

Overcoming Disappointment

Genesis 30:25-36

Go ahead and be turning to Genesis 30 in your Bibles. Jacob's time with Laban has certainly been a slog. Jacob had been burned by Laban already. Now at another pivotal moment in his life, Jacob seeks to insulate himself from further deceit and damage. If he just plays his cards right, he thinks, he won't fall prey to Laban's treachery. We feel like we can do that, don't we? Though our plans regularly fall apart, we still live with the notion that we're in control, we've accounted for all the circumstantial variables, and that others will deal faithfully with us, and we're disappointed when they don't. Disappointment is a part of this sin-broken world, but I believe that we see Jacob go through tonight teaches us key truths for "Overcoming Disappointment." So, picking up in verse 25, we read...

Genesis 30:25-26

25 As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. 26 Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you.

Jacob longed to go HOME to Canaan. It's where his parents, whom he hadn't seen in more than a decade, were. It's where he grew up, but most importantly, it's THE PLACE THE LORD HAD PROMISED TO GIVE HIM. He hadn't forgotten the promise, and his heart was FOCUSED on it. Having FINISHED HIS WORK with Laban, Jacob was READY TO GO HOME. Does that outlook sound familiar? It's a picture of how our hearts should be focused as followers of Christ. We aren't home right now. Jesus told this followers, "*I'm the WAY home, and one day, when you get there, I'll have it ready for you.*" God has promised us another home (John 14:3; Hebrews 13:14), and praise His Name, this isn't it. The suffering of this world—the infirmity in our bodies, the sorrow of death, the heartache of broken relationships, mistreatment from others, persecution for Christ's Name—isn't all there is. For now, we labor HERE, but we do so with our hearts focused THERE, allowing that eternal hope to fuel our actions and give us endurance now. No doubt, when things were hard and Jacob was low, God's promise echoed in his heart and encouraged him to continue.

Jacob told Laban, "**You know the service that I have given you,**" and because of the somewhat confusing way things have been presented to this point, I want to clarify the significance of this statement, and I'm going to let Jacob's words in the next chapter do that. Jacob told Laban...

Genesis 31:41

These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times.

So, it was a total of fourteen years that Jacob served Laban for his two daughters, but the way Genesis records the birthing competition between the sisters, the only way that could've transpired is if Jacob

had worked Rachel's week (her seven years) AFTER being given her as a wife. The passage that says that Jacob served Laban for another seven years after receiving Rachel as a wife attest to this (Genesis 29:30). There's no way the timeline would match up with Jacob's description of it had he ended up having to work for another seven years BEFORE receiving Rachel and then working another seven years AFTERWARD; that would've put him over the 20-year stint he recounted to Laban (a total of 21 years), not counting the six years he worked for Laban's flocks (that's coming up). It's during Rachel's week that she gave her servant Bilhah to Jacob as a wife and she conceived and bore Jacob two sons. Near the end of her week, the LORD opened Rachel's womb and she conceived and bore Joseph. While the birth of Joseph seemed like a catalyst for Jacob's departure, he was only able to leave because he had just COMPLETED HIS PROMISED SERVICE to Laban. When Jacob said, **"For you know the service that I have given you,"** he was saying, *"You know I've fulfilled my commitment."*

Through Jacob's parting request, we also see his MODEST EXPECTATIONS of Laban. This is a major point to overcoming disappointment, OUR THEME for the night. Think about it. How well had Laban treated Jacob? Not well at all. He had tricked him into working DOUBLE what he had agreed to work for the bride he had requested, and as Tim pointed out a couple of weeks ago, Laban justified his deception with a stinging lecture on CUSTOM. *"Things may be different where you come from (maybe things just got outta hand with YOUR family), but that ain't how we do it around here,"* LITERALLY ADDING INSULT TO INJURY. To this point, Jacob had only enriched Laban. He had no portion in Laban, and neither did his wives or any of their children, he knew it, AAAAANNND HE DIDN'T BOTHER ASKING FOR ANY. He simply requested leave with his wives and children in order to ESTABLISH HIMSELF. Jacob knew exactly what kind of man Laban was—he learned the hard way—and he had set his expectations appropriately. He had no delusions of receiving generosity or fairness from Laban. In fact, as we'll see, he expected the very opposite, which given past dealings, was very APPROPRIATE!

