Blueprint for Backsliding — Delivery Transcript

Genesis 33:1–35:15 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, September 8, 2024 · *The Patriarchs*

> ⚠️ ***AUTO-GENERATED TRANSCRIPT — verify against the audio before quoting publicly.*** *Produced from a Descript transcription of the Broadview Church sermon recording and lightly cleaned (filler words removed, obvious mis-hears of names and Scripture references corrected). No timestamps. This is not a publication-ready manuscript and it is not Wes's exact words for print. Check any line against the recording before it goes on a graphic, in an email, or in a book.*

If you have your Bible, we're going to be in Genesis chapter thirty thirty-three this morning, and we are going to be covering some territory, so we're going to have to listen quickly. I, you know, usually don't do this. We usually go nice and slow through a text, but for whatever reason, as I was meditating on these three chapters, I really think to preach it well, it's got to be preached together. And so we're going to look at a topic that I think if you've been walking with the Lord for any length of time, you have experienced if not once, multiple times, and it can be summarized in the phrase backsliding.

I don't know if you've ever has anyone ever heard that term? It's kind of a dated term, backsliding. I grew up going to church, and it was even said of me, I hate to admit it, he's in a season of backsliding. And what they mean by that is you're not doing what you're supposed to be doing. You're not walking with the Lord. You've kind of drifted spiritually and again it happens to a lot of us. Nobody wakes up one morning and says, I want to drift in my relationship with God.

You just stop deciding to abide in the Lord. In fact I came across a quote this week that says you can't have backsliding without a season of slack abiding. And if you actually write backsliding out and you rearrange the letters, you can see that slack abiding and backsliding do go together. They're the same group of letters and that is usually how it happens. You stop abiding, you stop walking with the Lord, you stop doing your quiet time, stop going to church, check out of your small group, whatever those sources of grace that God had been using in your life to keep you on the straight and narrow, you reject those and you find yourself in a place you didn't want to be.

And the reasons for backsliding are interesting in Jacob's life. We're going to look at those this morning, but we're also going to see the consequences and the fallout. The devastating brokenness that enters his life as a result of his backsliding and I'm praying that it will be a warning for us, especially those of us who find ourselves in that season right now, to repent

and to come out of that season as we recover from such a state. So if you're new to the story, Jacob is the brother of Esau. They are both the sons of Isaac and Rebekah who was the son of Abraham.

So the whole book of Genesis is about God's not just creation of the world, but choosing of particular people for his redemptive purposes and kind of blessing the world through those mediators of his of his gracious covenant. And I and I came across a quote about Genesis that's always stuck with me that Genesis doesn't just tell us what happened. But it tells us what always happens because the truth is even though we advance technologically and in a lot of different ways, the human heart is basically the same. And so the reasons for Jacob's backsliding are very similar to our own.

In the case of Jacob He was a trickster, a supplanter, a deceiver. He tricked his brother into selling his birthright, tricked his dad into giving him Esau's blessing. Esau got so upset he vowed to kill Jacob as soon as his dad died, and so Jacob flew to his uncle Laban's house, 500 and miles to the north and stayed there. While at Laban's house the Lord begins to work on Jacob. He puts him with Laban, who is a trickster himself. He falls in love with a girl named Rachel, works for seven years to have her in marriage and instead gets her ugly o her ugly older sister, Leah.

Laban says I'll give you the pretty one, but you got to work another seven years. So he works another seven years. And during those seven plus six years where he's with Rachel and Leah and shepherding Laban's flocks, he ends up having, I'll call it Jerry Springer on steroids. He's got two wives who themselves have servants, female servants, he Jacob ends up sleeping with all four women. You know, that was not God's plan. It was one man, one woman, one marriage, one life. He deviates from the plan. You could blame it on Laban, but you know, it takes two to tango.

So Jacob did what he did, and it is a it is a mess of chaos and jealousy and Rachel has Jacob's love, but she can't have children. Leah can have all kinds of children, but she doesn't have Jacob's love. And then they start using their servants, having babies to their servants to try to one-up each other. And eventually God works through all of that suffering to teach Jacob what he needed to know and Rachel what she needed to know and Leah what she needed to know and finally at the end God says to Jacob it's time for you to go home.

