

# Keep Moving Forward

Genesis 35

*\*\*Preaching Schedule\*\**

## **Intro: Keep Moving Forward**

There's a fun little flick our family has watched over the years called "Meet the Robinsons."

It's a story of an inventor boy who feels his inadequacy because he keeps messing up his inventions. Eventually he travels to the future (2037) and meets his future adult self who encourages him to *keep moving forward*.

The reason his adult self could say that is because he had enough life experience to realize that apparent setbacks are actually opportunities for growth to become a better inventor. In fact, one of this boy's inventions would change the course of history, BUT it would've never happened if he had given up when he got discouraged.

And so the motto of his life becomes: *keep moving forward*. It's a cute story with a happy ending, but might feel a little cheesy and fake to us. That's because it is. BUT it's also because many of us look at our lives and

think, “It’s just not working out. There’s not gonna be a happy fairytale ending like the movies. My life has too many setbacks. I feel totally stuck in my marriage...my singleness ...my relationship my kids...my job...in life.” And you keep asking yourself, “Am I just spinning my wheels? I discouraged. I don’t feel like I can keep moving forward.”

This passage is meant to encourage to keep moving forward. Keep going in the Christian life. Keep fighting your sin. Keep telling others about Christ. Keep being a faithful wife/ mother, husband/ dad, brother/ sister, student, employee. Keep loving those who are hard to love. Keep serving the church. Keep trusting the Lord. Keep going.

In fact, this the story is structured according to four *movements* (which is why the emphasis is on *moving forward*). Jacob is moving deeper and deeper into the promise land: from Shechem to Bethel to Bethlehem to Hebron. And with each movement, there’s something that could cause Jacob to stop/ give up instead of moving forward.

And so, the point is: *You keep moving UNTIL God completes the work he started...until he does what he said he will do.* Each movement in this passage helps us know HOW to keep going. Let's first look at...

**Movement #1: Bury your idols.** You can't move forward in this journey called the Christian life if you don't bury your sin. Jacob cannot move forward in obedience to God's call to press deeper into the promised land if he doesn't bury the idols that tempt him away from the Lord. **[v1]** God is reminding Jacob of the first time he appeared to him in Bethel twenty years before. At that time, God promised, "I will bring you back to this place."

So God is saying here, "Go to the place I told you I would bring you back to." Interestingly, he says, "Go UP to Bethel," which was not north of Shechem, where Jacob currently was. It was south. So why does God tell him to "Go UP"? Bethel sat at a higher elevation than Shechem, so it would feel to Jacob like he is "going up." But, that term "go up" doesn't *merely* have topographical significance.

It has spiritual significance. It's a term that carries the idea of movement toward the Lord, rather than away from him. God is really calling Jacob to *return* to himself. BUT to do that, he's gotta *turn* from any other gods he's clinging to. Look what Jacob does. **[vv2-3]** No hesitation! He knew, to obey God moving forward, he and his family couldn't keep clinging to false gods.

Where did they come from? Apparently, Jacob knew about these idols! Why else would he have thought to tell his people to get rid of them? It appears Jacob tolerated idol worship for some time. Where did they come from?

Remember the problem of the previous chapter? Jacob got too comfortable with the pagan people of the land of Shechem and the danger was that his people would become one people with their people, which includes worshipping their gods. And that's exactly what happened!

But through God's call, Jacob comes to his senses and tells his people to put them away.

AND notice in v2, he tells them to purify themselves by “changing their garments.” Why would he command that? Clothing (in the Bible) is often a symbolic picture of one’s spiritual state before the Lord. That’s why in Zechariah 3, there’s a scene of Satan accusing Joshua the High Priest for all his sin, and the angel of the Lord changes his filthy garments and puts a white robe on him. Why? It’s a symbol that Satan’s accusations no longer stick! God gave Joshua a clean status!

The NT uses this similar imagery when speaking of what happens when someone becomes a Christian—they “put off” their old self and “put on” the new self (Eph. 4:24). That’s imagery of changing clothes, which pictures our spiritual state before God.

Listen, this is what must happen for anyone to be right with God: you need new clothes! Not new church cloths (we don’t care about that!). But new spiritual clothes; white, spotless robes representing purity before a holy God. Where do you get that from? Not from yourself. You only get it from Christ! **[Gospel]**

I love the line in the hymn *Jesus Paid it All* that says, “I’ll wash my garments white in the blood of Calvary’s Lamb!” Oh what irony! The only thing that can make the filthy garments of your sinful life clean before a holy God is by washing them in blood! This blood doesn’t stain; it cleanses! It’s the blood of Jesus.

Oh would you do that? Would you wash your garments white in the blood of Christ? Do you know what that means? It means, right now, in your heart, before God, you trust what Jesus did for you. He died in your place so that you could be right with God. Change your clothes! Get a pure status before God.

Jacob led his family to repent of their idolatry so they could move forward in obedience to the Lord. Look what he does with all their idols. **[v4]**. The word “hid” can also be translated “buried.” That’s what repentance looks like! Burying your idols! AND everything associated with idol worship. That’s why he buries all the earrings too. In the ANE, earrings were thought to invoke protection from pagan gods. Burying them meant trusting in the Lord.

