



Genesis 27:21-29

If God's blessings were only for the deserving, who among us would receive them? **God's blessings come through God's grace and are rarely given because someone is worthy.** Because of this, whom God chooses to bless might appear arbitrary, but God seems to value different things than we do.

Isaac, the first child God promised to Abraham and Sarah, had grown old. To prepare for his life's end, Isaac sought out the firstborn of his twin sons, Esau, to offer his blessing. Esau and Jacob had struggled against each other since they shared their mother, Rebekah's, womb. As children, Esau traded his birthright for a pot of Jacob's stew. Later, Jacob plotted to deceive his father and secure his brother's inheritance. By wearing Esau's clothes and covering his smooth skin with animal hide, Jacob tricked their blind father into granting him Esau's blessing. When Isaac learned of the deception, he was angry! But Isaac could not take the blessing from Jacob, even though it was gained by deception. Is it fair? No, but who of us is deserving? Who hasn't sinned? **God's blessings are not reserved for spiritual giants. God doesn't cast away those who are undeserving. God redeems them.**

John 8:1-11

In the ancient world, much of Jewish living was regulated by rules. These laws brought religious meaning to the mundane and ordered society. **The rules were considered the best way to serve God, but sometimes they got in the way.** When an adulterous woman was threatened with death by stoning, Jesus turned the rules around on the religious leaders: let any without sin cast the first stone. **Jesus refused to condemn her.**

Deuteronomy 1:6-11

God made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but a long, long, long time passed before their descendants took possession of the Promised Land. **Along the way, the Israelites lost faith and broke the covenant. God, however, remained faithful and called them into the Promised Land.**

Luke 18:9-14

In Jesus' time, people would have revered the Pharisee because of his position in the temple. The tax collector would have been seen as a traitor because his work supported the hated Roman government. Yet Jesus lifted up the tax collector. **Jesus taught that the lowest among us receive God's mercy and perhaps even appreciate it more.**



When hearing the word *heel*, most people think of the body part, but *heel* has many other connotations, most of them negative. Jacob was born with a firm grasp on his twin brother Esau's heel. Jacob then stole his firstborn brother's blessing. Despite Jacob's trickster behavior, God continued God's covenant through Jacob.

WHAT THE HECK ARE PRETEENS THINKING?

- Preteens have probably identified, labeled, and categorized their classmates. They know who's cool, who's sporty, who's artistic, and so on. Some kids will have received the label "awkward" or "outcast." This can make them feel unworthy. Remind kids that God makes them unconditionally worthy.
- Some kids feel like their parents have favorite children. Listen for kids who voice concerns about sibling rivalry or blended families. They may have honest struggles with God's choice to bless Jacob over Esau.

Warm Up

Supplies: small stickers

1. Give each kid 5 or more stickers. Instruct kids to place stickers on the back of their nondominant hand so they'll be easy to reach.
2. Explain that the object of the game is to place stickers on other kids' heels while avoiding stickers being placed on their own heel.
3. Allow kids to play until most stickers have been used up.
4. Tell the group about the surprise ending to this game. The kid with the *most* stickers on his or her heel wins.

Video

Supplies: *Connect Unit 2 DVD*, whiteboard/chart paper, markers

1. Draw 2 columns. Label one "Fair" and the other "Unfair." Invite kids to share events they've experienced or heard about that they consider fair or unfair. As a group, decide whether the event was truly fair or unfair. Fair events may include getting detention, getting good grades or bad grades, or earning extra allowance. Unfair events may include disasters, illness, or being pooped on by a bird.
2. Watch the video, "Jacob & Esau" (*Connect Unit 2 DVD*, chapter 2).
3. Ask the following questions.
 - What sorts of things do you consider unfair? What do you think God's role is in those moments?
 - When have you gotten away with something? What did it feel like?
 - What are some good consequences you've experienced? What are some bad consequences you've experienced?
 - How do you think Todd will change after "winning" the award?
 - Would you rather hang out with Jacob or Esau? Why?

LEADER TIP

Let this game be active but not aggressive. No ankle-grabbing or tag-teaming allowed. Having kids remove shoes is recommended.

VARIATION

Do you have more time? Reverse the game. Have kids attempt to remove stickers from other kids' heels.

LEADER TIP

Some students in your class may be living in unsafe environments where they experience abuse that is *never* deserved. If any child shares that he or she is being victimized, contact a church staff member so you can report the situation to child protection authorities.