And Jacob's thinking to himself, well, if I go home, I got to face Esau. And last time I talked to Esau, he wanted to kill me. I don't know if I should do this, but God says, I am the God of Bethel And now on Jacob's initial journey he stopped at Bethel and God met him there and said, I'm going to be with you, I'm going to get you where you're going, and I'm going to bring you safely back home. And so this same God reappears to him and says, don't forget what I said.

I'm going to be with you. I'm going to take care of you. Go home. So he goes home, and when he goes home, Laban gets mad, so they got to settle that. That was itself a disaster. But he settles up with Laban and he's going home to Esau. Or you're going home to mom and dad. But on his way he sends a message to Esau, Hey brother, I'm coming home. I'm not here for your money. I'm not here to claim my rights. I know I've done wrong. I just want to make things right.

And Esau sends the word back that I'm coming to see you, brother. And I've got four hundred armed men with me, which is probably not what Jacob wanted to hear. And so he cries out to God. In some ways Jacob is more godly than when he first started this journey. He cries out to God. He separates his family. He tries to come up with a plan so that worst case scenario, Esau kills him, maybe his progeny survive, and that's where we pick up our story today. The one thing I haven't mentioned is that the night before Jacob beats Esau, he wrestles with this with God.

He says I wrestle with God. Some say it's a pre-incarnation of Jesus. He wrestles with God all night long. And during that encounter, Jacob is wounded. He tou the angel or the Lord touches Jacob's hip. Dislocates it. He walks with a limp for the rest of his life and God changes his name. When Jacob says, God, I need you to bless me, God says, I'm going to bless you by changing who you are. You'll no longer be Jacob, which means strickster or supplanter. You're now going to be called Israel, which means one who wrestles with God and wins.

And what's so ironic about what we're about to read is that Jacob is a new man. He's been changed fundamentally in his identity before the Lord. He has grown in grace and godliness, but at the same time, even though his name has been changed, he's going to slip into some of his old same patterns, his own same habits, and his old same the same old sins He had a new name, but the new name didn't stick. In fact, what's crazy about Jacob is even though a lot of people in scripture get their names changed, it's only Jacob who gets a name change and keeps getting called his old name.

All throughout Genesis thirty-four he's Jacob. A lot through Genesis thirty-five he's Jacob. He's Jacob and Jacob until finally he grows into his new name. So he had a new name, but he was wearing his old clothes, and I think that's like a lot of us. You meet the Lord, you grow in the Lord, and then you go back and start wearing some of the same old clothes, doing the same old things, falling into the same old sins. And that's exactly what happens to Jacob. So with that in mind, let's read starting in Genesis 33.

He's going to meet his brother Esau, and Jacob looked up and he saw Esau coming towards him with 400 men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two slave women. Again, those were not slaves like we think of slaves, but they were the sir household servants of Rachel and Leah, who got married in when Jacob married those two girls. So he's

got two baby mamas and two two wives. He put the slaves and their children first, Leah and her children next. And Rachel and Joseph last. That's a little bit of favoritism there.

He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times until he approached his brother. But Esau ran to meet him, hugged him, and threw his arms around him, and kissed him I'm sure he didn't see that coming. So just like the prodigal son story where the father welcomes the prodigal who comes home and they weep together, and then when Esau looked up and he saw the women and the children, he says, who are these with you? So Jacob responded these are the children that God has graciously given your servant.

And the slaves and their children approached and bowed down. Leah and her children also approached and bowed down, and then Joseph and Rachel approached and bowed down. Notice they're taking the cue from their spiritual leader, Jacob, who's demonstrating humility. Now they're demonstrating humility. So Esau says, what do you mean by this whole procession I met? It's all to find favor with you, my lord, he answered. I have enough, my brother, Esau replied. Keep what you have. But Jacob said, no, please, if I found favor with you, take this gift from me, for indeed I have seen your face, and it is like seeing God's face, since you have accepted me.

Please take my present that was brought to you because God has been gracious to me and I have everything that I need, so Jacob urged him until he accepted. Now this is really awesome, obviously, because Esau Jacob thought Esau was going to kill him with those four hundred men, and instead Esau seems to have brought those four hundred men for protection so that when he reconciled with his brother Jacob they could go home together and live happily ever after. God supernaturally changed the heart of Esau and it's really incredible. And you see a transformation.

