

*And there he built an altar
and called the place El-bethel,
because there God had
revealed himself to him when
he fled from his brother.*

■ GENESIS 35:7 ESV

Reminder of
OUR PERSONAL
responses in building
altars to the LORD

SEPTEMBER 2015

*And there he built an altar
and called the place
El-bethel, because there
God had revealed himself
to him when he fled
from his brother.*

GENESIS 35:7 ESV

COVENANT EFC

2015 Memory Focus

FROM GENESIS (ESV)

JANUARY

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

FEBRUARY

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God
He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:27

MARCH

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Genesis 1:28

APRIL

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Genesis 6:5

MAY

“I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis 12:3

JUNE

“Far be it from You to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”

Genesis 18:25

JULY

He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

Genesis 22:2

AUGUST

“I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that You have shown to Your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.”

Genesis 32:10

SEPTEMBER

And there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed Himself to him when he fled from his brother.

Genesis 35:7

OCTOBER

“He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”

Genesis 39:9

NOVEMBER

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Genesis 49:10

DECEMBER

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Genesis 50:20

Foreword

BY SENIOR
PASTORS

2015

marks our Jubilee Year as a nation. God is the ultimate reason for Singapore's 50 years of peace and prosperity, safety and security, shalom and success. Indeed God alone deserves all praise, honour and thanksgiving for all the blessings from above!

Jubilee has been called a super-Sabbath. God is looking for devoted disciples who flee from *clamour, hurry and crowds* and cultivate the habit of abiding in God's Word, delighting in God's will and walking in God's way. Those who are intentional about a stronger foundation, a closer walk and a deeper life. Those who are tired of their hit-and-run, hide-and-see, touch-and-go relationship with Him. This Jubilee Year, will you intentionally and zealously commit yourself to be among the first fruits of this new Jubilee generation by scheduling personal time alone with God?

Psalm 1:2-3 speaks of the blessed person as one whose "delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers".

The Psalmist finds great joy in relating to the Word of God...

He meditates upon the Word when day comes and when night falls...

Far beyond outward prosperity, the Psalmist desires the inward prosperity of his soul...

We invite you to take this year to grow deeper in faith and in His Word. Deal decisively with distractions in your life. Cut yourself off from habits and modern gadgets that displace communion with God. Fast from social media. Overhaul your schedule. Remove activities that desensitise you to the gentle promptings of the Spirit.

There is a dailyness in discipleship – soaking daily in His Word, applying His truth, reaping the fruits and passing them on.

Some years ago when Jerry Bridges was in Singapore, he talked about encountering God daily in the Word and especially the Gospel. When asked what it was like, Jerry said, "God always shows up."

What an assurance! This Jubilee Year 2015, draw near to Him. Linger in His presence. Allow Him to refresh you, renew you and restore you – a people prepared for the Day of His Visitation.

Jesus is Our Jubilee!

Ps Tony Yeo and Ps Tan Kay Kiong

God is looking for devoted disciples who flee from *clamour, hurry and crowds* and cultivate the habit of abiding in God's Word, delighting in God's will and walking in God's way.

Guide to Using This Devotional Journal

1 Prepare your heart in God's presence

- Select a fixed time (preferably in the morning before you begin your day) and a quiet place where you can be alone and undisturbed.
- Observe a moment of silence as you acknowledge God's presence. Centre down.
- Begin with a song of worship. Meditate on the lyrics even if you are unfamiliar with the tune. (Refer to the list of worship songs provided.)
- Ask God to open your heart to hear Him.

The English Standard Version (ESV) is the default Bible version unless otherwise specified.

2 Allow God to S.O.A.P. you with His Word and Spirit

- **Scripture** – *Take your time to meditate on the Scripture passage for the day. Pause and mull over words and phrases that stand out to you.*

- **Observation** – *Jot down significant insights and reflections from the passage you have read. You can use the guiding questions provided.*

What's New in 2015?

A "Deeper Reflection" section has been introduced to aid your contemplation of the Scripture. It is not to replace your own observation, for the Holy Spirit illuminates the Scripture to you as you seek Him earnestly.

- **Application** – *Note down a specific and practical commitment to God's Word for you. Is there a command to obey, a sin to avoid, an example to follow or a principle to live out? Where appropriate, share your devotional entry with someone.*
- **Prayer** – *Bring your heartfelt response to God in prayer.*

What's New in 2015?

- Suggested prayers are included twice weekly to serve as an aid to those who may find them helpful in their prayer response.
- On Sundays, you may want to meditate on the Psalms, the Gospel or the Scripture passage of the sermon. This may be followed by reviewing and reflecting on the past week and then responding in prayer. Examining your life is essential in your faith journey as a redeemed disciple of Christ.

Sep/Oct
2015

Worship Songs

WAVES OF REVIVAL

Verse

Love divine, all loves excelling
Jesus our life, our all
Your love abounds in us forever
You are our hope

Breathe O breathe Your loving Spirit
Into every weary soul
You are our Peace
And our Redeemer
Great is Your mercy and love

Chorus

Let Your light
Shine through the darkness
We cry, let every heart be turned to Christ
Waves of Revival
Holy Spirit sweep across our land

Let Your love
Touch every heart, renew every mind
Our heart yearns for more
Lord send Your fire
Waves of Revival
Holy Spirit sweep across our land

*Words and Music: Andrew Yeo
Year & Publisher: © 2014 Music Arranged by Goh Kheng Long
Mixed and Mastered by Jerry Chua @ MYX Music Studios (www.myxstudios.com)*

MIGHTY TO SAVE

Verse 1

Everyone needs compassion
Love that's never failing
Let mercy fall on me
Everyone needs forgiveness
The kindness of a Saviour
The hope of nations

Chorus

Saviour, He can move the mountains
My God is mighty to save
He is mighty to save
Forever Author of salvation
He rose and conquered the grave
Jesus conquered the grave

Verse 2

So take me as You find me
All my fears and failures
Fill my life again
I give my life to follow
Everything I believe in
Now I surrender

Bridge

Shine your light and let the whole world see
We're singing
For the glory of the risen King Jesus
Shine your light and let the whole world see
We're singing
For the glory of the risen King

*Words & Music: Ben Fielding | Reuben Morgan
Year & Publisher: © 2006 Hillsong Music Publishing
CCLI License # 324618*

CHRIST IS ENOUGH

Verse 1

Christ is my reward and all of my devotion
 Now there's nothing in this world
 That could ever satisfy
 Through every trial my soul will sing
 No turning back I've been set free

Chorus

Christ is enough for me
 Christ is enough for me
 Everything I need is in You
 Everything I need

Verse 2

Christ my all in all, the joy of my salvation
 And this hope will never fail
 Heaven is our home
 Through every storm my soul will sing
 Jesus is here, to God be the glory

Bridge 1

I have decided to follow Jesus
 No turning back no turning back

Bridge 2

The cross before me the world behind me
 No turning back no turning back

Words & Music: Jonas Myrin | Reuben Morgan
Year & Publisher: © 2012 Hillsong Music Publishing
CCLI License # 324618

ALL WHO ARE THIRSTY

Verse 1

All who are thirsty
 All who are weak
 Come to the fountain
 Dip your heart in the stream of life
 Let the pain and the sorrow
 Be washed away
 In the waves of His mercy
 As deep cries out to deep
 (We sing)

Chorus 1

Come Lord Jesus come
 Come Lord Jesus come
 (REPEAT)

Chorus 2

Holy Spirit come
 Holy Spirit come
 (Repeat)

Interlude

As deep cries out to deep
 As deep cries out to deep
 As deep cries out to deep we sing

Words & Music: Brenton Brown | Glenn Robertson
Year & Publisher: © 1998 Vineyard Songs (UK/Eire) (Admin. by K I Publishing)
For use solely with the SongSelect Terms of Use. All rights reserved. www.ccli.com
CCLI License # 324618

GIVE ME JESUS

Verse 1

In the morning when I rise
 In the morning when I rise
 In the morning when I rise
 Give me Jesus

Chorus 1

Give me Jesus, give me Jesus
 You can have all this world
 But give me Jesus

Verse 2

And when I am alone
 Oh and when I am alone
 And when I am alone
 Give me Jesus

Verse 3

And when I come to die
 Oh and when I come to die
 And when I come to die
 Give me Jesus

Chorus 2

Give me Jesus, give me Jesus
 You can have all this world
 You can have all this world
 You can have all this world but give me Jesus

