

Genesis / Baby Wars / Chapter 29:32-30:24



INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

ICE BREAKER QUESTION: For the typical American Christian today, what would you say are the top three idols we are tempted to worship? Why?

At its root meaning, idolatry is the worship of created things in place of the worship of Creator God. What created things are most tempting for you to worship or idolize: Money? Pleasure? Food? Toys? Work? Yourself? Why do you think even well-meaning believers are tempted to elevate created things above the Creator? There are relationships, experiences, desires, and things all around us that can easily distract us from what is most important. God created us to love, worship, and enjoy Him (Isa. 43:7; Deut. 6:13; Phil. 3:1). When we elevate anything to the place of God, that thing becomes an idol. By looking in Genesis at a period of time in Rachel's life, we will be challenged to acknowledge our own idols and turn our hearts to the Lord who made us for a relationship with Himself.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **What is your biggest takeaway? How was your experience with the Life Tool's this past week?**
2. **How would you describe Jacob's marital relationships with Leah and Rachel? What were the contributing factors to his messy marriages?**

Jacob was selfish and prideful in his marriage, loving Rachel and not Leah. His problems went beyond how he treated them. He was looking at marriage the wrong way.

Jacob saw his wives as a way of gaining offspring. His sons would be his heritage and namesake and he longed to have a big family. Jacob did not see marriage as a way to honor his wife. Instead, he saw marriage as a way to get his wives to do what he wanted. In the New Testament we see a stark contrast in the way marriage is supposed to be practiced. Paul instructs husbands and wives to be like Christ as they navigate marriage.

The commentators quote below helped further show how these marriages could be described:

Jacob had demonstrated that he was an accomplished cheat. And, we shall see, the sister-wives were both sharp-tongued and shrill. Both women would use the births of

their own and their surrogate children as opportunities to put their feelings into words, be it to celebrate or to gloat. This is messy—multiple wives, multiple births, sister hatred, brother hatred—all of which will be acted out over the years.¹

3. **Considering what you know about Jacob, Rachel and Leah, what might they have been tempted to idolize at this point in her life? How do those idols push us toward the sin of envy?**

The envy of both women was rooted in idolatry—Leah’s idol was her husband and Rachel’s was children. Jacob idolized Rachel and having some like her after having to run away from his family.

When we envy, someone or something takes the place that only God should have in our lives. That idol could be as obvious as money, or as conspicuous as envying the positive character traits of another person. No matter how envy manifests itself, though, it is always rooted in idolatry and control.

The question we must ask ourselves is, how do we combat the temptations to envy that we face every day? That answer lies in the gospel. When we reflect on the lengths God has gone to in making us His own, gratitude and humility take the place of envy in our hearts. Then our focus becomes glorifying God, rather than desiring for more ways to glorify ourselves.

This commentator’s quote illustrated the dangers of idolatry:

Naturally, unloved Leah’s hopes soared. Perhaps now, as this remarkable set of sons was developing, Jacob would come to love her. Barren Rachel, of course, felt increasingly diminished by her sister’s successes. Thus we have two desperate women—one desperate for love and the other desperate for children. Oh, the joys of polygamy!²

4. **Read Ephesians 5:22-33. What important lesson does this passage and what we read about Jacob’s story teach us about God’s design for marriage?**

As we learned on Sunday Jacob was tricked into having more than one wife but his choice to continue to live not according to God’s design was what brought destruction into his life. Ephesians 5:22-33 gives us the picture of God’s design and the commentators quotes below explain more from that passage and others on what God’s design for marriage is:

Clearly, the ideal for Hebrew marriage was always monogamy, despite the examples of royalty. So in the Old Testament polygamy was understood to be a violation of the covenantal faithfulness that God demanded of his bride Israel as dramatically

¹ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 374.

² R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 375.

portrayed, for example, in the book of Hosea. And, of course, God spoke the final word in his Son who called his people to the joyous, monogamous love and fidelity that was emblematic of his love for his bride, the church (cf. Ephesians 5:25–33).³

The creation account's explicit record that God created only one wife for Adam made it clear for all who would follow that anyone who takes an extra wife is going beyond what God intended.⁴

a) **How can you minister to people that are going through a tough time in their marriage?**

Encourage the group to think through how God can use them be a community for those that are struggling in their marriage. Some people need a community around them who loves them enough to speak into their life and be there for them when they are going through a hard time.

5. What do you think about the Lord intervening for Leah and Leah's hope that more children would win Jacob's affection? What do you think about Leah's statement after she had Judah?

We see clearly in this story that ultimately God is sovereign, and he is the one who controls the womb. The quote below answers part of the questions:

Of first importance we see that despite the sin and polygamy that had engulfed Jacob's marriage, the Lord had begun to work out his own purposes. God himself had closed beautiful, much-loved Rachel's womb and opened the womb of her lowly, unloved sister. He had bypassed Rachel and opened the womb of Leah in her humble estate.⁵

Leah's words indicate that she spent time in petition for children from the Lord. She hoped that through them, by being the perfect wife in her culture, she would finally be loved and honored by her husband. Many women can relate to Leah's predicament. How many women have tried to be "perfect" for their significant other, only to find that they could never measure up? How many have fallen into the trap of asking the Lord for things to win their spouse or boyfriend's favor when really they would have been better served by simply seeking the Lord Himself?