In the character of Jacob. He's not who he once was. In fact, a lot of people look at these eleven verses and say, here's all the evidence that Jacob was truly transformed. He's humble instead of proud. He's generous instead of stingy. He's recognizing that God is the source of his blessings instead of self-reliant. He is all of the things that old Jacob would have done, he's now taking ownership and not being that old man. What I think is interesting is some other commentators read the same eleven verses and concluded the exact opposite.

They said he's not humble because he bows down seven times, and that's too much. He's not humble because he's insisting that Esau take the gift as a way to have something on his brother, so that if he changed his mind, well I gave you those animals, so you can't kill me. He's he's showing favoritism because he stacks his children from least favorite to most favorite. So he's same old Jacob, same old tricks. And honestly, you know, it could go either way because Jacob is about to lie to his brother. He's about to do something he shouldn't do.

So he's obviously not the man he needed to be. And I think that really makes him a very relatable character because he's like a lot of us in that we're not who we once were by the grace of God. Thank you, Jesus, but we're not yet who we need to be. So I'm not sure is this evidence of his transformation? Is this evidence he's the same old dog? Maybe probably a little bit of both. But what is clear from those seven verse 11 verses is that the there is a necessary connection between our obedience and God's blessing on our life.

And this is what I want you to take away from this passage, that there is this supernatural, God-given grace on your life when you will courageously walk by faith and do what God's told you to do. And it could not have been easy for Jacob. All he had was the promise of God, I'm going to take care of you. He didn't know what the 400 men were for. He didn't know if Esau had changed his mind. All he had was the promise of God, and he said, that's sufficient. I'm going to obey the Lord.

And because of that obedience, God miraculously changed the heart of Esau. And it's also a reminder that your vertical relationship with God is impacted by your horizontal relationships with other people. And that your Heavenly Father desires for you to be reconciled with people that there is a previous enmity between. Jesus says if you're worshiping and you know that your brother has something against you, it's your job to go to your brother and try to be reconciled before you offer your gift at the altar because horizontal relationships impact the vertical relationship.

God desires reconciliation between estrained family members, estranged friends, and God will miraculously do what you cannot do if you'll step out in faith and do your part. Never think someone's too far gone. Never think God can't change the heart of that person or that God can't change your own life so that you can become a person with whom reconciliation is possible. There's a connection between obedience and God's blessing, but there's also a connection in the opposite direction that when you disobey, it invites God's discipline into your life. And that's where Jacob goes next.

So it says after he gave that gift to Esau that that Esau replied, well let's hey brother, let's move on. I'll go ahead of you. My four hundred men, you know they're going to protect us. And Jacob rejects Esau's offer and says, my lord knows that the children are weak I've nursing flocks and herds. If they are driven hard for one day, the whole herd's going to die. So let your let my Lord go ahead of his servant. He's really laying this Lord stuff on thick. I will continue on slowly at a pace so suited to the livestock and to the children until I come to my Lord at Seir.

And Esau said, well, let me at least leave some of my people with you. I mean, I don't want you to be without protection. And Jacob again rejects the offer from his brother. Oh, no, no, no, no. Why do that? Please indulge me, my Lord. And so on that day Esau started on his way back to Seir, which was way to the south, but Jacob went to Succoth, which is a little bit

to the east. And he built a house for himself and shelters for his livestock, and that is why the place was called Succoth.

I'm not quite sure how you pronounce it, but what we're seeing here is Jacob slipping to his old tricks. He deceives his brother. You cannot get away from the fact that he told his brother, I'm going to go meet you in Seir. And did the opposite of what he said he was going to do. Now, if you give Jacob a generous assumption, maybe the animals really were tired. I mean they had been fleeing from Laban for you know, a week or so. Maybe the children were tired. Maybe they did need barns and chill out and recover.

That doesn't excuse telling your brother I'm going to meet you in Seir and then going the opposite direction and going to Succoth instead. Why did he lie? Well, he lied for the same reason everybody lies. You're afraid of what the truth is going to cost you. And I'm sure he. Maybe he thought to himself, well, Esau sure is acting nice now, but I know my brother, you know, he can switch on a dime, and I don't want to be with him when his mood changes. Or maybe he thought, you know, Esau he's not a believer, and I'm trying to get back with the Lord and do right, and if I go with him, he's not with God, and I'm trying to be with God, and I'm supposed to go to Bethel anyway.