Words & Music: Fernando Ortega

*Year & Publisher: © Words: Public Domain; Music: 2000 Dejamesolo Music
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SPIRIT TOUCH YOUR CHURCH

Verse 1

Lord we need Your grace and mercy
 We need to pray like never before
 We need the power of Your Holy Spirit
 To open Heaven's door

Chorus

Spirit touch Your church
 Stir the hearts of men
 Revive us Lord
 With Your passion once again
 I want to care for others
 Like Jesus cares for me
 Let Your rain fall upon me
 Let Your rain fall upon me

Verse 2

Lord we humbly come before You
 We don't deserve of You what we ask
 But we yearn to see Your glory
 Restore this dying land

Ending

Let Your rain fall upon me

Words & Music: Kim Bollinger

*Year & Publisher: © 1990 Integrity's Hosanna! Music
 (Admin. by Crossroad Distributors Pty. Ltd.)
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IN JESUS' NAME

Verse 1

God is fighting for us, God is on our side
 He has overcome, yes
 He has overcome
 We will not be shaken, we will not be moved
 Jesus You are here (oh)

Verse 2

Carrying our burdens, covering our shame
 He has overcome, yes
 He has overcome
 We will not be shaken we will not be moved
 Jesus You are here

Chorus 1

I will live, I will not die
 The resurrection pow'r of Christ alive in me
 And I am free in Jesus' Name

Chorus 2

I will live, I will not die
 I will declare and lift You high
 Christ revealed and I am healed in Jesus' Name

Bridge

God is fighting for us, pushing back the darkness
 Lighting up the Kingdom that cannot be shaken
 In the Name of Jesus, enemy's defeated
 And we will shout it out, shout it out

Ending

In Jesus' Name
 In Jesus' Name
 In Jesus' Name oh

Words & Music: Darlene Zschech | Israel Houghton
Year & Publisher: © 2013 EWI (Admin. by Crossroad Distributors Pty. Ltd.); Integrity Worship Music (Admin. by Crossroad Distributors Pty. Ltd.); Integrity's Praise! Music (Admin. by Crossroad Distributors Pty. Ltd.); Sound Of The New Breed (Admin. by Crossroad Distributors Pty. Ltd.)
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OUR GOD

Verse 1

Water You turned into wine
 Opened the eyes of the blind
 There's no one like You
 None like You

Verse 2

Into the darkness You shine
 Out of the ashes we rise
 There's no one like You
 None like You

Chorus

Our God is greater
 Our God is stronger
 God You are higher than any other
 Our God is healer
 Awesome in power our God, our God

Bridge

And if our God is for us
 Then who could ever stop us
 And if our God is with us
 Then what could stand against
 And if our God is for us
 Then who could ever stop us
 And if our God is with us
 Then what could stand against
 (Then) what could stand against

Words & Music: Chris Tomlin | Jesse Reeves | Jonas Myrin | Matt Redman
Year & Publisher: © 2010 Said And Done Music (Admin. by CopyCare Asia Ltd (Singapore Branch))
sixsteps Music (Admin. by CopyCare Asia Ltd (Singapore Branch))
Thankyou Music (Admin. by CopyCare Asia Ltd (Singapore Branch))
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worshiptogether.com songs (Admin. by CopyCare Asia Ltd (Singapore Branch))
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JUST AS I AM

Verse 1

Just as I am without one plea
 But that Thy blood was shed for me
 And that Thou bidst me come to Thee
 O Lamb of God, I come, I come

Verse 2

Just as I am and waiting not
 To rid my soul of one dark blot
 To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot
 O Lamb of God I come, I come

Chorus

I come broken to be mended
 I come wounded to be healed
 I come desperate to be rescued
 I come empty to be filled

I come guilty to be pardoned
 By the blood of Christ the Lamb
 And I'm welcomed with open arms, praise God
 Just as I am

Verse 3

Just as I am, I would be lost
 But mercy and grace my freedom bought
 And now to glory in Your cross
 O Lamb of God, I come, I come

Ending

Praise God just as I am
 Just as I am

*Words & Music: Charlotte Elliott | David Moffitt | Sue C. Smith | Travis Cottrell |
 William Batchelder Bradbury
 Year & Publisher: © 2009 CCTB Music (Admin. by Universal Music Publishing
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 Music Publishing MGB Australia Pty Limited); Universal Music - Brentwood Benson
 Publishing (Admin. by Universal Music Publishing MGB Australia Pty Limited)
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MAKE A CERTAIN BREAKTHROUGH

Verse 1

In my life of searching
 For the plain and simple way
 Many paths were so winding
 The roads were never straight

Then the Spirit of God broke through
 And healed my broken wings
 And showed me the way into His heart

Chorus

And I know that God is leading
 In a clear and certain way
 My one life for your purpose, Jesus,
 I offer up this day

To follow you completely
 To do all that you say

Cleanse my life, fill me up
 And use me this day
 Make a certain breakthrough
 Make it today

Verse 2

In these days of danger,
 Lord, we rest upon Your grace
 With Your tender and skillful hands
 You shape this stubborn clay
 Yes You calm my inmost being
 Giving courage to hope again
 And to build this one life in power and faith

*Words & Music: Ps Ann Chan, Ruth Ling
 Year & Publisher: © 2006 Covenant Evangelical Free Church*

The Church Beyond

■ FOCUS OF THE MONTH:

RADICAL LIVING IN EAST ASIA

I have always wanted to live on the edge. I am not contented to live a regular nine-to-five life. This was reflected in my choice of school after 'O' Levels, the hobbies I had and the places I went to. And I like the word "radical". It means to be different, to stand out from the crowd and be unique.

To answer God's call to be in Shanghai was a radical move but it was a calculated and processed journey of seven years. "Radical" doesn't mean rash, irresponsible and without thought. It does mean stepping out of your regular secure comfortable world into a new world of adventure and I took my adventure with God.

One recent radical thing I did was how I introduced Jesus to a new friend I made in a newly opened café in my neighborhood. Her name was Al. She was seeking God and didn't know much about Jesus. She wasn't sure if finding out more about Jesus would conflict with her belief. Instead of doing the EvangeCube or the Four Spiritual Laws, I asked her if I could introduce my God, Jesus, to her and she can discover Him for herself. She agreed and I prayed a prayer of introduction with her, telling Jesus that she would like to get to know Him. She was visibly touched after the prayer and asked "Is it so simple?" I said, "Yes" and taught her how to pray and have conversations with Jesus. I left it at that for that day.

A couple of weeks later, Al visited my small group and was so moved at our worship that she was crying throughout. Al is still on a seeking journey. I pray for the day when she will radically cross from darkness to light.

In this one life I have to live, I pray that I would be able to empower many people to make that radical crossing from darkness to light. Just like my Master, the Lord of Radical, who made that radical journey from Heaven to earth and to the Cross.

PRAY

- Many in East Asia to not only come to know Him but also live a transformed life and rise up to become disciple-makers for their own people.
- Workers in East Asia to have the wisdom, courage and strength to love Jesus passionately and live radically in obedience to His will for us.
- Revival and unity of the churches and for East Asia to become a safe and free place to worship Jesus.

And He said to all, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me."

LUKE 9:23

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

ROMANS 12:1-2

September 1
Tuesday
2015

Discipleship Journey: Foundation

■ Scripture

Psalm 1

■ Observation

What does it mean to be a Word-centered man or woman of God according to Psalm 1?

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Deeper Reflection

Our discipleship journey takes place in a world that lures us to depart from God and conform to it by “accepting its advice, being party to its ways, and adopting...its attitudes”¹ in the subtle progression from walking to standing to sitting (v. 1). **Saturation with the Word** – reflectively assimilating God’s Word “day and night” (v. 2) is the key to **separation from the world**. It means living in the world and looking at it by asking “What does Scripture say?” (Ro 4:3). The effect will be **sturdiness in life** (v. 3). **Spiritually Fed:** “like a tree planted by streams of water” (notice the plural “streams”) – deliberately and intentionally transplanted near to resources for spiritual nourishment and refreshment. **Spiritually Fruitful** (“bearing fruit each season”, v. 3, NLT): Constantly growing in spiritual maturity and godly character. **Transformation Check:** How has my life changed recently? **Spiritually Fit:** Every single “leaf” remains green in the forest fire of trials (cf. Jer 17:8). **Spiritually Fulfilled:** “In whatever he does he prospers.” Defined by Jesus’ life, it means living at the centre of God’s will (Jn 4:34; 17:4). The Word-centred disciple will always be **secure in God**, who knows, watches over, guides and protects “the way of the righteous” (v. 6).

