

# The Jacob Story

## Crafting our Pilgrimage for the Next Generation

Brian Morgan

Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino

[www.pbcc.org](http://www.pbcc.org)



Our Pilgrimage  
Memories from the Womb

Life in the womb

Mother

Birth order

Parental attachments

Sibling rivalry

Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725-1805)

Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said,

*"If it is so, why then am I...?"*

So she went to inquire of the LORD. The LORD said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb;

and two peoples from within you shall be divided;

and one shall be stronger than the other;

the older shall serve the younger."

When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them. When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents. Now Isaac loved Esau, for the game that was in his mouth,<sup>1</sup> but Rebekah loved Jacob. (Gen 25:21-28)

<sup>1</sup>The Hebrew idiom is unclear as to "whether the idiom suggests Esau as a kind of lion bringing home game in its mouth or rather bringing game to put in his father's mouth." Robert Alter, *Genesis* (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 128.

## Reflection

Use the questions below as **triggers** of your past that invite **reflection**. When you come to one that provokes your emotions, don't move on; stay there and invite God into that place, and reflect how he has shaped you through it.

1. What are your earliest memories of your mother?
2. Are you aware of the emotions your mother felt when you were born? Can you visualize them?
3. Did your mother have difficulty in pregnant or miscarriages?
4. Where were you in the birth order? What impact did that have on you?
5. Did your mother or father have favorites?
6. Do you know your mother's story?
7. Has wrestling of sibling rivalry impacted your adult life?  
Jacob wrestles with Esau; he wrestles against the stone at the well (symbol of Rachel's infertility); he wrestles with Laban; his wives wrestle for his affection and virility; he wrestles with the angel, and finally he *embraces* Esau.
8. Where there any tragic circumstances that shaped your mother or father?
9. Could you communicate freely with either parent?
10. How has time changed your perspective about your mother or father?
11. Write a **short psalm** of thanksgiving, lament or praise (or combination) that addresses this beginning of your pilgrimage with God. There are no guidelines, except that you must be **honest**. Be as creative as you like, and incorporate new insights. (my example attached)

## Grief's Gift

Mother's Day, May 12, 1996

As I think of Mother's Day,  
and you,  
my Mom,  
my mind is lifted up

Of your beginnings,  
wrought in joy,  
music resonating from your mother,  
eating lady fingers from your father.

Then struck down,  
twice alone,  
singed with pain,  
and consummate grief.

Unprotected and subjected,  
somehow you survived  
that treachery from Boston to Utah,  
and the scorching journey to adulthood.

Was it sheer tenacious  
determination,  
resolve that things could,  
and would be different,

That I knew nothing  
of such silent darkness,  
but only of boyhood splendor  
that takes one's breath away?

That I lived to play my dreams  
oblivious to your protective wings,  
or attentive heart that would grant my  
every soul's desire?

How many moms would drive ninety miles one  
way, each way,  
for five days, and just sit;  
while a son learns to ski?

So I was sent off freely treasured,  
protected and carefree,  
until grief caught me in its net,  
and the music ceased.

You lost father and mother  
as a youth,  
I lost son and daughter  
in their youth.

In tenacious resolve  
forged in grief, I now know  
the gifts I long to give my girls—  
wings of protection, unlimited grace.

And so today,  
we are united,  
a mother  
and her son.

Now I pray in the last days,  
when reflection is brightest,  
that your Father  
will find you,

and that you may eat freely  
from his fingers,  
that your soul will resonate  
Alive!

טוב לי כי עניתני

"It was good for me that I was afflicted,  
that I may learn your statutes."

Psalms 119:71

כי אם הוּגַה

"For if he causes grief,  
then he will have compassion  
according to his abundant steadfast-love."

Lamentations 3:32

My Psalm of Pilgrimage  
First Memories

# Our Pilgrimage

## Table Talk & Family Dynamics

Genesis 26:34-27:40

blessing

father

brother

a p p e t i t e s

mother

brother

curse

Govert Flinck (1615-1660) Isaac Blessing Jacob

As we anticipate the holidays and the accompanying family festivities, different emotions rise up within us. For some, family feasts are times of celebration and joyous reunion, but for others these can be stress filled occasions. Underneath the thin veil of celebration lurk unhealthy family dynamics that open up old wounds, age-old pecking orders, and longings for expressions of love that have never been fulfilled. The prevailing atmosphere is dominated by controlling forces that run as deep as the family history. When the festivities end, we question if we will ever be able to shake our childhood identities and be liberated from family competitiveness that strives to attain that ever-elusive family “blessing.”

In our text we observe similar family dynamics. The table is set for a holy meal, where the family “*blessing*” (7 times) stands as the centerpiece. Everyone is looking to the father to act as head of the home, but his passivity has made him a laughingstock of decency. Instead of being the spiritual leader, he uses the occasion to feed his own appetites. If he succeeds, he will place the family history at risk. There is no prayer before the meal. Everyone has their personal agenda, and will stop at nothing to get what they want. All expressions of love are self-serving. Family conversation is laced with deception, flattery, and blasphemy. Competition has created such a chasm that one half of the family can’t even speak to the other. Fokkelman notes, “All the members of the family take part in the actions, but at the same time they must be kept apart in pairs to prevent bloodshed.”<sup>1</sup> There is no speech between brothers, and practically none between husband and wife. The only safe conversation takes place between a parent and his or her “favored” son.

<sup>1</sup> J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (The Netherlands, Van Gorcum, Assen, 1975), 98.

### Literary Outline

**a Esau marries** outside the covenant causing grief to Isaac and Rebekah

**b Isaac** + son of blessing (Esau) sent out for game

**c Rebekah** sends Jacob onto the stage

**d** Jacob appears before Isaac, receives blessing

**d'** Esau appears before Isaac, receives anti-blessing

**c' Rebekah** sends Jacob from the stage

**b' Isaac** + son of blessing (Jacob!) sent out for marriage

**a Esau marries** (attempting to imitate Jacob!) to gain favor of parents

### Reflection

Use the questions below as **triggers** of your past that invite **reflection**. When you come to one that provokes your emotions, don't move on; stay there and invite God into that place, and reflect how he has shaped you through it.