So maybe that was his reason, but it doesn't justify lying to his brother. He lied to his brother who he just reconciled with because of fear. An unholy worry. And that's the first step, usually the first step in a season of backsliding. You allow your fear of the future to outweigh your faith in the Lord. And there becomes a an incre a decreasing confidence in the character and the goodness of God. Jacob thought to himself, I can't trust the Lord. So if you're taking notes, backsliding pushes us out from under the umbrella of God's blessing.

Jacob is about to experience the consequences of his sins, and he allowed fear to outweigh faith in the Lord. Yeah, I got a map here just so you can know. He's coming from Haran. He came all the way down here. This is where he realizes God is in my camp. Peniel is where he wrestles with the Lord. Esau goes down to Seir with his 400 men. Jacob says, no, I'm not going. I don't want your protection. I'm coming over here to Sukkoth. He allowed fear of the future to outweigh faith in the Lord.

He had a shrinking confidence in the could the goodness and character of God. And I'm telling you, this is how your backsliding will begin as well. You will come to a place where you think to yourself, God doesn't know better. God may not come through. God's probably busy. I'll just take care of this on my own. It's just a small compromise. It's pretty reasonable. God probably even agrees, you know, he said this, but if he was in my shoes, he would make an exception for the rule. And you allow fear of the future to compromise being obedient to the Lord.

That will set you on a trajectory for backsliding to persist in your life. And that's what happens to Jacob. So he goes to Succoth, and then from Succoth he goes to Shechem. So chapter thirty-three verse next sixteen. I'm sorry, verse 18. After Jacob came from Paddan-aram, he arrived safely at Shechem in the land of Canaan, and he camped in front of the city. Circle that phrase in front of the city. He purchased a section of the field where he had pitched his tent, circle the phrase, pitched his tent, from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for a hundred pieces of silver, and he set up an altar there.

And he called it God, the God of Israel. So the second first W is sinful worry. The second W is worldliness. If you'll go back to that map, he leaves from Shechem Or Succoth, he comes across the Jordan and he lands in Shechem. He's supposed to go to Bethel. You know, and God revealed himself and said, go home. He says, I'm the God of Bethel. At at minimum he should have stopped here, worshiped the Lord, said God, what's next? We know ultimately he's coming down to his hometown to be with his mom and dad and reconcile and all that.

But he stops 20 miles short of the will of God for his life, 20 miles to the north. Why does he do that? I think he does it for the same reason that lot chose sin over God's will for his life, and it was the fact that the Jezreel Valley or I'm sorry, yeah, this valley right here would have been well watered, would have had a lot of good greens and future prosperity for his animals, and so he stops. Maybe he was afraid of the Canaanites and the Perizzites and hostility and I found a neighbor, Shechem, he's the chieftain of the village, and if I'm on good terms with him, maybe this is where God wants.

But the end of the day, he chose comfort, worldly comfort over the will of God for his life. And that's textbook, how backsliding happens in your life as well. You make decisions based on comfort instead of God's will. Now let me show you this parallel, because I think it's intentional. In Genesis 13, when you see the language used of lot. It says that lot chose the plain of the Jordan because it was well watered everywhere, like the Lord's God, and he set his tent up, or pitched his tent, same language, near Sodom, just like Jacob Camped in front of the city.

He didn't go all the way in, just like lot didn't go all the way in. So it's kind of like I'm going to flirt with the world without getting all the sin inside me. And what ends up happening is Jacob doesn't, he's not delivered from his foolish decision, just like lot isn't delivered from his foolish decision. You can't flirt with the world. You can't be friends with the world and be friends with God at the same time. Friendship with the world is enmity against God. You can't get 90% of the will of God in your life and call it good.

That's how backsliding happens. Backsliding stems from a shrinking confidence in the character of God, it also stems from a growing comfort and partial obedience. And I'm sure I can speak from experience because as I said, there's been seasons of backslide in my life where you justify it. You think to yourself, well, I'm not that far away from where God wants

me. Or you'll say things like, I'm doing good everywhere else. I'm doing the right thing in all these other arenas. It's just this one area where I'm choosing to habitually sin against God, and I've got good reasons for it, so maybe God's okay.

Or maybe you do what Jacob does, and that is you build an altar and you worship the Lord and you, hey, I'm still going to church and I'm still giving and I'm serving and I'm participating. And even though I'm doing what I know God doesn't want me to do, since I'm mostly doing what God wants me to do, it's going to be okay. And it's not okay, you're set up on a trajectory of backsliding and it's going to end up in a place you don't want to be. So there's a shrinking confidence in the character of God.