■ Application

How do I want to grow more as a Word-centered man or woman of God?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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¹ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (IVP, 1973), 48

September 2
Wednesday
2015

Discipleship Journey: Orientation

■ Scripture

Psalm 33

■ Observation

What enabled the psalmist to worship God (vv. 1-3) and wait on Him (vv. 20-22) in Psalm 33?

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Deeper Reflection

Psalms can be categorised into songs of orientation, disorientation and reorientation. Psalm 33 is a song of orientation. Songs of orientation show human life “in satisfied seasons of well-being that evoke gratitude for the constancy of blessing”.² Psalm 33 begins with a fivefold call of **worship to God** (vv. 1-3) and ends with a calm **waiting on God** (vv. 20-22): worshipful waiting. Both acts are built on “what God is and does”³ (vv. 4-19). **God’s creative Word** (vv. 4-9): God’s Word and God’s work (v. 4) “are inseparable, for His Words are never empty”⁴ (Isa 55:10-11). God’s Word is backed by His perfect character (vv. 4-5). When we look at creation, do we see God’s Word (vv. 6-9)? **God’s commanding will** (vv. 10-12): All evil purposes and plans of nations and people may seem to prevail. But not for long, for God will frustrate and nullify them eventually (v. 10). God’s purposes and plans alone stand forever (v. 11), and God’s people can confidently rest secure in this (v. 12). **God’s caring watch** (vv. 13-19): Nothing that happens in the world escapes God’s notice at any time (vv. 13-15). In such a world, our loving God watches over us closely to save and preserve us (vv. 16-19), as we wait, trust and hope in Him (vv. 20-22).

■ Application

How does knowing God as revealed in Psalm 33 affect how I look at the world and live in it?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.



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² Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Augsburg, 1984), 19

³ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 136

⁴ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 136

September 3
Thursday
2015

Discipleship Journey: Disorientation

■ Scripture

Psalm 88

■ Observation

What do you observe about the psalmist and his relationship with God in Psalm 88?

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Deeper Reflection

Psalm 88 is a song of disorientation. Songs of disorientation show human life in seasons of “ragged, painful disarray”⁵ of “hurt, alienation, suffering and death”⁶ that evoke complaints and cries to God. Psalm 88 is the saddest psalm in the psalter. “Only one petition is made (v. 2). The rest is all lament.”⁷ “My soul has had enough troubles” (v. 3) and “in the lowest pit” (v. 6) sums up the psalmist’s condition. What is most painful is when he “cried out by day and in the night” before God (v. 1), and “called upon” Him “every day” earnestly (v. 9), but God remained silent. He is perplexed as to “why” God rejects him and hides His face from him (v. 14). The psalm begins with the God of deliverance (v. 1) and ends with the God of darkness (v. 18). “Darkness” is the last word of the psalm. But is this God’s final word? The psalmist’s six rhetorical questions to God in verses 10 to 12 form the theological centre of Psalm 88. It reflects the psalmist’s **heart** – God’s glory – and his **hope** – God’s unfailing love, faithfulness and righteousness. He is highly theocentric. “The God of my salvation” (v. 1) will ultimately answer such a person, however long is the dark night of the soul (see Lk 18:1, 7-8).

■ Application

How will I walk with God when I am “in the lowest pit” of my life?

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■ Prayer

Lord Jesus, You walked with Your Father on earth in perfect obedience. Yet, You were in the lowest pit and the darkest depths of Your life, when You cried out on the cross, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”⁸ I know that following You includes such darkest moments. And I know I will not be alone. For You will be with me. Amen.



⁵ Walter Brueggemann, 19

⁶ Walter Brueggemann, 19

⁷ James L. Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (John Knox, 1994), 282

⁸ Matthew 27:45-46

September 4
Friday
2015

Discipleship Journey: Reorientation

■ Scripture

Psalm 77

■ Observation

What do you observe about the psalmist's view of God in verses 1 to 10 and verses 11 to 20 in Psalm 77?

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Deeper Reflection

Psalm 77 is a song of reorientation. Songs of reorientation show human life “in turns of surprise when we are overwhelmed with the new gifts of God, when joy breaks through the despair”.⁹ Reorientation presupposes disorientation. Psalm 77 moves from disorientation (vv. 1-10) to reorientation (vv. 11-20). **Looking at God my way** (vv. 1-10): The psalmist cries to God day and night in his affliction, but is not comforted (vv. 1-2). He turns to thinking of God, but it only disturbs, wearies and troubles him more (vv. 3-4). He wonders if God has removed His “favour, covenant, faithfulness, promise, graciousness and compassion”¹⁰ from him (vv. 5-9). And he concludes: God has changed (v. 10). We can be so self-absorbed in our problems and pains that doubts and distortions about God creep in. This happens when we have our own idea of God. **Looking at God His way** (vv. 11-20): The psalmist turns to look at God in God's way. “Your way” (vv. 13, 19) envelopes his reorientation. God's way is “holy” (v. 13a): “All that contrasts with and transcends the human, the marvellous, the mysterious, the incomprehensible.”¹¹ In holiness, God is “incomparable”¹² (v. 13b). And “none” can “trace”¹³ God's “footprints” (v. 19).

■ Application

What area(s) in my life do I need to change from looking at God my way to looking at Him in His way?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.



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⁹ Walter Brueggemann, 19
¹⁰ James L. Mays, 252
¹¹ James L. Mays, 252
¹² James L. Mays, 252
¹³ New Jerusalem Bible

September 5
Saturday
2015

Discipleship Journey: Maturation

■ Scripture

Psalm 145

■ Observation

What strikes you in the totally theocentric worship to God in Psalm 145?

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Deeper Reflection

The discipleship journey that begins with the Word of God as foundation (Ps 1), and continues in orientation, disorientation and reorientation (Ps 2 to 144), reaches maturation at Psalm 145 – the gateway into the Hallelujah Psalms (Ps 146 to 150). Psalm 145 is an acrostic¹⁴ anthology, containing “quotations and near quotations, citations and echoes from the previous 144 psalms”¹⁵. Psalm 145 is filled with only worship. Its acrostic form indicates worshipping God A-Z! It begins and ends with praising God forever and ever (vv. 1-2, 21). Mature worship is intensive and extensive (vv. 1-2): exalting, blessing and praising God “every day” “forever and ever” (repeated twice). Knowing God and knowing Him intimately as “my God” (v. 1), develops a mature worshipper. This theocentric worshipper praises God forever and ever as the Great God (vv. 3-7) – “Your greatness is unsearchable” (v. 3), the Gracious God (vv. 8-9), the Glorious God (vv. 10-13) – “the glory of the majesty of Your kingdom” (v. 12) – and the Giving God (vv. 14-20) – “You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing” (v. 16).

■ Application

What aspects about God as revealed in Psalm 145 are particularly relevant to my life now?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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¹⁴ The first word in each of the 21 verses in Psalm 145 begins with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.
¹⁵ Eugene Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (HarperCollins, 1989), 124

September 6
Sunday
2015

■ Scripture

■ Observation

■ Application

■ Prayer

The Past Week

REVIEW

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

What gave me life and what drained me?

How was the Spirit of God at work?

September 7
Monday
2015

Where Is God?

■ Scripture

Genesis 29:1-30

■ Observation

Where is God in verses 1 to 30?

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Deeper Reflection

The story of Jacob in verses 1 to 30 spans over 14 years (vv. 20, 30). God is not mentioned at all in the story. It is filled with just human events, actions, speeches and emotions – good and bad, right and wrong, with moments of pleasure like being deeply in love (vv. 18, 20), and moments of pain like the discovery of having married the wrong wife (v. 25). The story “does not express any theological points. Rather, the narrative unfolds its theological lessons in a subtle way”.¹⁶ Such narratives are very much like the narratives of our lives when we ask “Where is God?” When you read a biblical narrative where God is not there, look for Him. This is reading theologically. Genesis 29 begins with “Then Jacob went on his journey” (v. 1) – a continuity from his encounter with God in Genesis 28:10-22; and “the LORD” appears again only in Genesis 29:31. Verses 1 to 30, which have notable divine absence, is framed by the divine presence in Genesis 28:10-22 and Genesis 29:31ff. And every point in verses 1 to 30 must be read in light of God’s promise of His presence and protection to Jacob “wherever you go” and “I will not leave you until” God has accomplished His purpose for him (Ge 28:15).

■ Application

In what areas of my life, where I ask “Where is God?”, do I need to learn to see Him?