Setting appropriate expectations for ourselves, and in this case, for other broken people in this sin-broken world (notice that I said "OTHER" broken people; we're broken too) is one of the keys to overcoming disappointment. I've nodded to this point one or twice in messages before, and many more times in one-on-one conversations, the point that WE INVITE DISAPPOINTMENT as we make life about ourselves. Now, none of us would quickly admit to making life all about us, and in reality, we probably don't make ALL aspects of life about ourselves. However, selfishness (or self-centeredness, if you will) is insidious; it creeps in, and after you've sought to rid the house that is your life of it, when you check under the couch of natural responses or pull back the rug of expectations of others, if selfishness or self-centeredness is found anywhere, it'll be found there. Our lives are often so full and busy that it's easy to develop tunnel vision on our own lives, and if we aren't careful, that outlook can become regular and habitual.

We have to be reminded that life isn't a movie about us; everyone else isn't an extra who's there to add interest, entertainment, or convenience to the story about us. When we arrange our lives with this subliminal notion that it's all about us and that others are meant to make life about me too, WE SET OURSELVES UP for disappointment. You may be thinking, *"I don't do that,"* and maybe you don't!

However, the degree to which you are disappointed by others is the degree to which you have expected people to deal with you more on your terms than theirs.

Now, I'm not really taking about having challenging expectations of others. That's certainly worthwhile, AS LONG AS IT'S TRULY FOR THE OTHER PERSON'S BETTERMENT and not a VEILED EFFORT to coerce them to respond to our liking. I'm also not saying to check your expectations of others in order to get you down or make you cynical or to adopt the fatalist outlook that says, *"Expect to be disappointed and you'll never be disappointed."* That's a dismal way to live, at best. No, I'm simply teaching to have right expectations of others according to what God has said about them. This is a piece to the overall puzzle. Other people have lives of their own, they're just as broken as we are, and therefore, they too are prone to making life about themselves and dealing with you and me in ways that are advantageous to them but not necessarily considerate of us. By embracing that reality, we aren't endorsing it, we're just setting appropriate expectations.

The LORD had been with Jacob through this challenging season with Laban, and He had blessed him with a large family in fulfillment of His promise of numerous offspring. Now Jacob was ready to return home and take hold of other aspects of God's promise. However, despite all signs to the contrary, Laban wasn't ready to see him go...

Genesis 30:27-28

27 But Laban said to him, If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you. 28 Name your wages, and I will give it.

Whoa! Look who's found so nice words to say! Previously, Laban deceived Jacob by giving him his oldest daughter Leah when Jacob had labored SEVEN YEARS for Rachel. Then he had the gall to lecture Jacob about *CUSTOM* when he confronted him about it! NOW, Laban's like, *"Jacob! BUDDY! My FAVORITE SON-IN-LAW! We're close, right? We're FRIENDS..."* I mean, Laban was laying it on THICK with this whole meek and humble **"if I have found favor in your sight"** bit.

Laban's like, *"I've got this crazy idea! WHAT IF...you didn't leave? YEAH! What if you just kept working for me?! You see, I've given it some thought, and I've asked myself, 'What's the key to all my recent success?' And it's YOU!"* Truly, Laban says that **"the LORD has blessed me."** Laban said he'd learned this by DIVINATION, which could mean the observance of omens or even the casting of spells, or it could just mean diligent observation. Bottom line, Laban sees the LORD in his blessings, and he knows it's on account of Jacob! Jacob is the CASH COW. He's the GOLDEN GOOSE! Jacob is the inheritor God's promised blessing, and Laban, despite his treachery, has experienced the "I will bless those who bless you" part of that promise from God, and he knows it. That what inspires him to say...

Genesis 30:28

Name your wages, and I will give it.