There's a growing comfort and partial obedience. And then the last thing in verse 20, he sets up a altar, and he says of the altar that it is God, the God of Israel. Now this may be a little bit of a stretch, but I think it's intentional by Moses, why does Jacob refer to the altar as the God of Israel? When he originally set up the altar for true worship, it was in Genesis 28 and he called it Bethel. The house of God. When God appealed when God appeared to him in Haran with uncle Laban, he says, I'm the God of Bethel.

Remember me. Remember the experience you had before you came up here. I'm the God who wants to send you home. So he's transferred he's transformed his worship away from worshiping the God of Bethel to worshiping the God of Israel Well, who's Israel? Israel is the name that Jacob received from the Lord. And so I kind of see this as Jacob kind of orienting his worship around himself. Making life with God all about me. And it's the same thing a lot of people do when they're in a state of backsliding. I see it all the time.

People will all of a sudden start showing back up in church. And they'll come to the office and they'll say, you know, I'm coming back to church. I want to join the church. I want to serve on every team. I'm giving all my money because I need God to fix my life. My marriage is a mess, I need God to fix my marriage, my finances are a mess, I need God to fix my finances. And what they're ultimately they don't know that they're saying this, and sometimes they're not necessarily saying this, but usually.

What they're ultimately saying is, I need God to fix me so that I can go about worshiping me. So I can go about pursuing what I want to pursue, which wasn't God, it never had been God, it had been money or the idol of some relationship or some status quo in life and that's not the heart of worship. The heart of worship is not geography, it's not Bethel. As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman we looked at two weeks ago, it's not about this mountain or that mountain. True worship, the worship God wants is worship in spirit and truth.

Romans 12, 1 and 2. Don't be conformed to the pattern of this world. That's not worship. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Offer your body as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. This is your spiritual worship. This is true worship. Another Old

Testament example that I think relates perfectly to what Jacob is doing. He's offering sacrifices. 1 Samuel 15, verse 33 says, does God really prefer sacrifice over obedience? Answer no. He doesn't care if you come here every Sunday, sing at the top of your lungs, give your tithe, and come back the next week and do the same.

What he cares about is your obedience. What he cares about is your submission, your surrendering your life to him. To pay attention is better than the fat of rams. So Jacob's worship was self-focused instead of fully surrendered. And backsliding stems from a ongoing failure to recognize that that is what God really wants. Your life isn't about you, worship isn't about you, worship is about the Lord. And when you orient your life around that truth that God is worthy, he's so worthy of everything I have to live, my awe, my adoration, my everything.

That is worship that pleases the Lord. But what happens to us is we slip out of that kind of worship and we slip into a worship that says, it's all about my feelings, it's all about what I need, it's all about what I like. It's all about my hopes and dreams and ambitions, and God's got to get on my train to help me get where I want to go when the reality is you are with the price, your body's not your own. God is your creator, and your whole purpose in life is to know him and to glorify him with everything.

But you don't see that when you're backsliding. Because you've exchanged true worship for a counterfeit. You've exchanged fear for faith. You've exchanged worldly comfort for God's will, and you've exchanged Surrender for a self-focused approach to worship. And that results in a decreasing confidence in God's character, a growing comfort with partial obedience. And an ongoing failure to know what God wants. And the worst part about it is it's not just that you disobey the Lord, it's that you set yourself up on a trajectory where God's discipline will invade your life. You can't God is not mocked.

Whatever a person sows is what he's going to reap. And when you choose to live in a life of disobedience, you choose to persist in a season of backsliding, it will cost you. And it costs Jacob. It's really tragic. If you if you read on in chapter 34, chapter 34 is not in the kids' Bibles. It certainly doesn't have the pictures associated. Leah's daughter Dinah, who Leah boarded Jacob, went out to see some of the young women of the area. Okay, she's new house, new new area, new friends, you know.

When Shechem is the son of Hamor, who lived right across the street from Jacob, when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, who was the region's chieftain, when he saw Dinah, he took her and he raped her. And after raping her he became infatuated with Jacob's daughter Dinah. He loved the young girl, and he spoke tenderly to her. Get me this girl as a wife, he told his father. Jacob heard that Shechem had defiled his daughter Dinah, but since his sons were with the livestock in the field, he remained silent until they returned.