1. Does this scene evoke any memories in your past? If not of your physical family, consider a spiritual family situation, where comparison and jealousy reigned and impacted you.
2. Have you ever felt that you had to be "someone else" to be praised? If so, what false self did you employ?
3. Have you ever felt like Jacob, robbed of a blessing because of who you are, or emasculated by a dominant female to look like someone else? How did you cope with it?
4. Has wrestling with sibling rivalry impacted your adult life? How?
5. How has the "table dynamics" of your family of origin affected your role as a parent?
6. Think how different the table dynamics are when Jesus reclines at table in Luke 7:36-50, and in John 21:1-14. What outrageous gift does Jesus give that shocks everyone?
7. Can you remember the when you decided to throw away your false self and live in the freedom Christ brings? What provoked it?

## My Psalm of Pilgrimage Family Dynamics

Write a **psalm** of thanksgiving, lament or praise (or combination) that addresses the competitive rivalries and/or favoritism and/or the new freedom you enjoy being utterly you in Christ. There are no guidelines, except that you must be **honest**. Be as creative as you like, and incorporate new insights.



# Our Pilgrimage

## Ambushed by God

Genesis 28:10-22

a refugee fleeing  
a no place  
a stone  
a dream  
angels  
an oracle & a vow  
an altar  
a holy place  
a son on a pilgrimage

We come to place in the Jacob story that is every parent's nightmare, when a son or daughter goes off into exile. At his father's command Jacob is headed to his mother's home seeking a wife. But there is more than one motive driving this pilgrim. Beneath the surface of his quest for a wife is really the fear of being killed by a brother who hates him. The emotional damage Jacob left behind in his family is so great, I doubt if he thought he ever could ever go back. So Jacob looks much more like a **refugee fleeing in fear**, than a potential groom laden with a handsome dowry. Being banished from one's home is a horrific thought which Shakespeare describes as worse than death.

*Ha, banishment! Be merciful, say "death;"  
For exile hath more terror in his look,  
much more than death.  
Do not say "banishment."*

But the Bible suggests that exile can be the critical starting point to begin an authentic journey with God. The key word in our text is "**place**" (used 6x). Jacob bled home and "came" to a "certain place." The verb "**came**" (*paga'*) is better translated "*to meet, encounter, or reach.*" Most often it is used to describe encounter with people, or angels (32:1) that are life-changing. When used geographically it usually pertains to a border crossing. So we find Jacob in a "no-place," but in reality this will become a "border crossing" where he is about to have the encounter of his life — where God no longer directs the affairs of men from behind the scenes, but steps right out center stage for Jacob to see. And it is at the most **critical junctures** in this journey, at the initial stage of his flight and return home, that heaven breaks into his life. Taken together these two encounters will transform Jacob and his entire world.

## Reflections

1. **Place** – Jacob comes to a “no place” whose conditions act like a mirror to reflect and magnify the ache within his soul. He is a lonely refugee shut out to all hospitality. The only comfort he will find at his “Dream Inn” is a pillow found among the stones.

The setting of God’s encounter with Jacob matches Jacob’s psychological condition. The security of the sun has been replaced by the dangers of night. The comfort of his parents’ tents has been replaced by a rock. Behind him lays Beersheba, where Esau waits to kill him; ahead of him is Haran, where Laban waits to exploit him. He is situated between a death camp and a hard-labor camp.”<sup>1</sup>

Have you ever found yourself exiled in such a state?

2. **Stones** are a dominant theme in Jacob’s life, for he is always pushing against the hard realities of stone. But God breaks into Jacob’s harsh world with ephemeral dreams. They shatter the presumed world of Jacob. When Jacob’s life is dark, the world silent, and he lays still, God makes himself known through a dream.

The wakeful world of Jacob was a world of fear, terror and loneliness. Those were parameters of his existence. The dream permits the entry of an alternative into his life. The dream is not a morbid review of a shameful past. It is rather the presentation of an alternative future with God. The gospel moves to Jacob in a time when his guard is down. The dream permits news.<sup>2</sup>

3. Reflect on the **spiritual transformation** that occurs in this text:
  - ❖ a man running away from home runs into God
  - ❖ a man terrified of his brother fear God
  - ❖ a certain place become nothing less than God’s place
  - ❖ a rock turns into a temple
  - ❖ night turns into morning
  - ❖ Canaanite Luz is transformed into Bethel (“the house of God”)
4. How might God be prodding you to make your soul more conducive to heaven’s descent, instead of being forced into that condition by way of a flight into the wilderness?
5. Using one of the metaphors in #3, write a Bethel psalm when heaven invaded your life unannounced.

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<sup>1</sup> Waltke, *Genesis*, 388.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 243.

My Psalm of Pilgrimage  
My Bethel



# Our Pilgrimage Love & Courtship Genesis 29:1-14

a well (5x)  
a large stone  
flocks of sheep  
shepherds  
R a c h e l  
a shepherdess  
a kiss  
a father  
a home

William Dyce – *The Meeting of Jacob and Rachel* (1850)

Jacob's heavenly encounter with God and angels at Bethel, grants him a renewed sense of purpose. The Hebrew text reads – "**Jacob lifted his feet.**" The phrase frames the text at the end when he *lifts up his voice* and wept. "Rashi suggests that Jacob's elation after the Bethel epiphany imparted a buoyancy to the movement of his feet as he began his long trek to the East." Even though Jacob's father sent him away with no gift for a dowry, the encounter with God has fully energized him as he journeys ahead with eager anticipation of what God might have in store.

The encounter with Rachel at the well is what Robert Alter calls a "**type-scene**" — a fixed sequence of motifs that are often repeated in the Bible. In betrothal type-scenes we find several motifs reoccurring. First, a man is sent on a journey to a foreign land in search of a bride. When he arrives, he finds a young maiden by a well (a symbol of fertility), after a brief conversation and the drawing of water the girl *runs* home to her father, and a betrothal scene with a feast normally climax the scene.

The story strikes a resonant cord in every man, who wants to be a "**prince charming,**" and every woman who longs to be a **beauty** worth searching for. But deeper still the story speaks to the longing of our hearts to be sought by God. The fact that this is repeated five more times in the Bible heightens its significance. Each time the story is repeated the emotion is heightened as the audience is captured by the mystery of romance coupled with providence. We serve a God who courts, woos and wins back his bride. And God's romance doesn't end in a few months, but is ever more and dear the older we become.

Assuredly, I will speak coaxingly to her  
and lead her through the wilderness  
and speak to her tenderly.

