

Dealing with a Narcissist

Genesis 30:25–31:55 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: We've all been there at one time or another. Feeling like we are trapped in a friendship, a job, a volunteer role, maybe a relationship with a family member, an in-law, a sibling, a parent, a son or daughter, that's slowly draining the life out of you.

Every conversation feels like a battlefield where facts twist, blame shifts, and your sanity hangs by a thread. You've tried reasoning, you've tried patience, but nothing changes. Sound familiar? And we are haunted by the question: ***“How much more can I take?”***

In our fast-paced world, we call this dealing with a narcissist—a person consumed by self, blind to others' pain. But ***long before psychology labeled it, the Bible exposed it.***

CONTEXT: Remember that this portion of Genesis revolves around the person of the Patriarch Jacob. Jacob encountered the Lord at Bethel and received the assurance that God would be with him, that God would prosper him, and that he would be the father of a great nation. Not only that, but those who bless Jacob would also be blessed. Jacob arrives in the land of his Ancestors, Padam-Aram, and he meets Rachel and falls madly in love. Then he meets one of the most difficult characters in the entire Old Testament, Laban. By the hand and mind of Laban, Jacob will see the grotesque nature of his sin, up close and personal. Have you lived long enough to recognize that the things you dislike about yourself are the same things that you despise most in others?

I am a Pastor, and I prefer to use Biblical Categories when I preach; however, there is a category that describes this man, Laban, that may be easier for you to recognize as its biblical equivalent. The Bible would describe him as a carnal-minded, pride-filled, idolator - a modern-day psychiatrist would say that he is a textbook example of a **narcissist**.

ILLUSTRATION: In Greek Mythology, Narcissus was a young man of extraordinary beauty, yet he despised and rejected others, including the beautiful nymph Echo. As punishment, the gods caused him to fall in love with his own reflection in a pool of water. Unable to possess or look away from himself, he wasted away and died.

Clinical Psychologists have used his name to describe a personality disorder that has equal pull on every single individual. That must be resisted, repented of, and redeemed by the blood of Christ.

ILLUSTRATION: According to the **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders**, a Narcissistic Personality Disorder involves a pervasive pattern of: Grandiosity, Exploitative behavior, Lack of empathy, Entitlement, Manipulation, and hypersensitivity to perceived loss of control.

They feed off the mental, emotional, and sometimes physical pain of others. Have you ever met someone who seemed to think the only way they could have a good day was for you to have a bad day? That's a narcissist.

Let's see how Laban responds to this classic Narcisist in our text.

TEXT: Genesis 30:25–31:55 (ESV) 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 is sensing the urge to return to Canaan and face his brother, Esau. He approaches Laban and gives an opportunity this season of life to end amicably and peaceably. Which is important because down in **Gen. 31, Laban will ask Jacob, “Why didn’t you let this end peacefully?”**

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.” 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?” 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.

Now till this day, Bedouin shepherds cull the spotted or striped sheep. They prefer the solid-colored animals. Jacob is saying that those animals we typically cull from the herd will belong to me as 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.”

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.

Notice the lengths he is going to in order to remain in control; he does a final culling of the herd without Jacobs approval and keeps them for himself. The idea would be that this particular genetic anomaly will not occur as often in the herds of Laben.

Laban's herd should grow while Jacob's share diminishes. The text that follows is quite enigmatic.

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.

Now, there is no scientific evidence that the stripping of the limbs had any effect on the genetics of the sheep. This is simply a superstitious act on the part of Jacob; Michael Scott would say it may not be superstitious, but it is "a little stitious".

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 feeble of the flock he would not lay them there. So the feeble would be Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's.

Step one in dealing with a narcissist -

1. Wait on the Lord

Jacob recognizes Laban's character long before he challenges it. Yet he does not explode or demand instant justice. Instead, he waits: Jacob makes certain that his household is secure and that he has a plan first.

Do not confront a narcissist until you are secure enough to survive the consequences. Narcissists will tend retaliate when exposed. Jacob understands this intuitively. A premature confrontation would have led to economic ruin or violence. Jacob works behind the scenes to cover all the bases for his family.