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■ Prayer

With my head drooping and my heart downcast, I walk alone, asking, “Where is God?” Honestly, God, I feel You have forgotten and forsaken me. I look at the sky. It’s filled with dark clouds – just like me. Then, the sun appears, shining brightly beside a thick dark cloud. And I hear You saying to me, “I am shining beside your dark cloud.” Amen.



¹⁶ Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Baker, 1998, 1996), 497

September 8
Tuesday
2015

Behold, A Well...

■ **Scripture**

Genesis 29:1-12

■ **Observation**

How many times is “the well” referred to in verses 1 to 12 and what is its significance in the story?

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Deeper Reflection

While Jacob left Bethel and “went on his journey” (v. 1a), Bethel – “the house of God,” the presence of God (Ge 28:16-19) – went with him, just as God promised him (Ge 28:15). We can trace God’s providential presence with Jacob in verses 1 to 12 in its progressive narrowing down movement. Jacob’s journey reached “the land of the eastern peoples” (v. 1b, NIV), but he “is unaware of his precise whereabouts”.¹⁷ His question to three shepherds later, “My brothers, where are you from?” (v. 4a), indicates that he “clearly does not know that he has arrived at his destination”¹⁸ – “Haran” (v. 4b; see Ge 28:10). And more specifically, Jacob reached “a well” there (v. 2; repeated seven times in vv. 2, 3, 8, 10). Jacob came to Haran to look for a wife (Ge 28:1-2). And it is at “the well” that “Rachel comes (v. 6), his wife-to-be. Rachel appeared at an hour when it was “not time for the flocks to be gathered” (v. 7). The human untimely is the divine timely. Providence. And it was “while he was still speaking with” the shepherds that “Rachel came” (v. 9). Providence. God unseen in an unknown journey, but Providence unfolding the what, where, when and how. Oftentimes, our discipleship journey is like that.

■ **Application**

How does this story of God’s providence encourage me in my discipleship journey?

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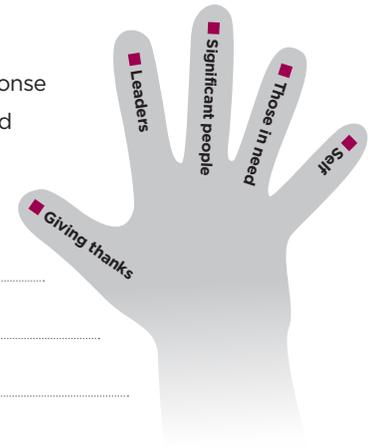
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■ **Prayer**

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.



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¹⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, Genesis: A Commentary (Zondervan, 2001), 400

¹⁸ Bruce K. Waltke, 400

September 9
Wednesday
2015

Jacob Loved Rachel

■ Scripture

Genesis 29:13-20 with 24:10-27

■ Observation

What do you observe about Jacob in getting his wife (vv. 13-20) in comparison to Abraham’s servant looking for one for Isaac (Ge 24:10-27)?

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Deeper Reflection

One thing is common in the two stories of wife-seeking in verses 13 to 20 and Genesis 24:10-27: “the well” as the place where the prospective wife appeared under Providence (Ge 29:2, 3, 8, 10; 24:11, 20). But the contrasts are significant. Reliance on God through prayer and responding with praise to God for His guidance marked Abraham’s servant in his mission (Ge 24:12-14, 26-27); but these are totally absent in Jacob’s case. Jacob “acts solely on the basis of physical attraction”¹⁹ (vv. 17-18), whereas Abraham’s servant asked God for a specific sign to test the prospective wife’s character (Ge 24:12-21). Jacob “has no bride price to give and will have to reduce himself to a hired hand to secure Rachel”²⁰ (vv. 15-20), in contrast to his father (Ge 24:10, 22, 53). We don’t know “why Isaac sent Jacob away empty-handed to make it on his own”.²¹ Undoubtedly, Providence guided Jacob to Rachel (Ge 29:1-12); but Providence will lead Jacob “to extreme hardships” and “becomes a means of discipline to transform Jacob’s character”²², as the story unfolds. Spiritual character is greatly lacking in Jacob. But Providence will graciously guide, grind and grow Jacob with His promised presence (Ge 28:15). Do you see Providence in your life as transformational?

■ Application

What areas in my life have been transformed through God’s providence?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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¹⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, 401
²⁰ Bruce K. Waltke, 399
²¹ Bruce K. Waltke, 399
²² Bruce K. Waltke, 399

September 10
Thursday
2015

Behold, It's Leah!

■ Scripture

Genesis 29:15-25

■ Observation

How do you think Jacob felt when he discovered that his bride was not Rachel, but Leah (vv. 15-25)?

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Deeper Reflection

Don't miss Jacob's romantic mood in verses 15 to 20 and 30. His love for Rachel is mentioned thrice (vv. 18, 20, 30). When Laban asked Jacob to tell him his wages for serving him (v. 15), he made "a handsome offer"²³ of "seven years" as a bride price for Rachel (v. 18). Jacob "was clearly not risking a refusal".²⁴ And the seven years "seemed to him but a few days because of his love for Rachel" (v. 20). How romantic can you get? Then, "by befuddling Jacob with wine"²⁵ in the "drinking fest"²⁶ of the wedding celebration, and "using the blindness of the bridal veil and the darkness of the night, Laban pulls off his deception"²⁷, by replacing Rachel with Leah (vv. 21-23). Then came the morning shock. "Behold, it was Leah!" (v. 25a). Imagine Jacob's feelings. In one night, Jacob's seven years of deepening love for Rachel was "forever marred by the substitution of Leah"²⁸! If Providence had led Jacob to Rachel (Ge 29:1-12), why did this happen? Providence directs and disciplines. God "is working out His moral law of reciprocity – one reaps what one sows (Gal 6:7)"²⁹. Jacob was "deceived" (v. 25b) just as he had deceived his father (Ge 27:1-29). This is part of the discipleship journey of transformation under divine discipline.

■ Application

How do I deal with the negative experiences in my life from the perspective of a discipleship journey of transformation under divine discipline?

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■ Prayer

Father, those whom You love You discipline.³⁰ Indeed, no discipline is enjoyable while it is happening – it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.³¹ Give me grace and strength to keep submitting myself to Your discipline that I may grow and share in Your holiness.³² Amen.



²³ Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (IVP, 1976), 160

²⁴ Derek Kidner, 160

²⁵ Bruce K. Waltke, 405

²⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, 405

²⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, 405

²⁸ Allen P. Ross, 502

²⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, 403

³⁰ Hebrews 12:6

³¹ Hebrews 12:11 (NLT)

³² Hebrews 12:10

September 11
Friday
2015

Dark Night of Slavery

■ Scripture

Genesis 29:15-30

■ Observation

What is the significance of Jacob serving Laban for 14 years as the bride price for his two daughters (vv. 21-30)?

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Deeper Reflection

Jacob was “deceived” by Laban (v. 25) into “a dark night of slavery”.³³ The word “serve” dominates the story, is repeated seven times (vv. 15, 18, 20, 25, 27), and is always used with reference to Jacob serving Laban for his two daughters. Jacob’s “character is being tested and refined in the crucible of living with his uncle Laban”,³⁴ who was “cunning, deceptive, heartless, greedy and ambitious”,³⁵ and “uses people”³⁶, even his own daughters, for economic gain. Jacob “has already shown that he possesses many of these same weaknesses”³⁷ (Ge 25:29-34; Ge 27). “When we are thrown together with people who are crafty, arrogant, deceitful, contentious, gossipy, or a host of other human frailties, before we lament that we have to be around such people, we perhaps should take a long look at ourselves. It may be that some of those traits characterise us and that other people may be part of God’s means of disciplining us.”³⁸ Providence may lead us to the Labans, when necessary. Jacob was destined to rule and to be served (Ge 25:23; 27:29). But he had to be “humbled to become fit to rule his brother according to God’s model of servant leadership”³⁹. God disciplines us for a destiny.

