on one day?” (Gen. 27:45).

In that moment, neither mother nor son realized the enormity of the family breach. She underestimated the full range of her interference, for she would go to her grave without ever seeing

her beloved son again. She tells him: “Your curse will be on me, my son” (Gen. 27:13). Little did Jacob dream that the lie would exile him for twenty years.

Bethel

Jacob headed for his mother’s people, back to her family roots near Haran in Paddan-aram (Mesopotamia). But on the way, God met him in a dream in Luz and claimed him as the conveyor of covenant (Gen. 28:13-15). In this dream Jacob saw a stairway leading up to heaven with angels ascending and descending. God graciously affirmed the covenant made with Abraham and Isaac. Once again, God blessed the covenant people so that they, in turn, might bless the whole Earth. So, in a world of many gods and goddesses, monotheism was confirmed, and God’s singular presence and power was restated. Jacob’s response to God’s promise was to try to bargain with God. He renamed the place “Bethel,” which means “house of God,” and he offered to build a sanctuary there if God would bring him back safely to his family land.

Two themes appear to be emerging. One is Jacob’s deceit, his treachery, and self-serving style. The other is God’s divine grace pouring out on an undeserving life.

Ending the Day's Assignment

Remember to end your study time in prayer.

Day 3

Spiritual Practices – Prayer

Genesis 29–31 (Deceiver is deceived; twelve sons: Mizpah)

Into the Word

Manipulation

It began romantically enough. Jacob met Rachel at a well—just as Abraham’s servant had found Rebekah at one, perhaps the same well. This time he was watering the flocks.

Rebekah manipulated her sons; her brother Laban manipulated his daughters. After working seven years to marry Rachel, Jacob woke up from his wedding night married to the wrong woman. The young trickster had met his match.

So, after Jacob married Leah, he married Rachel, too, and then worked seven more years to pay for her. That hurried departure from home had left him without gifts or money to pay for a wife. He was, in effect, an indentured servant.

Jacob’s two wives, Leah and Rachel, got caught up in a competition to give Jacob sons. Rachel was at first barren, so she offered her handmaid Bilhah to Jacob, and she bore two sons. Leah also offered her handmaid Zilpah to Jacob, and she, too, bore two sons. Leah gave him six more sons, and after many barren years, Rachel gave Jacob two sons but died after giving birth to the second. These twelve sons become the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel, and they gave the tribes their names.

Sons of Jacob (twelve tribes of Israel’s beginnings)

Sons of Leah:

Reuben (Gen. 29:32)

Simeon (29:33)

Levi (29:34)

Judah (29:35)

Issachar (30:17-18)

Zebulun (30:19-20)

Sons of Zilpah (Leah’s maid):

Gad (Gen. 30:10)

Asher (30:12-13)

Sons of Rachel:

Joseph (Gen. 30:22-24)

Benjamin (35:16-18)

Sons of Bilhah (Rachel's maid):

Dan (Gen. 30:5-6)

Naphtali (30:8)

A Call to Leave

It was time to go home. Signs, both human and divine, pointed that way. Jacob's flocks had grown. Sons and servants turned his campground into a community. Jacob's brothers-in-law were jealous and angry. Laban treated him with distrust. Leah and Rachel felt sold out by their father and were ready to leave.

God played a role. In a dream, Jacob heard the divine voice tell him to pack up and move out. After a continual family tug-of-war, it was time to separate. So, Jacob fled during the spring sheep-shearing time. Laban and his sons would be distracted by their work, so they would not miss him for a few days. As Rachel left, she stole her father's figurines of household gods (Gen. 31:19). Why? These gods may have carried legal power of inheritance of the family possessions. Rachel and Leah, as women, were deprived of any inheritance. Perhaps taking the figurines was Rachel's last grasp at family fairness.

A Parting of the Ways

For twenty years Laban and Jacob had been trying to outwit each other. Their various schemes and tricks resulted in hostility and alienation. Now they confronted each other in a potential moment of violence. The covenant of God again faced human peril.

God, in a dream, cautioned Laban. The figurines were not found. After angry accusations, the men softened their words. They agreed to go in opposite directions. We might wish that Laban and Jacob had become friends, but in this world sometimes peace and separateness were all that were humanly possible.