Meanwhile Shechem's father Hamor came and spoke with him. Now I cannot even imagine. If that happened to my own daughter, what I would do, I'd probably retire from pre from preaching. Because I can't preach in jail. But Jacob doesn't say anything. And what is going on? In the life of a father, when his own daughter is sexually assaulted by some guy who thinks he owns the world, and when dad comes knocking, he even entertains the offer. Of giving his daughter away to this very cruel, morally bankrupt son of his. Now he says it's because his sons are in the field and maybe that's legit.

Maybe he thought if I make a ruckus they'll kill me while my sons are away. I think Jacob is just self-absorbed. So he waits for his sons to come home. We don't have time to read the whole chapter, but I'll tell you what happens. He waits for his sons to come home. The sons come home, they're outraged. Obviously. Their sister got raped. So when the dad comes to the sons and says, listen, my son wants your sister, he'll pay whatever needs to be paid. And then Shechem, the son, actually pipes up and says, yes, I'll pay whatever.

Whatever price it costs. I'm a man of means. I'm a very important person. I will pay it. You just tell me what you want. And it says that the sons answered they answered Shechem deceitfully because they were angered by what they had done to their sister. This is verse 13. They answered him deceitfully because he had defiled their sister. And they say, we can't do this. Giving our sister to an uncircumcised man is a disgrace to us. Remember, circumcision was a sign of the covenant. So they say, we're only going to agree with you on this condition.

And again, they're kind of fingers crossed while they're saying this. If all your males are circumcised as we are, then we will give you our daughters, take your daughters for ourselves, live with you, become one people. But if you don't listen to us to be circumcised, then we're going to take our daughter and go. Now they're saying that with their fingers crossed because what's going to happen is Shechem and his dad are going to say, okay, we've got to be circumcised. I'm not going to say that's pleasant, but at least that doesn't cost me anything, so they go to their city gates, and remember he's the chieftain, so he's the boss, and he tells all the people of the all the men of the city.

Listen, you know these guys who've been staying with us. They're willing to become one people with us. They're willing to make our animals all the same and give us their daughters and we can give them our daughters, but the condition they have because they worship this God and the sign of the covenant and all that, they the condition they have is that we all have to get circumcised in order for them to do that. And so my son, who's your boss, really wants this girl, and so here's the scissors. I don't know what he said.

And they do it, right? They all all the men of the village, at least all the men who were at the city gates listening to it, they all got circumcised. And then the plan unfolds. And Simeon and Levi, who were the s the brothers of Dinah, They pull out their swords, and on the third day, while they're healing from their procedure, which by the way, if you're ever going to be

circumcised as an adult, give it three days. On the third day as they're healing, they get their swords and they kill everybody.

Every male in the city. And then they take the women, they take the children, they take the livestock, they take everything for themselves, and they come home to their dad and they say, Dad, we got them. And his response is not what you would expect. Verse 27, Jacob's sons came to the slaughter, plundered the city because their sister had been defiled. They captured everything, and then Jacob said, this is verse 30, Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, You have brought trouble on me. You made me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, we're just a few in number if they unite against me and attack me I and my household will be destroyed.

In other words, I had a good thing going here, boys, and you just ruined it all. And then they replied, well, should he treat our sister like a prostitute? What has happened? This is terrible. This is absolute everything about it is terrible. All because Jacob was 20 miles north of the will of God for his life. Now, I don't think any dad wakes up one morning and says, I want to live my life in such a way that my only daughter can be raped, my two boys can become corrupt, and I become numb to everything that's happened around me.

No guy ever says that. But a lot of men and women, by the virtue of their spiritual condition by virtue of their unhealthiness as a spiritual person are actually on a trajectory for that very thing to happen. And it's a tragic reality of backsliding. You cannot backslide for free. Your vertical relationship with God will impact your horizontal relationships with people. We saw it in chapter 33 in a positive way. Now we're seeing the reverse in a negative way. It has impacted his daughter, it has impacted his sons, and it has impacted his own soul.