What a verse! I love how those who gave us chapter and verse divisions chopped out that nugget. If there was ever a verse to motivate you to start a scripture memory ministry at your workplace, especially to your bosses, this is the verse! Again, we see that Laban is playing the NICE GUY. *“See how AGREEABLE I am? See how FAIR I can be?”* It sounds like a good deal, but even men without scruples can weave together pleasant and encouraging words when it suits them. Nevertheless, Jacob is single-minded in his desire to go home...

Genesis 30:29-30

29 Jacob said to him, You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me. 30 For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?

Previously, when Jacob declared that his time of service was completed, he was testifying to the FAITHFULNESS of his service; he'd held up his end of the bargain. Now, as he describes how the animals fared under his care, he was testifying to the SUCCESS of his service, though he ultimately gave credit to the One to whom it was due, the LORD. Through Jacob's labor, and really just his presence in Laban's household, the LORD had blessed Laban tremendously. However, during the same period, Jacob didn't experience the plenty that Laban did. He had spent all his time caring for the property of another man, so he was never able to establish his own. Now Jacob asks, *“How long before I'm finally permitted to provide the same security for my own family?”*

Now, before we move on, let me point out that we see no instructions from God for Jacob to return home, not like we see in the following chapter. In Genesis 31, we read...

Genesis 31:3

Then the LORD said to Jacob, Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.

JACOB was READY to go home RIGHT THEN, but as we'll see, God was not finished multiplying blessings to him. Though Jacob's life was difficult with Laban, God was using it to establish him. Tonight's passage is actually FORESHADOWING to Israel's time in Egypt. Jacob and his family would relocate there as a blessed household, but just a household. Through arduous trial and hardship, they would go out from Egypt a bonafide nation with great possessions as well. Again, it's a PICTURE of our own sojourn through this world on our way to our gloriously promised home. Here we're meant to multiply SPIRITUALLY, being used by God to bring about the new birth of many as we share the truth of His Word, and as we do it, we earn great reward as well. Like the spiritual offspring we seek, our rewards are also spiritual instead of physical, eternal instead of temporary, which is the best kind of reward.

Nevertheless, Laban continues bargaining with physical rewards. He was succeeding in wearing Jacob down...

Genesis 30:31-34

31 He said, What shall I give you? Jacob said, You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it: 32 let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and they shall be my wages. 33 So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen. 34 Laban said, Good! Let it be as you have said.

It was typical to pay the shepherd in kind, giving him a PERCENTAGE of the OFFSPRING and the PRODUCTS they generated, like milk and wool (10% being common, 20% being exorbitant). From pretty much every commentary I read, the mottled offspring was coveted primarily because it was RARER than the single-colored offspring, which means that Jacob was asking for very little. However, by not asking for a certain percentage of the offspring, but instead asking for his wages to be determined by the APPEARANCE of the offspring, Jacob attempted to protect himself from any accusation of theft WHILE ALSO making it seemingly impossible for Laban to cheat him. Because Jacob knew that only God could determine the appearance of the offspring, he was putting his hope of prosperity in God's hands, and effectively REMOVING Laban's hands from it.

Jacob proposes this arrangement with a GUARANTEE, saying, **"So my HONESTY will answer for me later..."** WHOA! Have we turned over a new leaf or what?! We started with "Jacob, the Deceiver," and now we have "Honest Jacob!" We've come a long way, baby!

Laban would have ZERO control over Jacob's pay, no way to get around the system and cheat him (so Jacob thought), and there's no way Laban could accuse him of theft. Anyone with eyes who knew the business arrangement could enforce it! Sure, Jacob was taking a risk of coming up with very little wages, but he knew who he was dealing with, and he was attempting to still make some sort of gain while also attempting to insulate himself from future deception. THIS WAS A GOOD PLAN! However, GOOD PLANS WILL STILL FAIL.