But the agreement between Jacob and Laban was even more inclusive. Jacob promised never to hurt Leah and Rachel or take other wives. Responsibility of family protection and family integrity was being transferred from father to son-in-law. The mound of rocks that Jacob assembled to commemorate the agreement later came to be known as Mizpah, which means "watch post." The Mizpah Benediction is now precious to people of faith: "The LORD watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other" (Gen. 31:49, NRSV). When we say this benediction, we mean, "May the Lord watch over and protect us all." But Jacob and Laban meant, "May the Lord keep an eye

on you and me when we can't keep an eye on each other, to make sure each is keeping his part of the bargain."

Jacob then swore by his father, Isaac, the relatives kissed all around, and they gave final blessings to one another. The two family units separated amicably. Jacob was going home. The covenant had been guarded again.

Recall a time when you reached an understanding, shook hands, and agreed with someone to go separate ways in peace.

What was the impact on your life?

Ending the Day's Assignment

Remember to end your study time in prayer.

Day 4 Assignment

Spiritual Practices – Prayer

Genesis 32–33 (Jacob wrestles with God; Esau extends grace)

Into the Word

Wrestling With God

God said little to Jacob during his twenty years in Haran. Now as Jacob approached the land of covenant, God began to speak again. A vision of God’s army (Gen. 32:1-2) may have reminded Jacob of the army of angels on the ladder of his dreams at Bethel. What had the promise been? “I am with you now, I will protect you everywhere you go, and I will bring you back to this land” (28:15). God had kept the promise.

But now “Grabber” was coming home to his estranged twin. Throughout his life, Jacob had operated on the principle that no problem was so big or so complicated that it could not be solved by running away. Older now, with two wives, children, flocks, and herds, he had nowhere to go but straight toward Esau. No longer was there a way to run. Messengers, gifts, division of family—all the ploys in the world were futile. Esau was waiting with four hundred men.

The Bible says, “Jacob stayed apart by himself” (Gen. 32:24). At night he wrestled, seemingly with a powerful man, but obviously with God. He was totally alone and without a plan of escape. All night long he wrestled as God sought to birth him again.

Jacob demanded: “I won’t let you go until you bless me” (Gen. 32:26).

God asked: “What’s your name?” (Gen. 32:27).

The word came slow and hard to Jacob’s lips because he knew this meant all that he was, the “Grabber” (Gen. 32:27). Nothing is more painful, yet more healing, than to honestly acknowledge who you really are.

Now, said God, Jacob had a new name: “Israel, because you struggled with God and with men and won” (Gen. 32:28). We fear God will kill us if we face truth squarely and openly, but God welcomes our confession and responds with mercy.

The new name was of utmost significance. The “Grabber,” the conniver, the one who stole and ran, was gone. He now became the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, laying the foundation of the Hebrew people. The Hebrews, in looking back over their history, particularly after the Babylonian Exile, saw in Jacob the symbol of Israel limping home, chastised, humbled, but nonetheless returning by God’s grace.

God touched Jacob’s thigh, the place on the body where vows were made, testimonies authenticated, and life was given. (Recall the servant’s vow over Isaac’s genitalia.) The new man, Israel, would limp, but he would never forget his night with God, and he would never be the same. Jacob named this place “Peniel,” which means “face of God.”

Share a time when you were anxious, afraid, alone. What happened to you? Were you driven to your knees? What happened? Did God shine a spotlight of truth into your inner being, asking who you were?

When Brothers Embrace

Limping up the hill after a sleepless night, Jacob offered himself in vulnerability to his brother.

“Esau ran to meet him, threw his arms around his neck, kissed him, and they wept” (Gen. 33:4). The one who was wronged ran down the slope as an act of grace. The one in power yielded to the powerless. The one with rights of punishment and revenge hurried to hug his brother.

Isn’t it remarkable how often the mercies of God are conveyed not by the chosen ones but by those who somehow stand outside the covenant?

Jacob (Israel) was straightforward and honest when he looked his brother in the eye and said, “Seeing your face is like seeing God’s face, since you’ve accepted me so warmly” (Gen. 33:10).

To see one’s sibling in reconciliation is to unveil the face of God.

Describe a time in your life when you went humbly to someone, open and vulnerable, or when someone came limping to you.

We might wish for this story to conclude with that holy and merciful hug between two brothers. But they went their separate ways again, and life went on. It always does.

The Bible lets the ambiguity of sin and sin’s consequences just lie there for our contemplation.

From your life experiences, reflect on the ways you deal with moral ambiguity, family shame, or revenge for being hurt.