I will give her her vineyards from there,  
and the Valley of Achor as a plowland of hope.  
There she shall respond as in the **days of her youth,**  
when she came up from the land of Egypt."

## Reflections

1. **“And Jacob kissed”** – there is a pun between “he watered” (*wayashq*) and “he kissed” (*wayishaq*). The same pun is used in the Song of Songs, but here the order is reversed, usually you introduce then kiss. “No other love is like unto the ecstasy of the moment when spirit cleaves to spirit in a kiss, more especially a kiss on the mouth...When mouth meets mouth, the spirits unite—they are one, and love is one. Do not the kisses proceed from Him?” The ladder and the kiss are one and the same. (Stevens)
2. **John 4** – The **seventh** time this betrothal scene is played out it is God himself who comes into a foreign land searching for his bride. And when he arrives at a well (it is Jacob’s well!) there is a woman. She is not a Jew, but a half-breed Samaritan. To our surprise, she is not young, nor a virgin, and after several unsuccessful marriages she is just living with someone out of convenience. She draws her water alone, for no one in this town associates with her anymore. But like Jacob, Jesus breaks all the social conventions and speaks tenderly to her, and asks for a drink, and then offers her living water. But like the shepherds in the Jacob story, she thinks there are too many obstacles. But then when she learns that this is the Messiah, she runs from the well and announces this new guest not to her father but to all the men of the village as the Messiah. It is climatic betrothal scene of the Bible and she becomes the new Rachel.
3. Compare Jacob’s **first love** with your first love
  - ❖ Where was your well?
  - ❖ Was it love at first sight?
  - ❖ Were there obstacles?
  - ❖ Can you remember your first kiss?
  - ❖ Did you feel like you had come “home”?
4. Reflect on **God’s courtship** of you
  - ❖ Where were you when he found you?
  - ❖ How do you think he felt when he first laid eyes on you (Song 2:14; 4:9)?
  - ❖ What gifts did he bring?
  - ❖ What emotions did you feel?
5. Reflect on your present journey
  - ❖ Can you still hear God’s voice wooing and searching for you (Song 2:10-13; 4:8)?
  - ❖ Where might you be resisting him?
  - ❖ What would you like him to do for you?

## My Psalm of Pilgrimage Love and Courtship

Using any of images from Jacob's story, or from Song of Songs, write a **psalm** describing the time you were first captivated by love and relate to how God courted you. Conclude with where your "heart" is today and what you would like God to do for you.



# Our Pilgrimage

## Marriage: Waking Up to Reality

### Genesis 29:15-30

Laban  
wages  
Rachel  
seven years  
love  
a few days  
Jacob blind Leah  
in this place

When you fall in love  
it is a temporary madness;  
it erupts like an earthquake,  
then it subsides;  
and when it subsides,  
you have to work out whether  
your roots have become so entwined  
it is inconceivable that  
you should ever part.

Love is what is left over,  
when being in love has burned away.  
Captain Corelli's mandolin

Laban presents himself as a generous man eager to reward his nephew, and invites the Jacob to name his *wages*, but only after his nephew has been laboring for nothing for the entire month. In contrast to his grandfather Abraham, who received his “wages” as the gift of God, Jacob will painfully find that his “wages” are hard won through sweat and deception. “Wages” (8x) will define every aspect of his life (marriage, children and dowry) during his twenty year stay in Haran. In the end they will leave a bitter taste in the mouth.

If in Laban’s offer we wonder “**Does true love have a price?**” Jacob’s actions demonstrate that “**true love will pay any price.**” Reducing his courtship to a service contract does not dampen Jacob’s romantic dreams, the seven years seemed “*in his eyes*” (note the word play with Leah’s “*soft eyes*”) like just a few days. Paul Stevens notes, “**Jacob is the first lover in the Bible**, that is, the first to show what it is like to be in love as an all-consuming passion.” But though the seven years pass like “a few days,” Jacob grows impatient towards the end, as his greedy uncle makes no mention of fulfilling his part of the contract. The frustrated Jacob is forced to initiate the conversation with his future father in law. “*Give [me] my wife...that I may go in to her.*” Jacob’s speech is like Esau’s, when he caught sight of the stew Jacob was preparing and reveals his sexual impatience (at least Esau said “*Please*”).

Laban gathered all the men of “**the place**” and prepared what looks more like a bachelor party than a wedding feast. The goal is obvious – an abundance of alcohol given to a very “*thirsty*” young man will aid the deception. Under the cover of darkness Laban brought Jacob’s veiled bride to him, and the naïve groom consummates the marriage, unaware of the bridal switch.

The next morning when Laban is confronted by an angry Jacob, he immediately justifies himself, saying that in “**this place**” such things are not done. What things? Marrying off the younger before the firstborn. Instead of the term “*older*” he substitutes “*first-born*,” a little barb for Jacob’s past deception of his brother. In effect he says, you may get away with that where you live, but not in “**this place!**” But to soften the blow, he explains that for a slight inconvenience he can have all that he wants. Complete the marriage week of “*this one*” and Jacob can have the other “one” as well. Priceless daughters now become nameless bargaining chips for profit. And he adds that there will be just a small additional “*price*,” 19 mere seven years. But for Jacob, what are seven years when you are “in love?”

## Reflection: Where is God is “this place”?

### 1. God judges his elect in “this place” through mirrors

The narrator’s repetition of “*this place*” (7x) emphasizes that God is just as present in Haran as he was in Bethel. In this case God has allowed “*the unthinkable*” to discipline Jacob. Just as Jacob deceived his father who was robbed of his sight, so now he is deceived in the dark. Just as Esau’s sensual passions blinded him to Jacob’s deception, so too, Jacob’s obsessive love blinds him to Laban’s deception. And just as he never received his father’s affection, so now is married to an unloved woman. God is the master of mirror making. Sometimes the very thing in others that provokes our rage in others may be also deeply rooted in us. For Jacob “*this place*” is the place where God disciplines the son he loves (Heb 12:5-7).

### 2. God redeems his elect in “every place”

Marriage is not designed to make us happy, but to be “*a place*” where we learn to grow to maturity. As Paul Stevens writes, “Maturity is not something that can be obtained through self-help books, high-powered seminars and consumer-oriented religion. It comes only in the long thick experiences of life, seasoned by some of the hardest and disappointing experiences, which, if directed Godward become the crucible for faith formation and holiness.”