We're talking about OVERCOMING DISAPPOINTMENT, which as we've established largely has to do with HAVING RIGHT EXPECTATIONS. We already discussed how we have to have right expectations of OTHERS, understanding that they have lives of their own, they're just as broken as we are, and therefore, they too are prone to thinking primarily about themselves (not us) when making decisions. Laban had already done this with Jacob, and Jacob was anticipating it happening again! Besides having right expectations of others, we must have right expectations about life in general, which includes the understanding that good plans will still fail because we are NOT IN CONTROL. Sure, the plans of others may seemingly interfere and cut our plans off, but it's the LORD who either allows or disallows things from happening. Solomon wrote...

Proverbs 16:9

The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.

He said...

Proverbs 19:21

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.

I've already alluded to the point that, while Jacob was ready to go home, the LORD hadn't finished providing him with everything he was meant to receive on this sojourn. The LORD had given him offspring, but HE PLANNED to send him out with more than a dozen mouths to feed. He planned to give Jacob and his family GREAT PROVISION. I'm sure many of us have experienced something like this, a time when we desperately wanted "THIS" to happen (like Jacob wanting to GO HOME), and weeks, months, or years after it didn't, we stood back and said, "LORD, thank You for NOT letting 'THAT' happen!" It was our plan, but it wasn't His; it wasn't what was best for us or most glorifying for Him.

So, keep planning. The Bible tells us to make plans. It tells us to INCLUDE GOD in our plans. David wrote...

Psalms 37:4-5

**4 Delight yourself in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.**

**5 Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him, and he will act.**

Sometimes, as we trust the LORD, He will bring our plans to fruition. Sometimes, however, as we "delight ourselves in the LORD," as we WANT Him, HE CHANGES OUR "WANTER," and we devise NEW PLANS that are more in line with His. Whether our plans, like Jacob's in this instance, work out or don't, this key to overcoming disappointment through it all is understanding that we aren't in control, and the key to PEACE is recognizing that THE LORD IS.

Well, getting back to the story, Laban considered the proposal for all of two seconds and decided it was a good plan too BECAUSE that's all the time he needed to devise a way to beat it...

Genesis 30:35-36

35 But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in the charge of his sons. 36 And he set a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban's flock.

IMMEDIATELY DOUBLE-CROSSED! Laban HID Jacob's wages with his sons some distance away. Jacob had just said, "Let me pass through all your flock today and remove all the mottled sheep and goats, and they shall be my wages," and Laban said, "DEAL!" Then Laban WITHHELD the wages he had just promised Jacob! Imagine Jacob's outrage when he passed through the flock to collect his initial wage and saw ONLY WHITE goats and sheep. He had seen numerous mottled sheep and goats JUST YESTERDAY! Now he was to believe that, what? They disappeared? Laban wasn't even subtle with his

treachery anymore. He thought that by separating the mottled flock from his white flock, it would reduce the wages he'd have to pay Jacob. Had God not intervened, Jacob would've continued serving Laban for NOTHING!

That brings us to HOW God intervened, and let me just say that it's INTERESTING, and I mean that in the typical sense, you know, when you don't really know what to say. You say, "It's interesting." No commentary I've read has an outstanding explanation of this, so we're going to dive into it, and I'll tell you what I think about it...

Genesis 30:37-43

37 Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks. 38 He set the sticks that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, 39 the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. 40 And Jacob separated the lambs and set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban. He put his own droves apart and did not put them with Laban's flock. 41 Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob would lay the sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the sticks, 42 but for the feebler of the flock he would not lay them there. So the feebler would be Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. 43 Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

Now, some teachers make a big deal out of Jacob's "breeding program," seeking to PROVE ITS VALIDITY, while others more or less DOWNPLAY IT, saying, "*None of this make any sense to me,*" focusing more on the providence of God. I believe the fullest understanding is somewhere in between, so I'm going to look at both, at God's providence and the "science behind the sticks," as some have called it.

When Jacob made his bargain with Laban for the mottled flock to be his wages, he knew he was asking for something that he had no control over, and more importantly, that LABAN had no control over. Most importantly, Jacob was putting his hope of prosperity squarely in God's hands, knowing that only Creator God had the power to manipulate the physical appearance of the flock's offspring. HE ALSO HAD THE VISION FROM GOD. You see, the LORD had already given Jacob a bit of a preview of what was going to happen, which likely led Jacob to request the wages he did, and though we don't see instructions from God about the sticks in the water troughs, the vision likely inspired this odd breeding program. In Genesis 31, after God DID tell Jacob that it was time to return home, Jacob told his wives...