■ Application

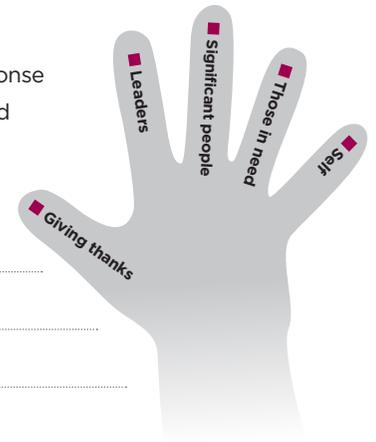
How do I respond to God’s transformational discipline in my life which are unpleasant and painful (Heb 12:11)?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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³³ Bruce K. Waltke, 403
³⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, 404
³⁵ Bruce K. Waltke, 404
³⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, 399
³⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, 404
³⁸ Allen P. Ross, 504
³⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, 403

September 12
Saturday
2015

Living in Life's Complexities

■ Scripture

Genesis 29:21-30 with 29:31; 30:1-5, 9-10, 22

■ Observation

What can you learn about God in the four women in Jacob's life (vv. 21-30 with 29:31; 30:1-5, 9-10, 22)?

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Deeper Reflection

God in His providence led Jacob to Rachel (Ge 29:1-12), and “graciously gave him the gift of romantic love”⁴⁰ for her (Ge 29:20). But, under Providence, he was deceived into marrying a woman he did not want (v. 25). He did finally marry Rachel, but at the cost of another seven years of servitude. And all these resulted in a painfully divided family, with Jacob loving Rachel more than Leah (v. 30). Two other women entered Jacob's life: Zilpah, Leah's maid (v. 24), and Bilhah, Rachel's maid (v. 29). These two women in Jacob's life are “anticipatory of the next scene”⁴¹ in Genesis 29:31 to 30:24. It is through four women, giving birth to Jacob's 12 sons (Ge 29:31; 30:1-5, 9-10, 22), that God fulfils His promise of making Abraham “a great nation” (Ge 12:2). Why through four women? God doesn't tell us. All we know is it happened this way. Life can be very complex, even when it is under the providence of the sovereign God. Yet God is present with us, not leaving us until He has accomplished His purposes for us (Ge 28:15), and faithfully fulfilling His promises. In the complexities of life, it is enough to know and walk with this unfathomable infinite God (Ro 11:33-36).

■ Application

How do I live with the complexities of life?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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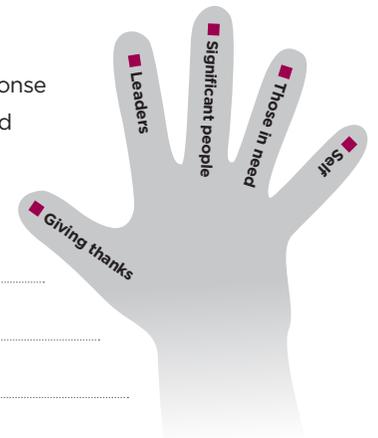
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⁴⁰ Bruce K. Waltke, 405
⁴¹ Bruce K. Waltke, 406

September 13
Sunday
2015

■ Scripture

■ Observation

■ Application

■ Prayer

The Past Week

REVIEW

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

What gave me life and what drained me?

How was the Spirit of God at work?

REFLECT

*What is one key thing that God said to me this week
in light of what has happened?*

RESPOND

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying?

COMMIT IN PRAYER

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL
September 2015 - Week 2
WORTH THE WAIT

Waiting for good things in God's timing.

Scripture - Genesis 29:9-30

1. Activity Bite

Let's imagine that you are now an adult, with all the freedom to do the things you've always wanted to do. Share with everyone what those things are.

2. Chat Time

Q1: Why is it that you can't do the things you want to do as an adult while you are still a child?

Q2: Why is waiting for the right timing a wiser choice?

Q3: In Genesis 29:20, what would have happened to Rachel (and Jacob) if Jacob refused to wait seven years?

3. Learning Point

It took seven years of hard work for Jacob to have Rachel as his wife. This would not have happened if he didn't want to wait that long. Sometimes, it is better to wait for good things instead of rushing to have them. It is even necessary too. For example, you will have to spend many years in school before being able to work for a living. There is a time for everything (Ecc 3:1). God knows what is best for you and He will give it to you when the time is right. It doesn't matter even if we don't get what we wish for as long as we trust God for what is best.

4. Action Point

List down some things that you are yearning to do and commit them to God for His right timing.

5. Prayer Power

(Ask your children to pray after you.)

Dear God, it is hard to wait sometimes but help me to trust You for the right timing because I want the best from You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

September 14
Monday
2015

Broken Family with God-given Destiny

■ Scripture

Genesis 29:31 – 30:24

■ Observation

What do you observe about Jacob's family in Genesis 29:31 to 30:24?

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Deeper Reflection

Genesis 29:31 to 30:24 presents Jacob's broken family, marked by fierce rivalry between his two wives. Leah was "unloved" (vv. 31, 33) – "hated"⁴² (ESV) – by her husband; but she was fruitful, bearing seven children for him (29:32-35; 30:17-21). Rachel, on the other hand, was much loved, but was barren (v. 31). So, in jealousy and envy, both fought each other in "shameful competition"⁴³ to get what the other had. The names of the sons born through them and their maids (vv. 3-13) "contain a theophoric (i.e. a divine name) element"⁴⁴ (29:32-35; 30:4-6, 18-20, 23-24). However, the names reflect their spiritual state of a God-and-self mixture. "Each name was interpreted to reflect the concrete family conditions...instead of simply repeating the pious substance that they had as testimonies to God as the Giver and Protector of life."⁴⁵ For "out of pride and self-exaltation, they use the names to hurl malicious shafts at one another"⁴⁶. But nonetheless, this broken family still had a God-given destiny: God fulfilling His covenant purposes through it, forming "the great nation" He promised Abraham (Ge 12:2; cf. 26:4; 28:14). As we struggle in our marriage and family life, we have hope in this immensely gracious sovereign God!

■ Application

How do I hope in God in the brokenness of my life, marriage or family life?

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■ Prayer

Father, You know how I stumble in many ways, like the rest of Your people⁴⁷ – in my personal life, in my marriage as a spouse and in my family life as a parent. There are times I feel so ashamed and unworthy. But God of redemption, You are still willing and wanting to work in this fragile clay jar to transform it into the image of Your Son. Thank You for Your grace. Amen.



⁴² The Hebrew literally says "hated" (Bruce K. Waltke, 409).

⁴³ Bruce K. Waltke, 415

⁴⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, 408

⁴⁵ Allen P. Ross, 514

⁴⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, 408

⁴⁷ James 3:2a

September 15
Tuesday
2015

God Working amid Human Machinations

■ Scripture

Genesis 29:31 – 30:24

■ Observation

How many times do the divine names “the LORD” and “God” appear in Genesis 29:31 to 30:24 and what is their significance in the story?

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Deeper Reflection

At the centre of all the human self-centered machinations in the story is **God**. The divine names, “the LORD” and “God,” are mentioned 13 times (29:31, 32, 33, 35; 30:2, 6, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24). God is mentioned 12 times in the acts of God (29:31; 30:17, 22), or in acknowledgements of God – from Leah (29:32, 33, 35; 30:18), and from Rachel (30:6, 23, 24). And once in Jacob’s anger (30:2). The story begins with “Now the LORD” (v. 31). Divine sovereign initiative. Happenings in our lives, good or bad, always begin with God – “from Him...are all things” (Ro 11:36). “The atmosphere” in Jacob’s household “was electric with tension and jealousy as the two sisters crowed triumphantly over each other as each successive son was born”⁴⁸. But God is ever present and at work at every point. The narrator “stressed simultaneously the rivalry between the women and the way that the Lord blessed Jacob with children”⁴⁹. Prevailing in this dysfunctional family is God’s grace. God “incorporates the most fallible and fallen people into His gracious plans”⁵⁰. God’s “grace is greater than our sins, and His purposes will not be thwarted by them”⁵¹. Thus, it is always “to the praise of His glorious grace” (Eph 1:6)!

■ Application

How do I live in a situation that is marked by much human self-centered machinations?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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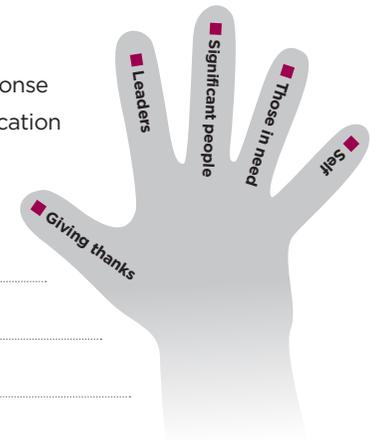
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⁴⁸ Bruce K. Waltke, 408 – citing K. Armstrong

⁴⁹ Allen P. Ross, 505

⁵⁰ Bruce K. Waltke, 415

⁵¹ Bruce K. Waltke, 415

September 16
Wednesday
2015

Divine Appointment in Human Disappointment

■ Scripture

Genesis 29:31-35; 30:19-20

■ Observation

What do you observe about God and Leah who was unloved by her husband in Genesis 29:31-35 and 30:19-20?