I want you to realize what Jacob is doing. He got these idols from Shechem. And he is burying them and leaving them behind. He's moving forward from the defilement that happened to his people in Shechem.

You cannot move forward in your walk with the Lord if you won't leave behind the idols in your life. If there's anything (I mean *anything*) that you value more than the Lord...that you're looking to for comfort, worth, security more than that Lord...I'm telling you, you won't move forward. You'll continue to feel like your feet are stuck in mud and you don't have the strength to put one foot in front of the next.

You gotta bury your idols! Don't stick them on a shelf in your heart that you might be able to grab later. Don't put them in a pocket in your heart that you can pull out for later use. Bury them! Get rid of them! How? It's not rocket-science. You must run to the Lord for the very thing you're looking for in that idol.

If you're bitter because of *relational emptiness*—you want marriage, you want a

better marriage, deeper friendships, more meaningful church relationships—you'll get nowhere by being bitter because of what you *don't* have. Bury that idol in your heart (you know it's an idol when you're bitter). Bury it by repenting of any demand you place on God to give you something other than himself for your deepest comfort.

If you're anxious over your *health*, bury the idol for good health by repenting of any demand you place on God to give you something other than himself for your deepest peace. Oh Kinney, God really is enough! He is! So bury your idols and keep moving forward.

**Movement #2: Trust in God's Faithful Promise-Keeping.** Notice the next movement marker in **[v5]**. That's the opposite of what Jacob thought would happen. Remember what he said to his sons after they wiped out the men of Shechem? **[34:30]** But the opposite happened. The surrounding peoples feared...whom? V5 says, "the sons of Jacob." Word spread about what they did to the men of Shechem!



This is what happened with the people of Israel on their way to the promised land. Surrounding peoples feared them because the reputation of their strength spread. So this protection of Jacob would've strengthen the faith of Israel, that God is faithful to keep his promise to protect his people. And he will do for them what he said he will do. **[vv6-7]**

Remember when God did that in ch28? God “revealed” himself to Jacob saying, “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land [referring to Bethel!]. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

Twenty years prior God made that promise. That's a long time. *I was in a college dorm room twenty years ago...a totally different person. I've been through SO much since then. And I can look back and see the hand of God every step of the way. But I couldn't (necessarily) ALONG the way. It's when you look back, you can see God's faithful hand.*

That's why Jacob builds an altar there, not merely as an act of worship or thanksgiving, but an act of faith because God got him back to the place he said he would and so he's trusting God will also give his offspring this land in the future. He's marking his territory because he trusts in God's faithful promise-keeping...even when he experiences loss. **[v8]**

This seems to come out of nowhere. We haven't heard about Rebekah's nurse since ch24, and even then, we weren't told her name. And we have no mention of Deborah sojourning with Jacob or being part of his family (what appears to be) for a while. So why mention her death?

I think Deborah's death implies that Rebekah, Jacob's mom, already died. There's no mention of Rebekah when he finally reunites with Isaac (his dad) at the end of this chapter. And this is very sad because it was Rebekah's idea for Jacob to flee to Haran in the first place! She seemed to think he wouldn't be gone very long because she told him to stay there "until your brother's anger turns away

from you, and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send and bring you from there.” <sup>(27:45)</sup> In other words, “I’ll see you again.”

She wouldn’t. She never saw her son again. So Deborah’s death hints that his parents’ era is coming to an end. Which explains why Jacob named Deborah’s burial site “Allon-bacuth,” which means “the oak of weeping.” This was a big loss for Jacob.

But he’s gotta keep moving forward. How? He’s gotta trust in God’s faithful promise-keeping. Which is why God renews his covenant with Jacob in Bethel. **[vv9-10]** Now, didn’t Jacob already get that name change back in ch32? He did. This is a reminder. Jacob is needs to be reminded he is no longer defined by his former “heal-grabber” self, which is what the name “Jacob” means. It’s a name associated with a *deceptive schemer*.

Now, he’s defined by his new name, “Israel,” which means “wrestler with God,” one who depends on God. You know what’s so funny about that? Even after his name change,

Jacob/Israel still struggled to depend on God and not himself. We saw it in the last chapter!

He is a complex character, just like all of us. Can you relate? Do you feel up and down in your dependence on the Lord. One moment you have a mountain top, “nothing-in-all-the-world-can-shake-me,” “bring-it-on-Satan” kind of faith! And the next moment, you’re like, “Am I even a Christian?”

One of the things we need to realize about the Christian life is that the promises of God are essential for us to keep moving forward...*not merely* because WE hold onto them, but because they hold onto us! Look how God reiterates his promise to Jacob. **[v11]**

This is the same promise God gave to Abraham (Jacob’s grandpa) and to Isaac (Jacob’s dad). A promise of a people. What kind of people? Notice the three descriptions?

