

Developing Depth in Ourselves
A Spiritual and Psychological Analysis of Jacob
Part 2
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We're in the second part of a three part series called "Developing Depth in Ourselves – a Spiritual and Psychological Analysis of Jacob." Last week we looked at Jacob's emergence, the people that had influence upon his life – his mother, his father, his brother. And tonight we're going to be looking at Jacob's transformation – the making of a person in the depths.

I want to do two follow-ups to some things that were shared last week however, before I launch into this material.

I talked last week about the importance of the sovereignty of God, that the scriptures make it very clear that while Jacob was still in the womb he was selected to rule and be stronger over the younger. Paul explicitly says in Romans 9 – he uses this illustration to defend the understanding that God is sovereign and that he elects whom he will. I know that some people are troubled about the concept of God's sovereignty.

I have a friend who wrote an elaborate tract called "Cosmic Chess" in which he essentially took the thesis that God does not know from one day to the next what is going to happen. He has limited himself to his knowledge and had created an intricate set of checks and balances so that one choice determines a consequence, another choice determines another consequence and everything sort of falls together by our own personal actions like a deck of cards. God really doesn't know whether I'm going to be in his presence or what I'm going to do in life or anything. I realize that's a very attractive view because it would then hold God completely blameless for anything that goes wrong.

If however we look at scripture seriously we understand that God does elect people to purposes and salvation. Nothing is said about his electing people to damnation. I think that's perhaps where Calvin made his mistake inferring that if God elected some people to do some things that he must have elected other people to be lost. Scriptures do not say that he elects people to be lost. He does use people like a Pharaoh to advance his purpose. But the same sun that melts the butter hardens the clay. The consistency of Pharaoh's heart proved such as to be hardened against God.

As I grow and develop more in the Lord I become more and more comfortable with the understanding of God's sovereignty. I understand that does not in any way take away my freedom of will. As a believer and a believer in the scripture I understand that God has both said to us that he is sovereign and we are free. I don't expect until I see the Lord that those truths will ever be reconciled completely for me. But I'm just as convinced that those truths are totally reconciled in God's mind. That he is sovereign and he has made us free.

I thought in terms of God's purposes if for example there were a large anthill in my back yard. The ants thought they had a great deal of freedom and made themselves busy assuming that that was their backyard. I left them there because I chose not to do anything. But as the owner of the yard there is nothing to prevent me from one day deciding to level it. And do what I want with the ants. There is no one that can hold me accountable for what I do to the ants. No court is going to drag me in and hold me responsible for what I did with an ant pile. Even the Humane

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Society isn't going to get me for what I do to ants. In my own backyard, in that area, I'm the potentate. I'll do what I want with the ants.

If God indeed is all creative and all-powerful he can do what he wants in his backyard. The great comfort about God is he himself holds himself accountable to himself. That his moral nature always balances his power so that when we prayed "God is great, God is good," we prayed two balancing things that are true. God is potentate. We sometimes have too weak a view of God, too insipid a view of God. Scripture knows that God does accomplish his purposes and chooses people for particular functions. Such is the case with Jacob. Do I understand it all? No. But do the scriptures teach it? Yes, they do.

Second fascinating thing from last week. I was talking about the influence of Rebecca upon Jacob. I mentioned that that influence was still predominating when Jacob was 70 years old. Jacob was 70 years of age when he put the goatskin on his hands and tricked his father Isaac and got the blessing. We think of him as a teenager. But by calculating the biblical chronology in the book of Genesis, Jacob was actually 70 years of age. Seventy years of age, still being dominated by his mother. She put him up to it and she assumed responsibility for it.

I was struck therefore this week with an article in *The Register* called "Mama's Boys." It discusses the mother influence on five greats of recent American history. The writer said For some men who have known maternal adoration life in the real world may be an awful comedown after life with Mama. It's disillusioning to be mama's fair-haired boy and then find out that the rest of the world doesn't treat you that way." Another writer in that same article said, "A line from Freud seems fitting: 'A man who has been the indisputable favorite of his mother keeps for life the feeling of a conqueror, that confidence of success that often induces real success.'"

That's an incredible line. Communicating to your children a sense of love that makes them feel that they are a conqueror. That confidence in their success makes it possible for them to attain real success. You see Rebecca doing exactly that with her son Jacob. Pushing him to success. Dressing him up when he was 70 years of age to play the role of his brother. Dominating his actions. Even denying herself the pleasure of her son's company by sending him off in order that his life could be preserved. Protecting him and making sure that he got the right wife. Because as Jacob is ready to flee from his brother one of the instructions that she communicates to her husband Isaac and Isaac passes on then to Jacob is that he not take for himself a heathen wife. But go back to Haran, the old family home and there find a wife.

In the scripture narrative we see that this was the supreme sacrifice for Rebecca for when Jacob returned from those twenty plus years away from home his father was still living but his mother was dead. She had willingly given him up in order to secure for him safety and an eventual family. Remarkable.

This mother dominance may smother some. But for Jacob and others it has given them a great security.

In a little work called "How Character Develops," the author outlines four types of persons who have a strong sense of self. Or strong drive of ego. He calls them The Star. This is the person who maintains their sense of self by seeking the limelight, adulation and glory. Stars love to

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shine. There are some people who simply like other people's eyes upon them and like to do things where they're noticed. Stars don't necessarily want power. Stars want to shine.

Another type of person who has a strong sense of self is The Clinging Vine. Self-centeredness here takes a different form. This person often seems to take a humble pose but he or she actually is clinging and overly dependent. They are making this attempt to avoid a responsible life. Their adaptation to life is basically one of a parasite.