Proverbs 19:11 says, "Good sense makes one slow to anger."

Some of you are working for a very difficult employer. Some have family circumstances that make absolutely no sense to you. Take some time, bring it to the Lord in prayer, and invite Him into the situation.

ILLUSTRATION: There was a lady back at my first church. Keep in mind, I didn't know anything and was certain I knew everything. But this much more mature sister in Christ was always patient, always supported my leadership. I said to her one day, "I think you have more confidence in my leadership than I do!" She laughed and said, "Oh, honey, it's not that - "I just simply tell the Good Lord if you get out of line to take you to the woodshed and bring you back into line". NOW - I feared that little old lady's prayer more than any board of Deacons.

The first step is always to give the Lord time to work...

⁴³ Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

What results is simply what God promised would happen. God would bless Jacob no matter what. Jacob intentionally breeds the feeble sheep separately; as a result, the solid-colored offspring are not as robust as their spotted counterparts.

Jacob Lets God Vindicate Rather Than Self-Justifying. Jacob repeatedly attributes outcomes to God, not cleverness. Vindication is best when it comes from above, not from below. Clinically, narcissists do not concede when confronted with facts. They escalate. Jacob avoids this trap by trusting God to vindicate him.

Psalm 37:6 promises, "He will bring forth your righteousness as the light."

Someone might be thinking... well, how do I know when enough is enough? God will reveal that to you... Look with me at...

THREE WAYS TO KNOW WHEN IT IS TIME TO PART:

a. Observation

Genesis 31:1-55 (ESV)

¹ Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth." ² And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favor as before.

The children of the Narcissist don't conceal their true feelings as well as their Father. Jacob simply listens to what the sons are saying.

Word of wisdom - If you want to know what someone really thinks about you, look at the countenance of their children. There are exceptions, but it's rare that a son will love whom the father hates. *Johnathan and David are exceptions to the rule.*

Observation: watch the person in a variety of circumstances and determine whether they treat others the way they treat you. A true Narcissist can't shut it off.

Observation...

b. Revelation

³ Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you."

We don't know whether this was a dream, a vision, or simply the Lord's prompting, but whatever it was, Jacob knew exactly what God was saying.

Now, beware of using this like a playing card. If you say, "God told me..." You'd better be rock solid certain. Or a wise person will write you quickly if you are proven wrong.

It's ok to say, "I think God is saying... or I'm pretty certain".

But there are times, God makes His will undeniably clear.

Observation...Revelation...

c. Consultation

Again - there is safety in a multitude... let every fact be confirmed by two or three witnesses...Look what Jacob does..

⁴ So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was ⁵ and said to them, "I see that your father does not regard me with favor as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me. ⁶ You know that I have served your father with all my strength, ⁷ yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. But God did not permit him to harm me.

He explains what has happened to him from the had of her Dad...then,

¹⁴ Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? ¹⁵ Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has indeed devoured our money. ¹⁶ All the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, whatever God has said to you, do."

Notice that he sees alignment with his family. He doesn't presume he is right; he makes his case to other parties, and they agree. Scripture teaches that there is safety in a multitude of counselors.

If you think someone is a narcissist and that you are in danger from them, seek to validate that from other parties. Go to people who love the alleged narcissist as well. Remember, these are his daughters. If your daughter says you have a problem, you might have a problem.

1. Wait on the Lord - use observation, revelation, and consultation to determine it's time...

2. Enact Boundaries

Notice, I didn't say "set boundaries"; instead, I said "enact boundaries." You see, Jacob does not attempt to reform Laban. He leaves without asking permission.

Boundaries cannot be negotiated with narcissists; they must be enacted.

¹⁷ So Jacob arose and set his sons and his wives on camels. ¹⁸ He drove away all his livestock, all his property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac.

¹⁹ Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household gods.

Now, mark that verse in your mind. The household gods were the idols that Laban worshipped. That's very important and it will come up later in the text.