Genesis 31:10-12

10 In the breeding season of the flock I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream that the goats that mated with the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled. 11 Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, Jacob, and I said, Here I am! 12 And he said, Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that mate with the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled, for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.

As Laban took care of Jacob by giving him wives and a place to stay, God took care of Laban; this was the whole reason behind Laban's desire for Jacob to stay. When Laban greedily withheld Jacob's wages, constantly changing them, and double-crossing Jacob, God made a separation between Laban and His blessing on Jacob. It probably would've been better for Laban to have sent Jacob on his way rather than urge him to stay and cheat him. However, something to remember, as one Answers In Genesis commentator noted, ***“Jacob wasn't CHEATING Laban, God was COUNTERACTING Laban's cheating on him.”*** The LORD had seen how Laban had mistreated Jacob from the deception on his wedding night to all the times he changed Jacob's wages. Laban was blessed by the LORD with plenty on account of Jacob, but when he asked Laban for just a little of that plenty, it was withheld, so the LORD took the plenty from Laban and gave it to Jacob.

So, what was going on here? Though we don't see any mention of it from the angel of God in Jacob's dream, was the peel sticks trick part of the vision? If so, Jacob's breeding program was an act of faithful obedience. Maybe he understood it, and maybe he didn't. Some commentators have stated, ***“It was generally believed that placing such ‘visual aids’ before the animals as they were mating, it was possible to influence the appearance of their offspring” (NET Bible).*** Others have investigated the medicinal properties of these types of trees and found that they indeed contained nutrients that boosted, among others things, BIRTH RATE. While I don't claim to understand how peeled sticks were meant to have an affect on the appearance of the lambs conceived before them, it's clear that the LORD honored Jacob's efforts done in faith. Not only did it work to manipulate the appearance of the offspring, Jacob also used these sticks to breed a stronger flock for himself and a weaker one for Laban. Whenever the stronger females of Laban's flock were in heat, he would work to make sure that they conceived mottled offspring that would be added to his flock. Other properties of the types of plants that Jacob put in the waters supposedly included curing urogenital problems, and reducing fever and inflammation. He kept manipulating the white flocks of Laban, making sure that they primarily produced mottled offspring (at least, when the stronger specimens were present to mate).

Ultimately, we know that this was a DIVINE ACT, God's design of the lambs' genetic makeup, and TRUE FAITH on Jacob's part. Though Jacob, it seems, made an effort to manipulate the appearance of the sheep and goats' offspring, he had NO CONTROL over that. As Laban sought to continue cheating Jacob, telling him that ONLY the SPECKLED or ONLY the STRIPED would be his wages, then the LORD caused the flocks to produce whatever Laban determined to be Jacob's wages.

I've already alluded to the FINAL EXPECTATION that we're going to consider tonight with regard to overcoming disappointment, and that's the expectation or understanding that THE LORD IS IN CONTROL, and HE IS GOOD. As our focus becomes habitually fixed upon him, we learn that life isn't about us, that this world is broken, just like God says it is (just like He says I am), and because of it, my plans are going to fail. Thankfully, however, such an outlook doesn't leave us on such a dismal note. We also come to understand the GOOD, HOLY, LOVING, ALL-POWERFUL, WISE character and nature of God, and the fact that HE IS IN CONTROL, and He understands all the things that I don't. That's when my life is flooded with CONTENTMENT, PEACE, JOY, AND GRATITUDE. Disappointment is ERADICATED because my hope is in Him.

Romans 10:11b (quoting ISAIAH)

Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame (or WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED).

In what areas of your life could your expectations stand to be adjusted? In what ways do you need God to help you take your focus off of yourself, or others, or your circumstances, and fix it on Himself? In what areas of life do you find yourself being disappointed? In what ways does that disappointment reveal a greater expectation of fulfillment from that person or situation than from God?