Ending the Day's Assignment

Remember to end your study time in prayer.

Day 5 Assignment

Spiritual Practices – Prayer

Prayer

Genesis 34–36 (Shechem and the rape of Dinah; return to Bethel; death of Rachel; Jacob and Esau bury their father)

Matthew 5:21-48 (Jesus teaches reconciliation)

Into the Word

Keeping On

Jacob moved first to Shechem, where he bought a “section of the field” (Gen. 33:19), but he was not destined to stay there. The son of the ruler of Shechem, also named Shechem, seized Dinah, Jacob and Leah’s daughter, and raped her (34:2). This unleashed a series of events that ended with the sons of Jacob slaughtering the men of Shechem, and Jacob being forced to flee from the area with his entire family (Gen 34).

Later, he settled at Bethel, where he had promised long ago to build a sanctuary. Here Jacob had his family purge their images of foreign gods, and God reaffirmed the covenant and Jacob’s new name, Israel. Jacob built an altar there, set up a stone pillar, and named the place “El-bethel,” which means “God of the House of Bethel” (Gen. 35).

So, Jacob’s reconciliation was complete. He had wrestled with God and prevailed, embraced his brother, Esau; buried his father, Isaac, at Hebron; placed his mother’s nurse in the ground; and fulfilled his Mizpah promise to Laban to look after Leah and Rachel until their deaths.

Into the World

To be ready to participate in this session’s group meeting:

- + Make sure you have completed all the readings, notes, questions, and group discussion threads.
- + Complete the **Into the World** and **God’s Word in My World** sections below.

Into the World

This section is your response to the Human Condition as you consider all you have experienced to complete this session. The goal is to help you commit to a life informed by Scripture.

Revisit this session's **Human Condition**:

Conflict within the family seems almost universal, even among the people of God. Estrangement between spouses, rebellion by children, fierce rivalry between family members are as old as humankind. We do not want to accept responsibility or blame for discord. We wait for someone else to make the first move or pray that the discord will go away.

Consider your reading of Matt. 5:21-48 (a portion of the Sermon on the Mount) and ask yourself: In what ways do the teachings of Jesus help you avoid alienation?

In what ways will the teachings of Jesus help you experience reconciliation?

Focus now on your extended family. Contemplate the tensions across the years. Try to relate specifically to Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Esau, Laban and his daughters.

When did someone practice deception or trickery in your family? How was that deception exposed and made right?

When have sharp dealings over property or money alienated loved ones?

What rivalry is still going on between siblings? How healthy or destructive is the competition?

What could you do to strengthen your family ties and relationships?

Breaches are everywhere; God is trying to heal them. "God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ" (2 Cor. 5:19). Racial barriers, economic rifts, and political enmity abound. Hunters like Esau are still in conflict with ranchers like Jacob. Employers like Laban lock horns with employees like Jacob. People in one country struggle against people from another country, as the nations of Mesopotamia and Canaan did.

Read how Jesus instructed making a gift at the altar when you are at odds with a family member or a neighbor (Matt. 5:23-24). If you took that instruction literally, whom would you go see to make it right?

Reconciliation extends beyond family. It can involve the church, the workplace, the community and beyond. Offer tokens of reconciliation this week in your family, in the church family, in the neighborhood, or at work. Record the results here.

God's Word in My World

In what new ways will God's word and all you've encountered in this session influence your daily thoughts, attitudes, and actions so you continue to become more like Christ?

Now write a Personal Prayer as a response to your answer to the above question. It could be a request to God to help you with a change in thought, attitude, or behavior as you take these learnings into the world.

If You Want to Know More

Some people enjoy relating modern geography to the geography of biblical places. Study a map of the present-day Middle East that includes Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, and Egypt. Compare it to an ancient map to locate as many places of biblical interest as you can. Notice rivers, highways, trade routes, key ports and major cities.

If you can, secure a topographic map. It will help you understand economics, politics, and trade patterns. Notice the vast deserts, the significant mountain ranges. Research annual rainfall and seasonal weather conditions. Reflect on the logic of modern national boundaries.

Ending the Day's Assignment

Remember to end your study time in prayer.

Sabbath Assignment

Sabbath has power to create a way of life in which families experience tenderness, intimacy, and peace.

What could you do to foster joy or goodwill within your family?

Is there someone with whom you need to make contact?

Take time today to pray a family prayer, either alone or with your family. Pray by name for each person including members of your extended family.