

Genesis / Brothers Reconciled / Chapter 33



INTRODUCTION

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

ICE BREAKER QUESTION: Growing up, how serious were your parents about your following the rules and guidelines they gave you?

Our culture likes to celebrate the “American spirit” of the “self-made” person who pulls himself or herself up by the bootstraps. And many times that independent spirit serves us well. Many an immigrant or poverty-stricken child has achieved great business or academic success by refusing to go along with the script of their initial circumstances. We salute, honor, and draw inspiration from individuals who rewrite their life stories for the good.

But we do not have the freedom to edit every script. Some scripts stand right just as they are written. Any effort on our part to rewrite such scripts leads not to stories to be celebrated, but tales of warning to be heeded. We’re going to learn more about Jacobs struggled with the obedience to God’s commands as he travels back to the promised land.

Read back through the passage before going through the questions.

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 the different emotions that Jacob and Esau were feeling? What was the motivation for the blessings and generosity that they had for each other?**

Jacob was still anxious even after encountering God. Esau was joyous to see his brother, he ran unashamed, to his brother. They blessed and greeted one another. The commentators quotes below further describe these emotions:

Jacob haltingly approached his brother, bowing himself to the ground seven times (as was common in the ancient world in court protocol). Esau’s approach does not follow

such a ceremonial comportment—he eagerly ran to meet Jacob, embraced him, kissed him, and wept. Such is the result when “God fights” in his way.¹

It is important to emphasize Jacob’s descriptions of their relationship: he referred to himself as the servant, and to his brother as the lord. As mentioned earlier, such references deny the point of the blessing that made him Esau’s lord. Moreover, Jacob informed his brother that all he had gained came by God’s gracious dealings. He was certainly approaching humbly and cautiously, but this posture was caused by his fear and guilt.²

The Lord enabled their relationship to be restored because God had worked in each of the brothers lives. We have been able to see how God has humbled Jacob through the previous chapters and we get to see what God was doing in Esau’s in this chapter. This work was explained well with the quote below:

This warm welcome shows clearly that Esau had forgiven his brother and held no grudge against Jacob, either because it was all so much water under the bridge to Esau or because God had mellowed his attitude toward his brother over the years by prospering him.³

3. Read Matthew 22:37-39. What does this passage and Genesis 33 say about our relationships with God and man from Esau and Jacob’s meeting?

The way the encounter with Jacob and Esau unfolded taught us an important lesson about our relationship God and man and how the first will ultimately affect the later. This principle was explained well with the quotes below:

Jacob did not know it, but as he prepared for the dreaded encounter, a greater dread would grip him throughout the long night until dawn in a titanic wrestling match. And further, he did not know that was preparation—necessary preparation—for meeting Esau. God had to first deal with Jacob before Jacob could deal with Esau.⁴

Jacob had seen the face of God and lived. And then he saw the face of Esau and lived—so that to him Esau’s face was like that of God.

¹ Allen P. Ross, [*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 564.

² Allen P. Ross, [*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 564–565.

³ Allen P. Ross, [*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 564.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 403.

*And there is more. Jacob had not been ready to see Esau's face until he had seen God's face. The divine encounter prepared the way for the human encounter.*⁵

This principle is also seen in Matthew 22:37-39 and the truth explained well with the quote below:

*The principle of God first, man second is written large in the language of love in the Scripture. It is in the very structure of the Ten Commandments. The first four command love for God; the second six command love for humanity. That is the order. Love God, and then you can love man. Jesus summed it up like this: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).*⁶

- a. **How might their interaction have been different if Jacob had not encountered God the night before?**

4. What do we learn about God in the way He answered Jacob's prayer to deliver him from Esau?

Jacob's approach with the prayer was not taken with the approach of trusting that God could do everything. Jacob just prayed for God to deliver him from his brother but did not even believe that God would change Esau's heart. This truth can be seen with the quote from a commentator:

*Only the day before, Jacob had prayed, "Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children" (32:11). And here was the direct answer to his prayer. God had changed Esau's heart. "Such is the result when 'God fights' in his way" (Ross).*⁷

5. How does the work of God in your life change the way you approach non-believers?

Encourage the group to think through how the same principle we learned from this story would change how we approach non-believers.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 405.

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 406.

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 404.

6. What was wrong with Jacob's choice to settle in Shechem?

At first glance it may seem odd to think of Jacob's choice as being in the wrong. The commentators quotes below explain the sin in Jacob's decisions:

Why was that? What was Jacob doing settling down at Shechem and raising an altar when he should have been continuing on to Bethel to raise the altar there, where he had first had the dream? Did Jacob think that Shechem was a better site for trade and for his flocks? Perhaps he thought it didn't matter. After all, Bethel was now a mere twenty miles or so away; he could go there whenever it suited him, once he got settled. Why be so precise in these things? Shechem or Bethel—it's really all the same, isn't it? Indeed, it is not. Whatever his motivation, Jacob's compromise and his failure to follow through with complete obedience to what he had vowed would cost him and his family dearly, as we shall see in the following chapter. Almost obedience is never enough. Being in the right ballpark may be sufficient when watching a baseball game, but is not nearly enough when it comes to obeying God. Nothing short of full obedience is required.⁸

Partial obedience is always disobedience, no matter what our rationalizations are. God will not be fooled or mocked. And his sweet grace can be brutal.⁹

a. Where do we see the issues of partial obedience in our own lives?

We may overlook the issues with or not even notice where there is partial obedience in our own lives. The quote below helps give us some examples to understand:

We all understand the foolishness of halfway obedience from our life experiences. As both parents and children, we know that when a son is asked to take out the trash, his leaving it by the back door instead of in the trash barrel is unacceptable. In fact, it is disobedience because partial obedience is always disobedience. We also know that partial obedience can be dangerous, as, for example, when a child who is told not to play in the street plays alongside the roadway. Thus we insist on total obedience.¹⁰

7. Read 2 Corinthians 12:9. What does that passage and Genesis 33 teach us about weakness?

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 407–408.

⁹ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 408.

¹⁰ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 408.

The worldly perspective about weakness is completely different from God's perspective and we see why through 2 Corinthians and Genesis 33. This difference is laid out well with the quote below:

The New Testament says it wonderfully: "[God] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9). May we remember that the crippled Jacob was the man who fought with God and prevailed. It is the strong who always lose. But in weakness there is victory.

Lord, hear our prayer:

*O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.¹¹*

Conclusion

Reconciliation can be a painful process. God understands this. It took the life of His Son to reconcile sinful man to Himself. He has not called His people to sacrifice their children in order to appease an earthly enemy. He has called us to sacrifice our pride in order to model His message of reconciliation to others. He has called us to live peaceably with all men. When that fails, He calls us to love unselfishly, from a heart that has been reconciled to God. He calls us to remember that we are new creations, with new affections and new behavior, and that we were first loved when we were enemies.

PRAYER

Lead your group in prayer, thanking God for restoring us to Him, for choosing us, for loving us, for making us holy. Pray that the people of our church would be known as people of kindness, compassion, love and forgiveness.

¹¹ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 409.



FURTHER STUDY



Devotionals-

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/goal-reconciliation>

Article –

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/necessity-reconciliation>

Sermon –

<https://www.ligonier.org/podcasts/ultimately-with-rc-sroul/the-gospel-of-reconciliation>