LEADER TIP

The concept of a blessing may be new to some preteens. Work together to create a group definition. (Here, the blessing is a request for God's favor to be with Jacob.)

Genesis 27:21–29

Supplies: *Connect Bibles, pens, colored pencils, Bible highlighters*

In this story, Isaac was an old, blind man. Isaac's twin sons, Esau and Jacob, had warred with each other since before they were born. Second-born Jacob weaseled his way into receiving his brother Esau's blessing, and God's covenant continued through another imperfect person.

1. Read how Jacob tricked his father into receiving Esau's blessing in Genesis 27:21-29.
2. Look up the deal with heels on page 41 in the Connect Bible. Ask a volunteer to read the summary.
3. Follow the instructions to create phony Esau names.
 - In ancient times, the firstborn son inherited the father's wealth no matter what kind of person he was. Women couldn't even own property. This seems pretty unfair. Do you think Jacob had a right to get what he could? Why or why not?
 - God used very imperfect people like Jacob, who stole his brother's blessing. How does that shape your view of God?

John 8:1–11

When an adulterous woman was brought before Jesus to be judged and stoned to death, Jesus refused to condemn her. Jesus then challenged any of the religious leaders who were without sin to cast the first stone at her.

1. Read the story in John 8:1-11.
2. Write a word that describes forgiveness in a new and different way. Then color it with brown to make it look like it is written in the dirt.
 - What do you think Jesus wrote in the dirt?
 - Check out the timeline in the back of the *Connect Bible*. Approximately how many years had written languages existed when Jesus wrote in the dirt?
 - Do you think what Jesus did was fair? Why or why not?

Deuteronomy 1:6–11

After escaping slavery and wandering the desert for 40 years, the Israelites were finally about to enter the Promised Land. Though God provided all they needed, the Israelites doubted. Even when they rebelled, God kept the covenant with them and gave them the Promised Land.

1. Invite a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 1:6-11.
2. Highlight names in verses 6–11 you have trouble saying out loud. Remember God is God of everywhere.
 - What kinds of rules do you have to follow? Who gives them to you?
 - What would your life be like if you had no rules?
 - How does it feel to disappoint adults, yet they love you anyway?
 - How does it feel to know God loves you even when you mess up?

MORE TIME?

Luke 18:9–14

People tend to compare themselves with others. In this parable, Jesus cautions against assuming that outcasts are less loved and blessed by God than those with "good" lives. In fact, maybe it's easier for the humbled to appreciate God's blessings.

1. Invite a volunteer to read the parable in Luke 18:9-14.
2. Follow the directions to underline the labeling words. Discuss what modern-day label equivalents might be and how kids feel about classmates with obviously tough lives.

Project

Supplies: Jacob & Esau Learner Sheets, scissors, tape, pens or pencils

Esau traded his birthright for a pot of stew (see Genesis 25:29-34), and Isaac fell for the old fur-on-the-arm trick. Are you smarter than an Old Testament figure? Test your deception perception with this creation!

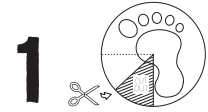
As kids create their projects, use these questions to help them engage their minds and connect with one another.

- If God continued the covenant through Jacob, what does that say about God?
- Do you think God's blessing is random and based on luck? Why or why not?
- How do you feel when you see really mean people or swindlers in church? Why do you think they should or shouldn't be there?
- Why do people lie, cheat, and steal?
- How do you decide what is the right thing to do? How do you think God decides what is the right thing to do?
- How can you do God's work even though you're imperfect?
- Do you think God can be tricked? Why or why not?
- How does God surprise you?

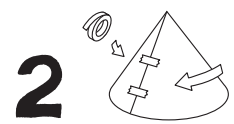
Closing Ritual

Supplies: ink pad, chart paper, pens

1. Ask each kid, by turn, to make a fist and press the pinky side of that hand in the ink pad. Stamp it on the paper to form the shape of the sole of a foot. Then use an inked finger to add toes to the foot. Invite kids to write their names on the heel.
2. Keep the heel images in a central place.
3. Make a circle by having kids touch their heels together. Invite them one at a time to share a blessing they've received—maybe even one they didn't feel they deserved. Quickly echo each blessing clockwise around the circle of heels.
4. Remind preteens that even though we don't deserve it, God blesses us still. Then close with Numbers 6:24-26: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace."



Cut out circles and triangle section.



Assemble into a cone shape and fasten at the tape line.



Write and cut out your blessing. Crumple into a ball and hide under a cone.



Mix up the cones. Try to keep your opponent from getting the blessing!