Just so you can have it for your notes, it threatens the safety of the people that you love. It corrupts the character of the people that you influence, and it numbs your soul to the damage that you've caused. And it happens to everybody who persists in a season of backsliding. I've seen it over and over again. I'm not saying Shechem was not responsible for his evil. He is He raped Dinah. It was grotesque and evil. I'm not saying that the men of the city, well, I guess some of them didn't deserve what they got, but I'm not saying Shechem didn't deserve what he got.

I'm not saying Hamor didn't deserve what he got, but it was morally evil for Levi and Simeon to enact the justice. They're not the law, it's vigilante, it's wrong. And it's incredible that Jacob's first response is, how this is going to make me look bad. Instead of grieving over the sexual abuse of his daughter and the corruption of his own boys, who now themselves are deceitful, scheming supplanters just like Jacob was. And I wouldn't say that any dad wants to do this, but it may be there are some of us here, dad, mom, whoever you are who by virtue of you persisting in a season of backsliding are actually setting up the conditions for your children or those you love to experience a similar thing.

The reality is you can't live in a state of backsliding for free. God isn't mocked. People reap what they sow. So how do you get out of it? How do you heal from a season of backsliding? That's what chapter 35 is all about, thankfully, because no one wants to end the sermon here, do they? So God says to Jacob, probably at his lowest moment, get up, go to Bethel, and settle there. Build an altar to God, the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau. In other words, no more of this God of Israel stuff.

Come home to Bethel, the original God who said, I'm going to be with you when all this takes place. And so Jacob said to his family and all who were with him get rid of the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, change your clothes. We must get up and go to Bethel. Notice he's taking ownership of his own sins and he's taking spiritual responsibility for his family. He's saying, get rid of this idolatry. He had obviously been putting up with false worship and idol idolatry and sexual perversion and who knows what else.

He's finally saying, I'm putting my foot down. I've not been a good leader. It's time for this to end. We're going to Bethel and I will build an altar there to the God who answered me. In my day of distress. Now he's remembering the Lord. He has been with me everywhere that I have gone. And so they respond to his leadership with obedience. They gave Jacob all their foreign gods. And all their earrings, and Jacob hid them under the oak tree near Shechem, and when they set out, underline this, a terror from God came over all the cities around them, and they did not pursue Jacob's sons.

Remember what I said earlier, that there's a connection between your obedience and God's blessing on your life. They disobeyed the Lord. They came out from underneath the umbrella of God's blessing. Brokenness and chaos invaded their life, but the moment that Jacob repents of his sins, takes ownership and begins to lead spiritually, they immediately come back underneath the umbrella of God's blessing and protection, and a holy dread falls on the whole city all around them, who they otherwise would have come after Jacob and probably killed him and all of his sons.

And taking Dinah to well, I guess Shechem's gone, but taking her for something else. But that doesn't happen because they are experiencing God's mercy and grace. Not because they deserved it. They do not deserve it. But because God is merciful and gracious to those who walk by faith. And faith is manifested through repentance and obedience to what God called them to do. So they obey the Lord, they experience God's Umbrella of blessing and provision, and then Jacob and all who were with him came to Luz, that is Bethel, in the land of Canaan.

Jacob built an altar there, he called the place El Bethel. Not Bethel, but the God of Bethel, because it's not about a place, it's about a person because it was there that God had revealed himself to Jacob when he was fleeing from his brother. Deborah, the one who had nursed and raised Rebekah died and was buried under the oak south of Bethel, so Jacob named it

Allon-bacuth. God appeared to Jacob again after he returned from Paddan-aram and he blessed him and God said to him, Your name is Jacob. You will no longer be named Jacob, but your name will be Israel.

He renames him again. This is what I want for you and so he named him Israel, and God also said to him, I am God Almighty, I can do anything. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation, indeed an assembly of nations, will come from you, and kings will descend from you. And I will give you the land that I gave to Abraham and to Isaac, and I will give the land of your future descendants, and then God withdrew from him at the place where he had spoken to him, and Jacob set up a marker where he had spoken to him, a stone marker, poured a drink offering, poured it on the oil poured oil on it, and named the place where God had spoken to him Bethel.

And so God Miraculously restores Jacob to a place of intimacy and communion, and Jacob takes ownership of his spiritual responsibility and leads his family to where God wanted them to be. That wasn't easy. I mean, they suffered loss and somebody died and all of these things, but God appears to him and says, this is where I want you. There is blessing underneath the umbrella of my will for your life. And if you will simply repent and do what I'm asking you to do, I will bless you. I will protect you.