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Deeper Reflection

A key motif in Genesis 29:31 to 30:24 is Leah being “unloved” by her husband. The motif is developed from Jacob’s deep love for Rachel (Ge 29:18, 20) to where Jacob “loved Rachel more than Leah” (Ge 29:30), and intensifies to “Leah was unloved” (v. 31). But here, God came into the picture: “The LORD saw that Leah was unloved”, and blessed her by giving birth to Jacob’s firstborn (v. 32a). Leah hoped that “surely now my husband will love me” (v. 32b), but only to be disappointed. When Levi was born, she hoped that “Now at last my husband will be attached to me” (v. 34, NIV). It didn’t happen. When Judah was born, Leah “resolved – or resigned herself”⁵² to praise God (v. 35). But her sense of disappointment remained. After giving birth to six sons, she hoped that “now my husband will honour me” (v. 20, ESV). She was disappointed again. God’s purpose in blessing Leah with six sons was not to fulfil her deep desire and longing. But God would form the priestly line through Levi (Ex 6:16-23; 28:1), and the messianic line through Judah (Ge 49:10; Mt 1:3-16). In our disappointments wait and watch for the divine appointment. But it can be something that happens in the future, or even beyond our lifetime.

■ Application

How do I see divine appointment in my disappointments?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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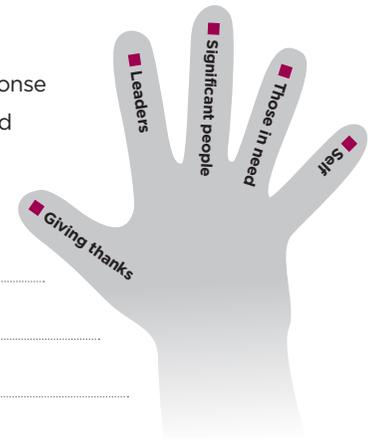
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⁵² Allen P. Ross, 510

September 17
Thursday
2015

“Am I in God’s Place?”

■ Scripture

Genesis 30:1-2

■ Observation

What is the significance of what Jacob says in verses 1 to 2 in the context of the story (Ge 29:31 – 30:24)?

Deeper Reflection

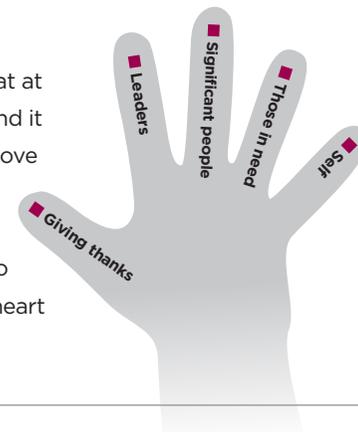
Rachel “saw that she bore Jacob no children” (v. 1a), but her sister had already borne four sons (Ge 29:31-34). Comparison leads to jealousy, which in turn leads to irrationality and unreasonableness: “Give me children, or else I die” (v. 1b). Rachel’s childish threat made Jacob “very angry” (v. 2a, NRSV), and shouted at her in frustration, “Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?” (v. 2b). All the speeches in the story are Leah’s and Rachel’s. There is no divine speech. And Jacob speaks only once: “Am I in the place of God?” It is of theological significance when viewed in light of the story beginning and ending with God opening of wombs – Leah’s (Ge 29:31) and Rachel’s (Ge 30:22). Jacob was used to getting his own way, but now, “for all his ingenuity” he “could not make Rachel pregnant”⁵³. Jacob must learn, and so must we, that there is a limit to human resources. Jacob’s seed cannot guarantee conception. It is God who opens and closes the womb. We must be careful not to act as though we are in God’s place. Sometimes, we can be unwittingly or presumptuously so, but “with God all things are possible” (Mt 19:26).

■ Application

What area(s) in my life do I need to relinquish in which I have put myself in God’s place?

■ Prayer

O Gracious God, help me to see that at the heart of sin is to be like God. And it is in my heart, which is deceitful above all things,⁵⁴ that in the most subtle way I take the place of God. I desperately need You to help me to diligently and vigilantly guard my heart against this evil. Amen.



⁵³ D. Stuart Briscoe, *Genesis, The Preacher’s Commentary* (Nelson, 1987), 238

⁵⁴ Jeremiah 17:9

September 18
Friday
2015

Get It by Any Means

■ Scripture

Genesis 30:1-8, 14-16

■ Observation

What do you observe about Rachel's character in verses 1 to 8 and 14 to 16?

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Deeper Reflection

Rachel's response to Jacob's angry "Am I in the place of God?" (v. 2) was to give Jacob her maid, Bilhah, to bear children for her (vv. 3-4). Rachel's attitude seems to be "Since God does not give to me, I will get it by any means". She was driven by jealousy (v. 1) and competition mixed with prayer, which God graciously answered (vv. 5-8). After using her maid, she resorted to "mandrakes" (v. 14). The mandrake "was used as an aphrodisiac in the ancient world"⁵⁵, and was "thought to induce fertility... hence Rachel's eagerness for them"⁵⁶. It was a "folkloristic superstition"⁵⁷. Rachel was "not free of her pagan background"⁵⁸. And she used a "sex-by-hire"⁵⁹ approach to trade for Leah's mandrakes (vv. 15-16). "The family's life is rotten and broken by the dehumanising atmosphere of service-wages"⁶⁰. Yet, we see "on the divine level...the grace of God choosing difficult and unpromising material"⁶¹ for His purposes. But this does not affirm that the end justifies the means in all things. And sovereign grace does not keep us from suffering painful consequences when we take things into our own hands, as the story tells us.

■ Application

How will I deal with situations where I am tempted or "compelled" to wrongly use "the end justifies the means" approach?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.



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⁵⁵ Bruce K. Waltke, 412
⁵⁶ Derek Kidner, 162
⁵⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, 413
⁵⁸ Bruce K. Waltke, 413
⁵⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, 413
⁶⁰ Bruce K. Waltke, 413 – citing J. P. Fokkelman
⁶¹ Derek Kidner, 161

September 19
Saturday
2015

Fairness in God's Sovereign Way

■ Scripture

Genesis 29:31; 30:17, 22-24

■ Observation

What do you observe about God in what He did to Leah and Rachel in Genesis 29:31; 30:17, 22-24?

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Deeper Reflection

The narrator shows us that God is fair towards both Rachel and Leah in the way He gave Jacob children through them: God “saw Leah” (v. 31) and “remembered Rachel” (v. 22); “God gave heed” to Leah (v. 17) and to Rachel (v. 22); God “opened” Leah’s womb (v. 31) and Rachel’s womb (v. 22). Yet on the other hand, we may say that, by human standards and reasoning, there was also unfairness. God enabled Leah to give birth to six sons, but for Rachel, only one for now. Rachel would later give birth to Benjamin (Ge 35:16-18). Two of Leah’s sons, Levi and Judah, were sons with special destinies. While Leah had the privilege of bearing Jacob’s firstborn, Reuben, his firstborn right would be given to Joseph (Rachel’s son) through his son, Ephraim (1 Ch 5:1). How then do we look at divine fairness? Things may appear to be unfair from a human perspective, but not so from a theocentric perspective. What is ultimately true and by which we are to look at things and live life is God’s character. God’s “work is perfect” and “all His ways are just”, for He is “a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He” (Dt 32:4).

■ Application

How will I deal with situations in my life where I believe God is being unfair to me?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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September 20
Sunday
2015

■ Scripture

■ Observation

■ Application

■ Prayer

The Past Week

REVIEW

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

What gave me life and what drained me?

How was the Spirit of God at work?

REFLECT

What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

RESPOND

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying?

COMMIT IN PRAYER

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL
September 2015 - Week 3

NEW THINGS

God wants to do new things.

Scripture - Isaiah 43:19; 2 Corinthians 5:17

1. Activity Bite

Let's talk about it - what are the new things you would like to have during New Year or Christmas?

2. Chat Time

Q1: Why is replacing old things with new ones so exciting?

Q2: One of the new things that God is doing in our lives is in the area of our attitudes. What are some of your attitudes that God is replacing with new ones?

Q3: What is one new thing that you have discovered about God's character in the past one month?