### 3. Where is God in your “place”?

- ❖ Did you ever wake up and wonder, “Is this the woman (or man) I married?”
  
- ❖ What have been the most difficult things you discovered about your spouse?
  
- ❖ Has God used any mirrors in your life to give you a good look at yourself?
  
- ❖ Have you ever made shocking discoveries about yourself?
  
- ❖ How has Jesus responded to your sins, shortcomings and addictions?
  
- ❖ Where is God presently at work shaping you through your marriage?

My Psalm of Pilgrimage  
Marriage: Waking Up to Reality

Write a **psalm** of thanksgiving to your spouse as God's tool to conform you to his image.

O Emily, you are my Rachel,  
your beauty and radiance captured my heart,  
five years was nothing to work for you,  
it seemed like a few days because of my love for you.

Then a voice was heard in Ramah,  
Rachel is weeping for her children  
because they are no more,  
but the Lord said, "Keep your eyes from tears,  
there is a hope, and your children shall return."  
His loyal love was true, and I loved you more.

I am Jacob, that dreamer of dreams,  
but while my mind is in heaven,  
and my head lay upon the stone,  
you build the ladder,  
that brings heaven home.



# Our Pilgrimage

## Children, a Doorway to a Parent's Heart

Genesis 29:31-30:24

Behold children  
are a gift of the Lord  
How blessed  
is the man  
who fills his quiver  
with these

Psalm 127:5

The promise of children was a significant driving force in God's covenant to Abraham, especially when given to barren women like Sarah and Rebekah. Through years of anticipation God was faithful to both. Now we wonder how God will continue to fulfill his promise into the third generation. What follows is a very surprising birth narrative of Jacob's twelve children, and with it we discover how two wounded women learn to connect with God.

Our text opens with God "*seeing*" and ends with God "*remembering*." He is prime mover of the entire scene and the one who intervenes to care for these hurting women. He grants priceless gifts of children to his daughters just because he loves them. And the fact that every requested pregnancy is immediately followed by an unsolicited second, is the supreme way of saying that God is generous beyond belief. These indescribable gifts give Rachel and Leah a voice. The two daughters, who never had a voice with their father, become the primary voice in this text. And we learn how precious it is for the Father to hear a daughter's voice! And though the theological expression of their voice is less than perfect, he just keeps on loving them with more gifts. This is truly God's grace at work.

But sadly we find that competition between the sisters blinds them to the purity of God's good gifts. So his gifts, rather than being expressions of love in their own right, become vehicles to possess something that is more important than God's love. When this happens our soul becomes blocked from experiencing the liberating freedom of the love of God. And just as in the Jacob story, God must often resort to extreme measures to root it out. How long must it take us to learn that "*wrestling*" and "*competing*" for human love will never make us content, even when we win? Perhaps like Rachel and Leah, you have found find that your greatest theological discoveries come as a result of crushed expectations.

## Literary Outline

	The initiator of the plot
A Rachel barren: Leah Unloved	Yahweh <i>saw</i>
B Leah conceives: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah	
C Rachel confronts Jacob: “give” me or I die!	Rachel <i>saw</i>
D Rachel / Bilhah as a wife: Dan & Naphtali	
D’ Leah/Zilpah as a wife: Gad & Asher	Leah <i>saw</i>
C’ Rachel asks Leah to give mandrakes	Rachel <i>asks</i> then “gives up”
B’ Leah conceives: Issachar, Zebulun	God <i>heard</i>
A’ Rachel fertile, conceives: Joseph	God <i>remembered</i>

## Reflection

Use the questions below as **triggers** of your past that invite **reflection**. When you come to one that provokes your emotions, don’t move on; stay there and invite God into that place, and reflect how he has shaped you through it.

1. Do you identify with Leah or Rachel in your quest to find love or fulfillment? Have you been damaged by competition or comparison?
2. Which of the children’s names resonate most within you? How do you think your spouse might answer the question?
3. Was there a moment in your life when, like Rachel, you found life by “giving up”?
4. If married with children, how have your children helped you understand the depths of God’s outlandish grace?
5. Have you experienced the joyous harmony of using your gifts in the symphony of the New Covenant (like Mary and Elizabeth) where there is no competition and no comparison?
6. Do you revel in the fact that you are “fearfully and wonderfully made,” and that God’s thoughts about you are “rare and innumerable...more than the sand...so vast is their sum!” (Ps 139:17-18)?
7. Are you still pained by barrenness? Or have you experienced the birth of spiritual children arising out of your barrenness and vulnerability (Isa 54:1-3)?
8. What has been your most fulfilling day as a parent (of physical or spiritual seed)?

My Psalm of Pilgrimage  
The Gift of Children

Write a **psalm** of thanksgiving or praise that addresses how the gift of children (physical or spiritual) has shaped you and drawn you closer to the Lord. Focus on one or two events.



# Our Pilgrimage

## Work at What Price?

### Genesis 30:25-31:16

Laban (“Mr. White”)

negotiations

striped spotted speckled

manipulation

breach of contract

dream - providential success

Do you sometimes wonder whether God is involved in your work? Few Christians view their workplace as the stage where God is supremely at work, both in shaping their character and displaying his image in creation. The length and sophistication of our text speak volumes concerning the value that God places on our work. Paul Stevens writes, “Jacob is the first worker in the Bible—the first to have his work vividly described in its complexities and satisfactions. But more importantly, this story reveals God’s interest in work. Jacob’s work is a way to God, blessed by God, and becomes a ministry to God and our neighbor.”