And that's the way out of backsliding. You do what Jacob did. You repent. Repentance is agreeing with God about the facts it's agreeing that God, I should have never worshiped these idols. I should have never tolerated it. Remember Rachel took the idols from her dad Laban. We didn't know why at the time, but obviously they had begun worshiping idols, mixed worship. Jacob's worship wasn't even all that great. He had been tolerating sin in his life and in his family, and he repents of it. He agrees with God. This is a mess.

This is wrong. We've embraced the counterfeit instead of your design. You're right, I'm wrong. I agree. That's repentance. And in your life it looks very similar. I God, whatever you've been doing sinning against God, you admit my sin was foolish You were right, I were wrong, I was wrong, I don't want to do it anymore. I repent, I turn away from that. And the second thing he does is he remembers the goodness and the grace of God. I love that song that we sang at the end of our service today.

Your goodness is running after, it's running after me. Jacob says, you've always been with me, God. I was so foolish to be blind to this. How could I forget the God of Bethel? How could I forget that you promised and that you every time I do what you want me to do? You go over and above, over and beyond what I even deserve. I'm sorry. I remember your goodness and your grace, and I'm coming home. He remembers the Lord's goodness and mercy, and then he returns to Bethel. And the true heart of worship.

And worship, again, isn't about a place. It's not about an experience. It's not about what you've got going. And I want God to fix what I got going. It's about God Being God and you recognizing that He is worthy. He deserves your adoration. He deserves your everything because He is God and you are not. And that's what worship looks like today. Except today it's not through the Abrahamic covenant that God gave to Jacob and reaffirms to Jacob. It's through the new covenant in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so for us to come out of a season of backsliding what I want to encourage you to do is to repent of your idolatry and unbelief.

Whatever that looks like, anything that you've loved more than God Anything that you're concerned more about their opinion than God's opinion, that person is probably an idol. You need to repent of that idolatry. Remember that God is good and gracious and he has proven his character by sending Jesus to do for you what you couldn't do for yourself, which was to die on a cross, having lived a sinless, perfect life of love and obedience. To his Heavenly Father. He died in your place for your sins, so that when you repent of your sins and put your faith in Him, not only are you forgiven of the wrongs that you've done, but God clothes you with His perfect righteousness, the life of His Son.

And just like Esau embraced Jacob and said, it's over, I forgive you, I love you, I want you. Your heavenly father, when you repent and you run to Jesus, He will embrace you in his arms and he will say, I love you, I forgive you, it's over, you're mine, and I'm yours. That's how much he loves you. But you've got to get up. You've got to repent. You've got to agree with God. I made a mess. You were right. I was wrong. And also agree with God that He loves you and He demonstrated His love by sending Jesus into the world to die for you so that you could be set free.

And once you've repented, you need to actually get up and come home to Bethel. And that's why I think people come to the altar. They get up and they come down the aisle to give their life to Jesus. It's kind of an old practice. People don't do it much anymore. When I was growing up in church, people would get up and they'd come to the altar as a way of rededicating their life to Jesus. As a way of saying, I'm done running, I'm done hiding, I'm done fighting. God, I'm surrendering to you.

And so I can't help but think there's some people here this morning who need to come home to Bethel, who are hearing their Heavenly Father say, stop running, stop fighting, come back. I love you. I can heal you, I can forgive you, I can restore what the enemy has taken, but I need you to come home. And so if that's what the Holy Spirit is saying to you this morning, the altar's open, I'd be happy to receive you, pray with you help you in that spiritual decision. If I get tied up, there's staff, there's deacons, there's pastors here who will post up on the back walls.

If some of you guys want to post up back there, that'll be fine. Or Terry, any of our small group leaders, anybody who's willing to pray with somebody, if you'll stand up in the back

and receive people, today may be a day, a divine appointment between you and the Lord. And you need to demonstrate faith by getting up and responding to what God′s calling you to do. But you do as the Lord leads. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time. And we thank you for Jacob, a normal guy, broken like all of us.

I thank you that you use broken people. Not the smart, not the strong, not the wise, not the put together, the people who are broken, who experience your grace and are never the same. And so would you use this time as we respond to you to create repentance in our hearts and faith and courage to step in out and obey what you′re calling us to do. And we pray these things in Jesus′ name. Amen.