- *A nation*. Referring to the nation of Israel.
- *A company of nations*. “Company” is the word for “assembly;” it’s the Hebrew word for “church.” He’s saying, “From you will

come, not just one nation, but many nations/peoples who will assemble as one people.” It’s a foreshadow of Gentiles inclusion forming the church.

- *Kings shall come from your body.* In other words, you will have a royal offspring. (And we come to find that through the line of his son Judah would come THE King of Israel, the Messiah.)

Then notice the reiteration of the land promise in **[v12]**. See that emphasis on *give*? God’s promises are filled with grace. HE GIVES! And he gives in abundance. **[vv13-15]** The stone pillar was Jacob’s way of saying, “God’s gonna keep his promise to me.”

You gotta believe that! You gotta believe God will remain *faithful* to you in his promise-keeping. As AW Pink said, “No one ever... trusted [God] in vain.” (Pink, 68) Do you realize that’s what it would mean for us if God were NOT faithful to his promises. Our trust in him would be TOTALLY vain! And therefore, you SHOULD be an anxious mess! You SHOULD question everything you read in the Bible! You

SHOULD throw out all hope and just wallow in despair...IF God is NOT faithful to keep his promises to you. BUT he is! He is! And yet, too often, we're still an anxious mess...we still doubt his Word...we throw out hope and let despair take over.

Beloved Kinney, God is faithful to keep his promises. Believe it and keep moving forward.

### **Movement #3: Set Your Heart on Future**

**Hope.** You can't keep moving forward if you have no hope for the future. And the only way you can have hope for your future is if you have taken steps 1-2: buried your idols and trusted God's promises—that gives you hope for the future. Look how Jacob demonstrates hope in the face of unbearable loss. **[vv16-18]**

“Ben-Oni” means “son of my sorrow,” which means Rachel refused comfort in her affliction, even though she found out she was having a son. *Which, my wife (who was a labor and delivery nurse) told me that Rachel was probably breech, meaning, her baby was coming out legs first, which is not the natural*

*way for a baby to be born and is very dangerous for the mother. But it's why the midwife knew the gender of the baby as the baby was coming out.*

As a result, Rachel is dying, and she doesn't want to be comforted. But Jacob gives the baby a different name. "Benjamin" mean "son of my right hand," which is a name that reveals Jacob's hope for the future of this son, even after his own mother's death. **[vv19-20]**

Do you know what is so ironic and sad about Rachel's death? Before she was able to have children, she angrily and desperately said to her husband, "Give me children or I will die!" And death came to her IN childbirth. Be careful what you wish for! Or better put, be careful what you idolatrously crave, because God might give it to you.

In the midst of great loss—the loss of his beloved wife, Rachel—Jacob still has hope... hope that helps him keep moving forward.

**Movement #4: Believe God Will Finish the Work He Began [v21]** The tower of Eder is unknown to us, but it would've been known to the original readers and it became known as the place where Rueben, Jacob's son, did what he did! **[v22]** Wow. Remember Bilhah was Rachel's servant. And she's the one whom Rachel gave to Jacob when Rachel was jealous of Leah for being able to have kids when Rachel couldn't. So Bilhah had two kids with Jacob: Dan and Naphtali.

And here, we discover, Reuben gets with Bilhah, his half-brothers' mother who's also the woman with whom his dad committed adultery at the encouragement of his wife, Rebekah. It's a messed-up family.

And it's likely Reuben was attempting to replace his father as the patriarch of the family because this would've been the way to do it. (Remember Absalom tried to replace his father David's throne by sleeping with a bunch of his concubines? (2 Sam 16:15-23)



WHY do you think this gross detail of Rueben's adultery is in this story? The Bible is not shy about mentioning the messed up lives of people. But this detail is but another reminder that God uses even the worst of us. It doesn't mean sin is without consequences. Reuben will earn a curse for this sin (49:3-4). But Reuben still makes it to the promised land. And his offspring become one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Which is why the list of all of Jacob's sons is given next. **[vv22b-26]**

All of them, except Benjamin, were born outside of the promised land in Paddan-aram, the place of slavery (if you will) under Laban. The original audience could take heart that they too, born outside the promised land as slaves in Egypt, would one day inherit it because God would get them there.

God finishes the work he begins. That's why it's so fitting that Jacob comes again to his father. **[v27]** Why is that so important that Jacob gets to see his dad again? In ch28 he said to the Lord in faith, I will come again to my father's house in peace."

God is completing the work he began in Jacob. But it doesn't come without loss.

**[vv28-29]** That's the third death mentioned in this passage. But this one is presented in terms of completion/fulfillment. Isaac lived a full life and went to heaven ("gathered to his people"). And Jacob and Esau (reunited) bury him in the land God promised to his people.

And the question for Jacob now is: "You gonna keep going? Your dad's gone now. It's on you and your sons to carry the baton of the covenant...to keep trusting God to do what he said he would do for your people. Will you?"

## **Conclusion**

The same question is for you: Will you keep going? You got to! You can! Bury your idols. Trust God's faithfulness. Set your heart on future hope. And believe God will finish what he started in you.

Keep moving forward.