²⁰ And Jacob tricked Laban the Aramean, by not telling him that he intended to flee. ²¹ He fled with all that he had and arose and crossed the Euphrates, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead. ²² When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, ²³ he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him for seven days and followed close after him into the hill country of Gilead. ²⁴ But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad." ²⁵ And Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen pitched tents in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁶ And Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done, that you have tricked me and driven away my daughters like captives of the sword?"

Do you see what is happening? Laban is creating a narrative that presents Jacob as the bad guy... this is called "Gaslighting."

Gaslighting is a form of psychological manipulation where someone deliberately twists facts, denies reality, or rewrites history to make another person doubt their own memory, perception, or sanity. Plainly put: it's **lying with intent**, over time, to gain control.

How it typically manifests itself:

- **Flat denial:** "That never happened," when it clearly did.
- **Rewriting events:** "You're remembering it wrong," despite evidence.
- **Blame-shifting:** "You're too sensitive," instead of owning wrongdoing.
- **Undermining confidence:** Constantly questioning your judgment until you stop trusting yourself.

The goal, not persuasion, not disagreement, but power. The gaslighter wants you confused, dependent, and unsure—so they stay in control.

²⁷ Why did you flee secretly and trick me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre? ²⁸ And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? Now you have done foolishly.

Well, it's because when I actually offered that to you back in **Chapter 30:26**, you talked me out of it, stole from me, and cheated me repeatedly.

²⁹ It is in my power to do you harm. But the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.' ³⁰ And now you have gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house, but ***why did you steal my gods?***"

Now Laban raises three questions - Why didn't you allow us to send you away properly, why didn't you allow me to show affection to my grandkids, and why did you take my household idol? It never occurs to Laban that he may be to blame for this...

³¹ Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force. ³² Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live. In the presence of our kinsmen point out what I have that is yours, and take it."

Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them. Rachel hides the idols under her cloak, sits down, and pretends that she is on her monthly cycle and cannot arise.

Why is this important? Because scripture repeatedly warns us that when we are dealing with the sins of others, we should be very aware of the fact that ***the very sins we attack in others may also attach to us.***

Galatians 6:1 (ESV)

¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

1 Corinthians 10:12 (ESV)

¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

Scripture teaches that Demonic Spirits attach themselves to Idols and seek to divert what belongs to God alone toward themselves. We said earlier, the root of Narcissism is Idolatry. If you want to repent of Narcissism, attack the Idol.

Jacob fled, but Rachel took the root cause of the problem with her. Idolatry would be a curse on Israel for the next few Millennia.

1. Wait on the Lord, 2. Enact Boundaries...

3. Stand in the Truth

³³ So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's. ³⁴ Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel's saddle and sat on them. Laban felt all about the tent, but did not find them. ³⁵ And she said to her father, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me." So he searched but did not find the household gods.

Now notice what happens... Laban is actually right here. Rachel did steal the idols, but his previous actions have sacrificed his moral authority.

Proverbs 22:1 (ESV)

¹ A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.

³⁶ Then Jacob became angry and berated Laban. Jacob said to Laban, “What is my offense? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me? ³⁷ For you have felt through all my goods; what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, that they may decide between us two. ³⁸ These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. ³⁹ What was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it myself. From my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. ⁴⁰ There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. 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. ⁴² If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night.”

Jacob lays his case out plainly... then look what happens. The narcissist enacts a reality distortion field...

⁴³ Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, “The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day for these my daughters or for their children whom they have borne?”

They were not Laban's; they belonged to Jacob.

George Forman once said, “There are some people, if they don't already know it, you can't tell them”.

IN the end, they make a covenant and set up a boundary marker. They can't even agree on what to name the marker. They promise not to cross the boundary to attack one another as long as they live.

What had been a metaphorical boundary before had to become a physical boundary. Sometimes the only answer is a BOUNDARY. Wisdom demands it.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

Scripture does not tell us to: Fix narcissists, Shame narcissists, Constantly Diagnose narcissists.

Jacob simply **stopped standing where Laban could keep hurting him.**

Sometimes, for the good to start, the bad must end.