The Lord loved Leah. He gave her strong sons to comfort her in her distress. The Lord did not give Leah children to win Jacob's approval; He gave her children for her. By the time Judah was born, she was past hoping her children would win Jacob's affection. By then, she

³ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 373.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 373.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 374–375.

was content simply to thank the Lord for another son, at least for a little while. The commentator's quote illustrates what was happening to Leah as she was having children:

But though she might not ever enjoy Jacob's love, God had given her four sons, and she had to be thankful for that. And truly if Leah could have seen down the generations, she would have been astonished at how blessed she was, because her last two sons, Levi and Judah, would respectively father the priestly and kingly tribes of Israel. Leah's blood would flow in the veins of Moses and Aaron and David and Christ the Messiah!⁶

6. What areas in your life can easily become idols and cause envy? How can the truth of the gospel help you combat idolizing?

Our bigger problem is not with envy—it is with God, the One who decides who gets what. When we are envious of another, we are implicitly challenging the wisdom and generosity of God and letting someone or something take the place that only God should have in our lives. That idol could be as obvious as money, or as inconspicuous as an obsession with parental desires.

The question we must ask ourselves is, how do we combat the temptations to envy that we face every day? That answer lies in the gospel. When we reflect on the lengths God has gone to in making us His own, gratitude and humility take the place of envy in our hearts. Then our focus becomes glorifying God, rather than desiring for more ways to glorify ourselves.

a. Have you ever struggled with the temptation to make your children, or desire for them, an idol? What's the danger in that?

We see this struggle in this story that we're studying and it may very well, as you hear it, think of your own struggles with your family. A commentator states how it happened for Rachel:

In her bitterness, Rachel had forgotten that her barrenness was God's doing—that he is the giver of life. At this point, thoughts of God were far from her.⁷

Encourage the group to be honest as they think about that question for themselves and what happens when we do put children or the desire for children as an idol.

b. Why might serving at our church or in the community help to guard against envy?

Serving others helps us think of others and put others before ourselves. As we talked about previously envy comes from idolizing and desiring something above

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 375–376.

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 376.

God. When we put God first and that drives us to serve then we will be guarded from that envy.

- 7. Read Philippians 4:11-13. What can we learn from this passage and the story about Jacob on how to be content?**
- a. How specifically might you remind yourself of the goodness of God in your life this week in order to build a heart of gratitude?**

How fascinating this freshly written section must have been at the exodus when every man and woman could find his or her ancestral father and mother in this narrative. And how fascinating to see that human determination and cleverness would not, could not accomplish the work of God. In fact, God comes to the lowly as he did first to Leah in her humble condition and then to Rachel in her lowliness.

How fascinating this is for those of us who possess the revelation of Christ in the New Testament! When Martin Luther read this account, he asked, "Does God have no other occupation left than to have regard for the lowliness of the household?" Luther's question was answered not only here but in the good news of the gospel, as we have it in Luke. When Mary heard Elizabeth confirm that her womb bore her Lord, Mary sang:⁸

Conclusion

We can learn many lessons from this struggle in Jacob's family. Although having two wives was not immediately Jacob's fault (the law only later prohibited such a marriage [Lev. 18:18]), through it God taught the nation about his wisdom and justice and compassion. We can learn the danger of favoritism in family relationships, a recurring theme in the patriarchal narratives. We can also learn about the danger of thwarting human affection. To conclude this commentator really helped summarize the finalized points for this passage:

The tragedy comes when we, striving for love and recognition, either within the family or not, live our lives on such an earthly level that only temporal things mean much to us. To sacrifice things spiritual for things physical—to trade things that are above trade value—is tragic in the long run. This loss may happen when we are filled with anxiety and envy over the apparent inequity of God's dealings with his people. *God's people must put away envy and strife, which lead to bitter conflicts, and accept the truth that God dispenses his blessings in sovereign wisdom, justice, and compassion.⁹*

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 378–379.

⁹ Allen P. Ross, [Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 514–515.

PRAYER

Close your time in prayer by thanking God for the gifts that He has given you. Pray that God would help you to be content with what you have and not be envious of the blessings He has given to others. Pray that your group would be characterized by humility and by service to others.

Thank God that He graciously teaches us in the midst of our struggles with idolatry. Ask Him to reveal any areas of idolatry you are still holding onto and to give you the courage and the strength to trust Him completely.

Lead your group in prayer, asking God to strengthen the marriages in our church based on the truths of His Word.



FURTHER STUDY

Devotionals-

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/god-remembers-rachel>

Sermon -

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/word-of-the-week/the-struggle-for-love/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/birth-wars/>