Like many in the workplace, Jacob works for a unscrupulous, oppressive employer who shows no concern for the well-being of his son-in-law, or his daughters and grandchildren. “Prudently, one should build up property before his family (Prov 27:23-27), but Laban prevents his flesh and blood from acting prudently. During the first seven years of their marriage contract, Laban should have allowed Jacob to prepare for his household; instead, he left him empty-handed. Now Jacob builds up his property on his own.”<sup>1</sup>

#### Summary Negotiations and Outcome

1. Both agree that Jacob shall have all “abnormal” animals, i.e., black/brown sheep and “everything that shows *white*” among the goats.
2. With his great experience and clever breeding-methods, his “white magic,” Jacob sees to it that with the strong animals all the young that are born have “white on them” (30:29)
3. The white color is manifest in 3 ways on the goats: by *stripes*, *spots* and *speckles*.
4. Laban, not having committed himself, is going to take advantage of this, for he sees the young of the strong animals “going over” to Jacob’s property, because of their “abnormal” color. Driven into a corner, he starts temporizing and twisting a subtle way. He continually asserts that the agreement was different, and he chooses a different variant of “*laban bo*” (*white on it*) (31:8)
5. Jacob’s cleverness is of no avail to him. Laban manages to circumvent the earlier agreement. But this in turn does not avail Laban either. A third figure interferes, **Providence**, adapting itself exactly to Laban’s new agreements. (31.8). Surprisingly enough, Jacob’s profits remain as large as they were earlier (30:39).

<sup>1</sup>Bruce Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 416-17.

<sup>2</sup>J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Van Gorcum, Assen: JSOT Press, 1975), 158

### Reflections: The Gift of Work

1. What is your job?
2. Do you work for a Laban? If so, what tactics does he employ?
3. Have you ever manipulated people or processes to work out for your advantage?
4. Has God ever “blessed” you, even when you manipulated an outcome?
5. Have you ever witnessed God at work in your work?
6. How would you like God to work in your work?
7. Do you know what your spiritual gifts are?
8. What gives you life at work?
9. Would you describe your work as “*slave*” work, “*faith*” work, or “*love*” work?
10. How has God shaped your character through your work?

## My Psalm of Pilgrimage

### The Gift of Work

Write a **psalm** of lament and/or thanksgiving addressing how you would like to see God at work in your work.



# Our Pilgrimage

## The Many Faces of Reconciliation

### Genesis 32:1-32

Laban  
border crossing angels  
the sum of all fears  
*minhah* ("gift")  
*panah* ("face")  
*hen* ("grace")  
*Jabbok* ("wrestling")  
"What is your name?"

Esau

Rembrandt: *Jacob Wrestling the Angel* 1659

We come to the climatic moment in the life of Jacob. It is that crisis moment that happens at least once in every lifetime: that dreaded encounter when we have to face our greatest fears. For Jacob it means facing his past and righting the wrong he did to his brother Esau by stealing his "blessing." When Jacob left, he was a fugitive fleeing a brother's rage. Though Jacob tried to outrun his guilt, he found it inescapable. Guilt is tenacious foe and cannot be eluded through time or distance. If Jacob left the Promised Land because of he wronged his brother, he cannot return without facing his brother. The thought of that encounter so plagued Jacob with fear that it practically undid him. But we see in the **generous gifts** sent to his brother, Jacob is making his first attempt at reconciliation by compensating for the wrong he caused, and going well beyond by contributing to the welfare of his brother.

But gifts alone are insufficient. Before Jacob can complete his journey of "reconciliation" he has to make a second "**border crossing**." The crossing is so dangerous that it requires divine aid of angels to make it successfully. It happens when things are darkest for Jacob and for the first time in twenty years he is alone in his thoughts. The importance of Jacob being alone his work world is critical to make this "crossing." Now he is able to assess the value of his life's work and his character. From this reflection, he makes his first (recorded) confession. The combination of the fear coupled with the darkness have given him clear insight as to the value God has been for him and the futility of all he tried to accomplish in his own strength. It is Jacob's first recorded prayer and the longest one in Genesis.

For the first time since Bethel, Jacob goes to sleep alone, but not for long. Soon he is engaged in a fierce "*wrestling*" (lit., "*rolling in the dust*") match with an anonymous man. Jacob has been a wrestler his whole life. He wrestled the blessing from a reluctant father and a sensual brother. He wrestled with stones and barrenness with Rachel. He wrestled with his manipulative father-in-law for property, and with his wives, who wrestled for his love, in the process of childbirth. Wrestling has shaped his journey through life. In the climatic moment of the struggle the stranger asks Jacob, "What is your name?" And for the first time in the story, Jacob admits who he is, "the heel grabber." And with that Jacob receives a new name, for he is no longer wrestling, but "clinging" to God in complete dependence.

## The Many Faces of Reconciliation

**A Jacob sends messengers to Esau (3-6)**

**B Jacob divides his family (7-8)**

**C Jacob prays motivated by God's covenant promises (9-12)**

**A' Jacob sends gifts to Esau (13-21)**

**B' Jacob sends his family across Jabbok (22-23)**

**C' Jacob prays as he wrestles the man-God (24-32)**

### Reflection

Use the questions below as **triggers** of your past that invite **reflection**. When you come to one that provokes your emotions, don't move on; stay there and invite God into that place, and reflect how he has shaped you through it.

- 1. The goal of the journey – to see a brother's "face"**
  - Do you have an estranged "brother" or "sister" in your life?
  - Do you long to "see his/her face," or does the thought of an encounter terrify you?
  - Have there been attempts at reconciliation? What happened?
- 2. The necessary "border crossing" to look at our own "face" before "God's face"**
  - Has the situation kept you up at night?
  - Has God met you in that place?
  - What did he reveal to you about **you**?
  - Have you been able to make an honest confession about who you really are?
- 3. The transformation in the journey – "Limping," seeing God's face**

Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Penuel,  
and he was limping on his thigh. (v. 31)

There is tremendous irony in this passage. Once Jacob is alone, he is no longer lonely, because God can finally encounter him face to face. The encounter that began with struggle and pain, ends in peace and holy awe. To perpetuate that sweet state of dependence, Jacob is wounded in such a way that his weakness is not only made permanent, but public, too. When our weakness is exposed to the public eye we are never lonely, because the face of God is perpetually near.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor 3:18)

- 4. What are your deepest wounds?**
- 5. Have you given thanks to God for them?**

My Psalm of Pilgrimage  
The Many Faces of Reconciliation

Write a **psalm** of lament and/or thanksgiving to God using two or three images from this text to lament and petition God for reconciliation or to thank him for reconciliation and what the process has taught you about yourself.