3. Learning Point

God always wants to do new things in our lives daily. He wants to teach us new truths about Himself, to help us reach a deeper level of love and trust in Him or give us new opportunities to bless those in need. There are new habits to gain too, like being more responsible to keep the study table tidy and make your bed every morning. However, often we are too occupied with our own things and forget about the things of God. Still, God will continue to change us to be better Christians because that will give Him glory.

4. Action Point

Think of three new things you would like God to do in your life. It could be in the area of attitude, habit or opportunity to bless others. Commit them to God.

5. Prayer Power

(Ask your children to pray after you.)

God, I am excited about the new things that You are doing in my life. I want my life to be new so that I can bring glory to You. Amen.

September 22
Tuesday
2015

God Blessing the Unkind

■ Scripture

Genesis 30:27-30

■ Observation

What do you observe about God when He blesses Laban through Jacob serving him for 14 years for his two wives (vv. 27-30; cf. 29:20, 25-30)?

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Deeper Reflection

Jacob's 14 years of "dark night of slavery"⁶⁶ under Laban was viewed by Laban as "the LORD has blessed me because of you" (v. 27, NIV). Laban, an idolater (Ge 31:19), learned about this "by divination" (v. 27, NIV). What Jacob, who knew God (Ge 28:13-15), saw was: "you had little before I came and it has increased to a multitude" and "the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned" (v. 30). Jacob inherited from Isaac the covenant blessings God promised to Abraham (Ge 28:3-4), with the ultimate purpose of blessing the nations (Ge 12:3; Ge 28:13-14). In the covenant, God promised: "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse" (Ge 12:3). But here, as if to add insult to Jacob's injury, God blessed Laban through his deception of Jacob (Ge 29:25-27) which resulted in making his life miserable! How would you feel if you were in Jacob's shoes? Overarching all that happened to Jacob in Paddan-aram was God's purpose and promised presence and protection (Ge 28:15). This can also be true for us. With such divine assurance, we keep walking with God, with God blessing people "wherever" we turn, even when we suffer under them. This in itself is God's blessing.

■ Application

What does it mean for me to be God's channel of blessing to others "wherever" I turn?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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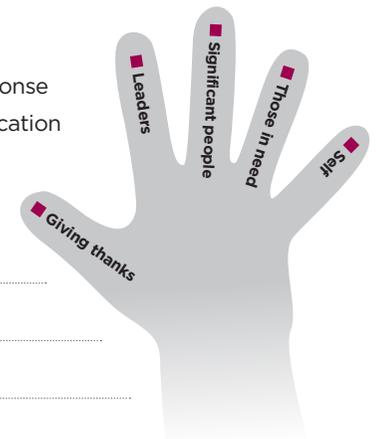
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⁶⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, 403

September 23
Wednesday
2015

But What about Me?

■ Scripture

Genesis 30:29-30

■ Observation

What do Jacob's words "when shall I provide for my own household" tell us about God and Jacob in verses 29 to 30?

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Deeper Reflection

Having served Laban 14 years for his two wives (Ge 31:41), Jacob still had to ask his father-in-law, "Give me my wives and my children" (Ge 30:26). Laban claimed them all to be "mine" (Ge 30:43), even though they were the result of God fulfilling His promise to Jacob (Ge 28:14). Jacob, on one hand, acknowledged that God had blessed Laban abundantly because of him; yet on the other, he was in an economic state where he asked, "But now, when shall I provide for my own household?" (v. 30). It is as though Jacob was asking God, "You have blessed my uncle abundantly because of me, but what about me?" There will be times when we feel being left out of God's blessings in certain areas of our lives. We think or feel that God has forgotten us, especially, when by His grace, we are walking with Him faithfully. We feel disappointed. This usually happens when we compare with others whom God has blessed. But we cannot make demands on God, simply because God is God. God will, in His sovereign freedom and wisdom, bless us in His own way and time. God is our heavenly Father who gives "what is good" (Mt 7:11) to His children.

■ Application

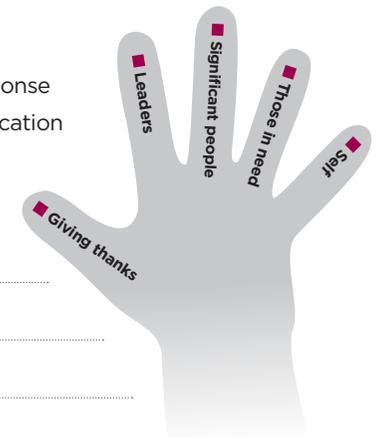
How will I deal with my feeling of being left out of God's blessings in certain areas of my life?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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September 24
Thursday
2015

One Obstacle after Another

■ Scripture

Genesis 30:31-36

■ Observation

What did it mean for Jacob when Laban removed the odd-coloured sheep and goats from his care and putting them in his sons' care (vv. 34-36)?

Deeper Reflection

Jacob needed to provide for his household (Ge 30:30b). He saw Laban's offer "What shall I give you?" (v. 31a) as an opportunity to meet his need. Jacob's replied that all "the abnormally coloured sheep and goats"⁶⁷ in Laban's flock would be his wages (vv. 31b-33). Normally in the Near East, "the hire of a shepherd is 20 percent of the flock, and rarely, if ever, would the speckled population be such a large percentage"⁶⁸. So, Laban immediately agreed (v. 34). "As per the agreement, the unusually coloured animals should have been Jacob's starting flock."⁶⁹ But Laban "removed" the odd-colored animals and put them in his sons' care (v. 35) at a "three-day journey" distance from Jacob's workplace (v. 36). This left Jacob with no odd-coloured animals to begin with to breed and increase his flock. Jacob faced one obstacle after another in seeking to "prudently...build up [his] property before his family (Pr 27:23-27)"⁷⁰. In doing what is good and right, we may face obstacles through people or circumstances. But, as in Jacob's case, God's faithful protective presence is with us (Ge 28:15), and His providence is there, although it may yet to be seen.

■ Application

What obstacles am I facing in my life now and how will I respond to them?

■ Prayer

O Sovereign Lord, I am trapped in a situation like Israel, with the mighty Egyptian armies behind me and the roaring Red Sea before me. But You are the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night over me, going before me and going with me.⁷¹ Help me not to fear, but stand steadfastly and see Your salvation that You will accomplish for me.⁷² Amen.



⁶⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, 419

⁶⁸ Bruce K. Waltke, 419

⁶⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, 419

⁷⁰ Bruce K. Waltke, 416

⁷¹ Exodus 13:21-22

⁷² Exodus 14:13

September 25
Friday
2015

Human or Divine Accomplishment?

■ Scripture

Genesis 30:37-42; 31:9-12

■ Observation

What do I observe about Jacob and God in the way Jacob bred and increased his odd-coloured flocks in verses 37 to 40 and Genesis 31:9-12?

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Deeper Reflection

Having been prevented by Laban from breeding his odd-coloured flock (Ge 30:35-36), Jacob “employed questionable breeding practices”⁷³ to build up his property (vv. 37-42). “In displaying the striped rods at breeding time he acted on the common belief that a vivid sight during pregnancy or conception would leave its mark on the embryo”⁷⁴, and thus produce odd-coloured animals. It worked successfully (vv. 39, 41-42). Was it due to something inherent in the method that actually worked? God will later show Jacob that the source of his success was God Himself (Ge 31:9-12). Does that mean that God worked through pagan magic? No, that would have contradicted God’s holy character and command (Dt 18:10-11). Behind “this unusual scene with strange, seemingly pagan rituals” is the “hidden hand of God”⁷⁵, and Jacob’s “scheme works because of God’s sovereign grace”⁷⁶. God does work through amoral, but not questionable, human methodology. But we must be careful not to define or confine God’s work by human methodology. Methodology ought to be employed in light of theology: Who God is, what God wants and how God sees and acts, as revealed in His Word.

■ Application

How do I use human methodology in doing God’s work?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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⁷³ Allen P. Ross, 520
⁷⁴ Derek Kidner, 163
⁷⁵ Bruce K. Waltke, 416
⁷⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, 420

September 26
Saturday
2015

Journey of God's Blessing

■ Scripture

Genesis 30:27-43

■ Observation

What do you observe about God blessing Laban in verses 27 to 30 and God blessing Jacob in verses 31 to 43?