# Our Pilgrimage The Cost of Compromise

Genesis 33:18-34:1

compromise

city lights

naive daughter

rape

silent father

murderous sons

flight

The alluring “face” of the city

After the greatest battle of his life at Peniel, it must have been especially sweet for Jacob to finally be at peace. But unfortunately, peace can have its own set of temptations, and they cast their spell on the patriarch. Jacob now captivated by the “*face*” of the city (a subtle echo reminding us that he has left *Peniel*- “the face of God”) with its alluring idolatry, gives up his spiritual pilgrimage for a plot of land, digs a well, and builds an altar to worship. Though he raises his colors in that place, his worship is in the wrong place, far short of his destination (Bethel). Worship is no longer the driving purpose of his life, but an addendum of praise after he has achieved his real goal of financial security.

Jacob’s **backsliding** is not a total flight from God, but a subtle feeding of the appetites that have been scorched with longing. Who among us would not long for community, security, and a permanent home after being a fugitive on the run for twenty years? And when longings run deep and we are suddenly “faced” with the attractive solutions of the world, it is very easy to accommodate ourselves to the ways of the world to achieve those ends.

For decades we have played out the same story in Silicon valley. The lure of exponential wealth in our high tech industries fed our longstanding dreams for financial security and independence like never before. In the process, faith wasn’t always abandoned, but just given a back seat. And what happened for many who accommodated themselves to the relentless demands of the idols in the workplace was that, like Jacob, the payment came in the form of lost sons and daughters.

## Literary Outline (Bruce Waltke)

**A** Shechem son of Hamor rapes Jacob’s daughter Dinah (34:1-4)

**B** Reactions to the rape (34:5-24)

1. Reactions (or inaction) of Jacob and sons to defilement
2. Reactions of Hamor and Shechem: proposed intermarriage
3. Reactions of Jacob clan and Shechemites: a treacherous treaty

**A’** Jacob’s sons rape [city of ] Shechem (34:25-29)

**B’** Reactions to the plunder (34:30-31)

1. Reaction of Jacob

*Down to Earth Spirituality: The Life of Jacob*

2. Reaction of sons

## Reflections on the Cost of Compromise

### 1. We are never immune from compromise

The disaster in Shechem reminds us that we are never immune to compromise and are especially vulnerable after times of spiritual victory, as we are reveling in “peace.” May we never forget the words of the ancient hymn:

Prone to wander, Lord I feel it  
Prone to leave the God I love  
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it;  
Seal it for Thy courts above.

When was the first time you felt the lure of compromise after achieving a spiritual victory?

When was the last time you felt the same lure?

### 2. The lure of compromise is subtle, yet powerful

The appeal of compromise at Shechem is not to forsake God, but to displace God—to delay or postpone our pilgrimage to the heavenly Zion until we achieved some longing by partnering with the world. We continue to worship, but it now takes a back seat to our real longings for worldly security. The point of issue is that Jacob forsook his holy vows to return to Bethel for the comfort of Shechem. There are no retirement comfort stations for the believer where we can just relax in ease until death. Instead we are called to be faithful pilgrims giving witness to the gospel wherever he sends us until we reach our heavenly home.

Where have you “partnered” with world to secure some longing?

Is compromise so subtle and pervasive, do you help to identify it?

### 3. The cost of compromise is immeasurable

When you think about it, all Jacob wanted was a home, but losing sight of his God in the process cost him dearly. First he loses his daughter to rape, then he loses the respect of his sons who now despise him (in the next scene Reuben will show his contempt by sleeping with Bilhah, his father’s concubine), and finally he loses his identity becoming a curse to those around him instead of a blessing. As Moses would later write,

I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate me.” (Exod 20:5)

This is not teaching fatalism, but rather is a severe warning that idolatry is contagious and has a way of escalating through the generations. As parents, we must be careful to guard our own hearts from accommodation to the world, lest the children follow our example.

Have you seen any consequences for compromises you have made?

What regrets do you have?

Where have you been victorious?

#### 4. Though Jacob is silent, God is not silent

The most painful aspect of this text is that when a father is needed most he is silent. Compromise has robbed Jacob of his ability to speak. It is a shameful silence in Shechem. But though Jacob is silent, God is not silent. There are no heroes in this text, for no one escapes the narrator's censor. But God's voice still resounds through marred mirrors to awaken Jacob out of his compromise and model for him how he should act as a father. Brothers who are torn by grief and rage model for Jacob how a daughter's pain deserves to be mourned. And it won't be long before this silent father will mourn over the loss of everything he loves, Rachel his wife, Joseph his son, and finally Benjamin. In that inconsolable grief he will come to see how God mourned for Dinah when she was raped. Even morally depraved Hamor functions as a better father to Shechem than Jacob does with his sons. He takes more initiative with his son, works in concert with him, and serves him at great personal cost and physical discomfort. As in the case of all the patriarchs, when compromise sets in, God uses non-believers to rebuke his people both by word and deed.

Has compromise ever paralyzed you from boldly confronting evil and injustice?

Did others have to step in and act what you failed to take action?

Has God used "marred mirrors" to motivate you to righteous action?

#### 5. Shechem revisited and sanctified

Finally we discover God never forgot what happened at Shechem. Two thousand years later God's Son revisits Shechem—a place whose desecrated memory every young girl in Israel would just as soon forget. In the very same spot where Jacob had sold out and sunk his well Jesus encounters a woman. She is a grown up Dinah, outcast, lonely, and tormented by sexual abuse of more than one man. Here is the new Jacob who is not silent to one who lived in silent shame. And she is given a voice. Amazingly in a short conversation their conversation turns from the water in Jacob's well to living water, and from the failed men she had lived with to the hope of the Messiah. The memory of the desecration at Shechem is now transformed and made holy. Perhaps this culmination of the story leaves us with a paradigm for healing.

**God's invitation:** The overarching story encourages us that we can go back to the darkest of memories, and in the pit of pain God will visit us. And when we hear his voice in that terrible place, dark wells of pain can turn into springs of living water.

My Psalm of Pilgrimage  
From Dark Cisterns to Wells of Living Water

Write a **psalm** of lament and/or thanksgiving to God giving voice to lure of compromise in your life and how you would like Jesus to redeem it (or thanks he has redeemed it).

Our Pilgrimage  
Coming Home  
Genesis 35:1-29

repentance  
cleansing  
divine protection  
reunion with the Holy  
rededication  
death  
rebellious son  
silent father

Rembrandt – The Return of the Prodigal

How do we come home to God after we've drifted from our faith through compromise? It's one thing for the sinner to turn from darkness and to repent and be converted, but think of the difficulty of the believer who once converted reverts back to his old ways and leaves a home in wreckage. How does he or she come home? Is restoration even possible? What if others in the family won't forgive or think their repentance is genuine? What then?