Deeper Reflection

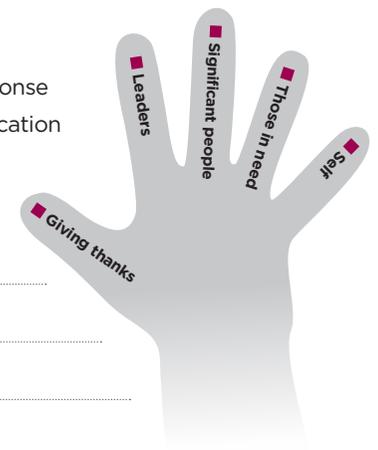
Jacob's 20 years of serving Laban (cf. Ge 31:41) concluded with him "growing exceedingly prosperous" (30:43, NIV). The Hebrew word for "grew prosperous", *parats*, occurs at three strategic points in Jacob's story in Genesis 28-30. **God's commitment to blessing:** When God met Jacob at Bethel, He promised to multiply his descendants greatly, such that they "shall spread out" (*parats*) all over the earth (Ge 28:14). How did God go about fulfilling His promise? **God's development of character:** God put Jacob into the "dark night of slavery"⁷⁷ under the unscrupulous Laban for life-transforming discipline. But in those 14 years, God blessed Laban through Jacob (v. 27): "you had little before I came and it has increased (*parats*) to a multitude" (v30). As for Jacob, he had nothing to provide for his own family (v. 30b). **God's fulfillment of His promise:** For 14 years, God blessed Laban through Jacob serving him unjustly. But for the next six years, God justly turned the tables. He blessed Jacob through plundering Laban (vv. 31-42; Ge 31:9-13). And Jacob "became exceedingly prosperous" (v. 43). The use of *parats* in Genesis 28:14 and verse 43 shows "that the promise has been fulfilled"⁷⁸. This is Jacob's journey of God's blessing – a paradigm for us.

■ Application

How does Jacob's journey of God's blessing help me in my personal discipleship?

■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.



⁷⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, 403

⁷⁸ Bruce K. Waltke, 420

September 27
Sunday
2015

■ **Scripture**

■ **Observation**
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■ **Application**
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■ **Prayer**
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The Past Week

REVIEW

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

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What gave me life and what drained me?

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How was the Spirit of God at work?

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REFLECT

*What is one key thing that God said to me this week
in light of what has happened?*

RESPOND

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying?

COMMIT IN PRAYER

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL
September 2015 – Week 4
FORGIVING OTHERS

Forgiving others is a Christ-like behaviour.

Scripture - Ephesians 4:31-32

1. Activity Bite

Prepare two glasses of your favourite juice. Into one of them, add a few teaspoons of dark sauce. Try tasting the juice from both glasses. Which one tastes horrible?

2. Chat Time

Q1: What would happen to your stomach if you drank all the juice with the sauce?

Q2: The feeling of unforgiveness is like the taste of the juice with sauce. What would happen to your heart if you keep having unforgiveness?

Q3: What is the best way to remove unforgiveness from your heart?

3. Learning Point

It is not unusual for us to get angry at someone for hurting us. But if we are not willing to forgive, it will be like a rotting apple wrapped in a plastic bag tucked deep inside a refrigerator. Seeing the person again can cause us to become angry, like drinking the bitter-tasting juice. Unforgiveness also hurts our relationship with God because this does not please Him. He has forgiven us of all our sins, as well as those who hurt us. So how can we say we love God but not forgive others? It may not be easy to forgive but God will give us strength to do that.

4. Action Point

Pray to God to show you if there are people you need to forgive. Ask Him to give you strength to forgive so that you can be free to love again.

5. Prayer Power

(Ask your children to pray after you.)

Dear Jesus, I'm sorry if there is someone whom I have not forgiven. Please give me strength to forgive so that I can be free to love and be happy again. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

September 28
Monday
2015

“Then the Lord said to Jacob”

■ Scripture

Genesis 31:1-3

■ Observation

What is the significance of God speaking to Jacob in verses 1 to 3?

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Deeper Reflection

In Genesis 31, Jacob was at the end of his 20 years of serving Laban (Ge 31:41). Six years ago, Jacob attempted to leave Laban, but Divine Providence kept him from doing so (Ge 30:25-30) to fulfil the divine agenda of character transformation. God had blessed Jacob by plundering Laban, and he “grew exceedingly prosperous” (Ge 30:43). This made Laban and his sons very unhappy and unfriendly, unnerving Jacob (vv. 1-2). Was Jacob thinking of leaving? With Laban in his “dangerous mood”⁷⁹ perhaps, Jacob felt stuck. But just then, God spoke – “the LORD said to Jacob” (v. 3). “Jacob gives a fuller account” of God speaking to him “in verses 11 to 13”.⁸⁰ God spoke to Jacob for the first time in 20 years, the last time being at Bethel (Ge 28:13-15). “Return to the land of your fathers” (v. 3): It was God’s time for Jacob to leave. God would fulfil His promise: “I will bring you back to this land” (Ge 28:15). Walk by God’s Word – according to what He has spoken in Scripture and continues to speak through Scripture. Oftentimes, God also speaks through His providence, as seen in Genesis. “Timing is crucial in providence.”⁸¹ When we walk by God’s Word, we are assured of His faithful guidance.

■ Application

How much is my personal discipleship characterised by walking in God’s Word – what God has spoken in Scripture and speaks through Scripture?

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■ Prayer

God, as You are leading me through the wilderness, I need to learn again that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.⁸² Help me to walk by Your true and trustworthy Word, which is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.⁸³ Amen.



⁷⁹ Derek Kidner, 164
⁸⁰ Derek Kidner, 164
⁸¹ Bruce K. Waltke, 328
⁸² Deuteronomy 8:2-3
⁸³ Psalm 119:105

September 29
Tuesday
2015

Meaning of “I Am with You”

■ Scripture

Genesis 31:3-13

■ Observation

What does God's presence with Jacob mean according to verses 3 to 13?

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Deeper Reflection

God did not speak to Jacob in his 20 years of hard life until the end of that period. But enveloping the 20 years is God's presence with him. Before it began, God promised Jacob, “I am with you” (Ge 28:15), and when it ended, Jacob testified, “the God of my father has been with me” (v. 5). What does “I am with you” mean? One thing is for sure. It does not mean no problems or pain. On the contrary, there can be much problems and pain, as seen in Jacob's case (Ge 31:38-41). God's presence means **God is watching**. While God allowed Laban to cheat Jacob by changing his wages “10 times” (meaning “time and again”⁸⁴), “God did not allow him to hurt me” (v. 7). Silently, but caringly, “I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you” (v. 12). Mark the word “all”. God is watching every single moment. God's presence means **God is working**. The most important divine work in our lives is transformation. Jacob grew in God-centredness. In great contrast to Genesis 29 to 30, Jacob now viewed his life always in reference to God – in Laban's unfriendliness towards him (v. 5), he cheating him (v. 7) and changing his wages (vv. 8-9).

■ Application

How does understanding the meaning of God's presence with me from Jacob's spiritual journey help me in my own journey?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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⁸⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, 425

September 30
Wednesday
2015

Making Mistakes While Following God's Will

■ Scripture

Genesis 31:14-35

■ Observation

What do you observe about God in Jacob and Rachel making mistakes (vv. 19-20) while following God's will (vv. 17-18) in verses 14 to 35?

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Deeper Reflection

It is possible for us to make mistakes while following God's will. But the sovereign God graciously and faithfully intervenes to protect and deliver us. Jacob and his family began to leave Paddan-aram "to go the land of Canaan" (vv. 17-18) according to God's Word (Ge 31:3). But in this move, Jacob and Rachel made two serious mistakes. Out of fear, Jacob "deceived Laban...by not telling him that he was fleeing" (vv. 20, 26-28, 31). Embedded in God's Word to return to Canaan was assured safety and success (see Ge 28:15). Jacob failed to trust God, and put himself and his family in danger of harm from Laban (vv. 22-23, 29). But God intervened by speaking to Laban (vv. 24, 29). Before the flight, Rachel "stole" her father's "household gods" (v. 19). "Household gods provided protection and blessing."⁸⁵ Rachel was "probably not yet completely free of her polytheistic background and beliefs (see Ge 30:14; 35:2)"⁸⁶. When Laban accused Jacob of stealing his gods, Jacob made a rash vow that "unwittingly put Rachel under the death penalty"⁸⁷ (vv. 30, 32). But Providence kept Laban from finding his idols in Rachel's possession (vv. 33-35).

■ Application

How will I deal with making mistakes while following God's will in my life?

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■ Prayer

Write a prayer to God as your response arising from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

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⁸⁵ Bruce K. Waltke, 427
⁸⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, 427
⁸⁷ Allen P. Ross, 532

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