This is exactly the situation we find Jacob in after his compromise to the world around him cost him his daughter who was raped, the respect of his sons who hate him, and his witness to the world, as he became a curse rather than a blessing. In the last chapter week the theme was all about defilement, in this chapter it is all about purification and grace. Jacob's journey of sixty miles from Shechem to Bethel to Hebron give us a simple yet profound map of the exact steps required to make our journey home to God and to one another. The good news is that no matter where you are today or how much damage and pain you have left in your wake, there is way home and the Father is waiting with open arms.

The psalmist may have had this story in mind when he composed Psalm 24 and used it as a model for holy pilgrimage.

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?  
And who may stand in his holy place?  
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood,  
and has not sworn deceitfully.  
He shall receive a blessing from the LORD;  
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

*Down to Earth Spirituality: The Life of Jacob*  
This is the generation of those who seek him,  
who seek your face—even Jacob. Selah. (Ps 24:3-6)

## Reflection

Use the questions below as **triggers** of your past that invite **reflection**. When you come to one that provokes your emotions, don't move on; stay there and invite God into that place, and reflect how he has shaped you through it.

1. Are you home?
  
2. If not, do you know where you are?
  
3. What do you think you need to do in order to get home?
  
4. What prevents you from going home right now? What is your greatest fear?
  
5. What kind of reception do you think you will receive...
  - a. from God the Father?
  - b. from family?
  - c. from your closest friends?
  - d. from those you may have wronged?
  
6. Are you waiting for someone you love to come home?
  
7. How does this text encourage your faith and hope that God will get them home?
  
8. How does Jesus reshape the Jacob story in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15)?

## My Psalm of Pilgrimage

### Coming Home

Write a **psalm** of lament and/or thanksgiving to God giving voice to your hunger to come home, your joy in being home, or your lament for a loved one to come home.



# Our Pilgrimage Retirement Genesis 35:1-29

laughter's

last laugh

“See the smell of my son  
is like the smell of the field  
that the Lord has blessed”

Abimelech Seeing His Wife Rebecca Caressed by Isaac,  
etchings after the frescoes by Raphael in the Vatican Loggia

If ever a child was wanted, Isaac was that child. Promised to a barren couple, well past the age of fertility, from the announcement of his conception to his birth, this hoped-for son was surrounded by **laughter**. Initially, it was the laughter of incredulity, when Abraham fell flat on his face in disbelief (17:17). Sarah had the same response when she secretly overheard the angelic promise. Her body was so old it was absurd to think she could ever experience pleasure again (18:12). But after they had waited twenty-five years, God transformed their laughter of unbelief into unadulterated joy. Isaac was born; life sprang from the dead. In fact, the birth of Isaac is the only time in the story of Abraham that there is joy unabated, with no word of sorrow (Prov 10:22). Parents who receive a “miracle” child well know that indescribable feeling of love that fills the heart at birth. On the occasion of Isaac’s birth, Sarah comes to the realization that this miracle of life will eternally shape everyone’s “laughter”: “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me” (Gen 21:6). No son could have been more loved and appreciated than Isaac.

Isaac’s home was a place where faith was not just taught, it was superbly modeled. Early on, he witnessed firsthand his father’s obedience in sending his half-brother, Ishmael, off into the desert. Although this was a painful separation for his father, he carried out the command faithfully, while at the same time displaying extreme tenderness toward the boy and his mother. It is obvious that such holy behavior shaped Isaac, as in the very next scene he imitates his father’s faith. In an act of supreme sacrifice he allows himself to be bound by his father on the altar, silently trusting himself into his care, even if that meant death. In the aftermath he brushes up against an intervening angel, and smells the sweet fragrance of the ram given in his stead. Isaac reaches the summit of obedience when he is but a teen. This act of obedience would become the icon of obedience in Scripture, foreshadowing that of our Lord Jesus. Displaying such acts of faith in his youth, one can only imagine what kind of greatness this youth was destined for.

Considering how wondrously Isaac’s life began it is shocking to find that his story is passed over in the narrative. Even more frustrating is the fact that the narrator does not give any reason for this. The art of biblical narrative is to paint with subtle brush strokes. Here, the narrator challenges his readers to solve this compelling mystery. So this is our task. We will examine the seven scenes in Genesis that make up Isaac’s story, placing them in chronological order to get a composite picture of Isaac’s life. As we do so we will discover where “Laughter”  
Down to Earth Spirituality: The Life of Jacob  
laughs last.

## Reflections on Finishing Well

**A Birth:** God creates “laughter” – **joyous praise** for life out of death

**B Teens:** Silent **obedience** on Mt. Moriah

**C Marriage:** Isaac has **affections** for his wife - *“Isaac loved Rebekah”*

**X Isaac’s last laugh:** *“Isaac caused Rebekah to laugh”*

Isaac embraces his own name;  
this is the last time the verb “to laugh” is used in the story

**C’ Children**

Isaac’s **affections** are changed and become based on sensuality –  
*“Isaac loved Esau, for the game in his mouth”*

**B’ Old age** – Isaac spiritually blind, speaks in **disobedience**

**A’ Death** and the return of the son – no speech, **silent resignation**

1. Isaac began well and developed strong in faith until sensuality took over in mid-life. How would you plot the spiritual course of your life? (Ezek 33:8-20)
2. What dangers do you fear as you face the future?
3. Spiritual antidotes to sensual appetites
  - Flame out, don’t rust out
  - Make physical blessings subservient to worship
  - Keep a fresh vision of God

Our Pilgrimage  
Retirement Part 2  
Genesis 47-50

Inconsolable Grief  
Rachel  
Joseph and Benjamin  
Famine  
exile to Egypt

Israel worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff"  
(Gen 47:31)

After all Jacob's business success, his later years are wrought with death, poverty and unemployment. The whole country is reduced to famine and once again the family is forced to relocate, this time to the forbidden world of Egypt, where they will be reduced to slavery. Coupled with famine and poverty, Jacob is pummeled with inconsolable grief over the loss of his first love, Rachel, and afterwards the beloved son of his old age, Joseph. His mourning is extreme with little comfort to be found. If that were not painful enough, he is crushed with grief, thinking he has lost Benjamin as well. For a grievous period, the three loves of his life are gone, Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin. When Joseph brings his father to Pharaoh, Pharaoh asks Jacob, "How many are the days of the years of your life?" Jacob's answer gives decades of grief:

"The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years.  
Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life,  
and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life  
of my fathers in the days of their sojourning." (Gen 47:9)

John Sailhamer writes,

What do Jacob's words mean? They appear to be a deliberate contrast to the later promise in Deuteronomy that one who honors his father and mother should "live long and that it may go well with you in the land" (Deut 5:16). Jacob, who deceived his father and thereby gained the blessing, must not only die outside the Promised Land, but also we learn here that his years were few and difficult. From his own words, then, we can see a final recompense for Jacob's actions earlier in the book. As Abraham obeyed God and lived long in the land (Gen 26:5), so Jacob's years were short and difficult. In spite of such a final verdict on the life of Jacob, the narrative goes on to show that he lived out his remaining years "in the good [*bemetab*; NIV, "best part"] of the land" (v.11), though not the Promised Land; and Joseph, his son, provided for him and his household.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, EBC 2; ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), paragraph 7079.

## Reflections on Retirement

1. Have any of your life dreams been shattered like Jacobs? If so what are they?
2. How have unexpected afflictions affected your relationship with God?
3. Have you given voice to your grief?
4. How do you envision your retirement years?
5. What godly examples do you want to follow?
6. What was their secret to finishing well?

My Psalm of Pilgrimage  
Retirement

Write a **psalm** of petition giving voice to your longings for retirement and finishing your life well.

# Testament & Blessing

Genesis 47-50

Unexpected Reunion

Weeping with Joy

Blessing

Testament to 12 sons

Rembrandt: Jacob Blesses Ephraim and Manasseh

Then Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father in Goshen. He presented himself to him and fell on his neck and **wept on his neck** a good while. Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive." (Gen 46:29-30)

After this, Joseph was told, "Behold, your father is ill." So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And it was told to Jacob, "Your son Joseph has come to you." Then Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed. And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and **blessed me**, and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.' And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. As for me, when I came from Paddan, **to my sorrow Rachel died** in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)." When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?"

Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "**Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them.**"

Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. So Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face; and behold, God has let me see your offspring also." (Gen 48:1-11)

By faith Jacob, when dying, **blessed** each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. (Heb 11:21)

## A Theology of Blessing

### 1. “Bless” - Its meaning

בָּרַךְ (*bāarak*) – It’s root has two principle meanings: (1) knee, kneel, make kneel, which developed to kneeling before a superior; and (2) to bless.

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.” (Gen 1:28)

The first thing that God did after creating human life (as well as animal life) was to pronounce his blessing over the work of his hands (cf. Gen 5:2). The emphasis here is on the **life-infusing power of the divine word**, as God *blesses* his creation *saying* . . . (Gen 1:22, 28; cf. also 9:1). Thus, God’s blessing is his formative, empowering word (often, with overtones of appointing destiny). It is not an empty pronouncement or simply an expression of wish or goodwill, nor is it a bare command...Rather, the blessing of God has content; it actualizes and enables.<sup>3</sup>

To be **blessed** by God implies one is infused with abundant life (*fertility*) that conquers evil (*have dominion*).

### 2. The patriarchal blessing to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob – passing down the promises of the covenant (seed, land and victory over enemies).

### 3. New Testament

And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he **blessed** them. While he **blessed** them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. (Luke 24:50-51)

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:18-20)

So then, those **who are of faith** are **blessed** along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Gal 3:9)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has **blessed us** in Christ with **every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places.” (Eph 1:3)

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<sup>3</sup> Michael L. Brown, “בָּרַךְ” (*bāarak*), *NIDOTTE*, 1:743.

## Reflections on Blessing

1. Did you know that we have the power to “bless” others? We don’t have the power to infuse others with life but, by discerning the work of the Spirit in someone’s life, we can acknowledge what we see (perhaps even what they cannot see) and name it in a way that empowers the individual to enter into all that God has for them.
2. Parents have tremendous power to bless their children, especially at times of “rights of passage,” whether entering into adulthood, a career or a marriage. In the book of Ruth it is inspiring to note that every prayer and blessing comes true to those who have been faithful to keep covenant.
3. Have you ever received the gift of being blessed by an individual? What was that like for you?
4. Have you ever blessed someone? Was it something you felt the Lord inspired you to do?
5. For an outstanding book on the art of blessing others see, John O’Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

*August 31, 2000  
At the Romanian reunion in appreciation to God  
for the privilege of hearing my daughter's story and poem*

**A Daughter's Voice, A Cousin's Eyes**

I am a father,  
there are many joys  
that have penetrated my life,  
but tonight,  
just this night,  
I got to hear my daughter's voice,  
this time in full view of her mother's eyes,  
that voice with its own identity apart from me,  
telling the story  
of a cousin's eyes through her eyes.

I heard her voice tonight,  
that blessed voice,  
honest about the pain  
of an absent family who had to be prodded  
and applauded to show a gaze of concern,  
and now a heart overwhelmed  
by a little town so far away  
where everyone is a cousin  
and loves to play.

I heard her voice tonight  
as she welcomed us in to walk freely  
within every chamber of her heart,  
that voice I so longed to hear,  
a daughter's voice.

This is something not granted to fathers;  
angels yes,  
but not fathers;  
at least until the day is done,  
and the night has come  
and in that deep oboe sleep  
a daughter speaks  
of memories of what is gone.

It is then a father hears that voice,  
and with it every articulate vowel of memory,  
everything for which he's been waking waiting  
his whole life,  
a daughter's voice,  
his daughter's voice  
shaping his dreams while he sleeps.

Who am I  
that I should hear such sweet things  
while I yet live?  
Like an intruding angel,  
whose wings were caught in the doorway  
in a space I did not belong,  
but could not remove myself  
for fear of being exposed  
and caught by her deep blue eyes,  
might lose my disguise,  
and break the air of her concentration  
that granted me this one moment  
when I was allowed to hear her voice.

Katie was beautiful tonight  
and I was finally able to cry  
here like I do there.

Katie,  
my daughter,  
her voice  
I heard tonight,  
who am I?

My Psalm of Pilgrimage  
Testament and Blessing

Write a **blessing** for a son, daughter, beloved friend or disciple.