Another is the Turtle. This person's problem is in relating to people. They're ego defense pulls them inside a shell where no one can reach them. Their self-centeredness takes the form of hiding from life and relationships. Developing a thick shell. Living encased in psychological armor. Not coming out and especially when threatened not coming out.

The fourth is the Nero complex of self-centeredness. In the form of lust for direct power and control. This kind of person wants to dominate.

Such a person is Jacob. He is a person who wants to dominate. He wants to rule his brother. He wants to get the promise of Abraham. He's not sure of what it is and what it all will entail in his life. I'm certain when he ends up with the fulfillment of the promise that it was far different than what he first thought when he first went for it. I'm sure at first it meant ruling the clan, being a small potentate, having servants, having everybody respect and obey him. But when he winds up he is instead heir to a spiritual promise and a spiritual heritage and a line that he will carry. He will pass through tremendous transformation.

John Sanford says there are three basic experiences in which our self-centeredness can be changed. Through suffering, through the recognition of a power that is higher than our own, by coming to care for someone other than ourselves. All three of these happened to Jacob in this transformation. I'd suggest that these three things when they happen to us bring tremendous transformation to our lives. We are transformed through suffering. Especially if we are a self-centered, self sufficient person for whom everything seems to always go right. Suffering teaches us that even the strong are vulnerable and even the strong may be cut down.

Thus far in his life, in the early years, Jacob had avoided suffering. Esau had been the hunter, the risk taker, the one who was out in the wilderness where he could be ravaged by beasts. The one who knew unknown dangers. Jacob was the one who stayed secure by dwelling at home in tents.

But now finally he is placed in mortal danger by Esau's threat, Genesis 27:41 where Esau vows to do him in when his father is gone. Jacob had failed to calculate in his stealing of Esau's birthright and blessing the anger that was boiling up within Esau.

He is sent out through the wilderness, 500 miles, on his own, ill equipped for a journey, plunged into circumstances where his highly developed side is useless. Jacob's highly developed side was his ability to think, his ability to dream, his ability to be smart with his head. His poorly developed side was his ability to get out there in the wilderness and encamp and know how to cope the dangers of coyotes and lions and bears and snakes. He could have easily perished from hunger or from the cold or been killed by bandits or wild animals or lost his way and wandered

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helplessly. His journey into the wilderness had to be frightful and painful and one filled with suffering because the darling of his mother's eyes now had no mother and was cast off alone. It's awful to be alone.

Paul reminds us in Romans 5:3 that suffering produces steadfastness or staying power and staying power produces character and character produces hope. It's a process at work.

But suffering doesn't always work in developing some people. Suffering, if you want to come out of self centeredness, I'm not writing a prescription and say, go through some suffering. Never would I say that. Some people don't derive any strength at all from suffering because they cheated suffering, they cheated their wilderness experiences, cheated in a spiritual sense. They turned that suffering into an occasion of self-pity. No one has ever had it as bad as me. Why am I being picked on? Why did the stone fall on my head? Why? Why pick on me? A person who loses themselves in self-pity will not successfully learn any lessons from suffering. Some in the midst of suffering use that suffering to manipulate others. And they play a martyr role in the family. Or some use suffering by just giving up and wanting to die.

Suffering itself is no cure. It only cures our self-centeredness and self-sufficiency when our attitude toward it is right. Jacob, one of the great transformations that happens in his life comes when he is forced to go through a wilderness. It's not something he would have chosen. None of us chooses to go through a wilderness. I'm not recommending a wilderness experience to develop spiritual strength and personal power. But show me a person who has successfully gone to the depths and I on the other hand will show you a person of power and strength that knows life and God on a deeper level than persons who have simply walked a plain and never struggled with a mountain road or deep valley. Suffering places that in our life. A divorce, a death, an illness, a financial reverse. The suffering may come to us and it may mean nothing at all and we may choose to deny God and deny power that can happen to us in the midst of that suffering. But if we will embrace God's purposes and begin saying, What now can you do in my life? What strength can you put in my life as result of this experience that will power me and gird me up to come out of myself into you and into wholeness and fullness. God will turn that suffering and that painful moment as he did with Joseph when he says to his brothers "You meant it for evil but God meant it for good."

Suffering is powerful in Jacob's life.

The second thing that transforms him out of his self centeredness, out of being mama's boy and becoming God's boy, is that he becomes subject to a will that is higher than his own.

He had lived so long of his life either calling the shots himself or letting his mother call the shots. But in Genesis 28:10-22 we read of his remarkable dream at Bethel. His moving out of home across the wilderness to Haran to his ancestor's home. One evening he lays down on the ground and puts a stone for a pillow under his head. For the first time in his life he meets God. He meets God in that place. This dream which he has of a ladder coming down from heaven, angels of God ascending and descending upon it and the Lord revealing himself to him and saying, "I am Yahweh (the Lord) the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying." It's the first time God's word had come to Jacob. "Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth. You will spread out to the west

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and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

What an encounter with God! But it was an encounter in the form of a dream, which suggests that there was a certain quality about it that was mirage, illusion, fantasy. Jacob might well had he been a person not well developed on the intuitive side have awakened from that dream, shook it off and said, “Just another one of those crazy nightmares!” But he was sensitive enough in his spirit, and to his credit that he’s developing on the spiritual side, that God is having access to his subconscious or unconscious life. God is speaking to us at a time before God had ever spoken to us by means of the scripture. God spoke in dreams. He does not dismiss the intuitive reality of God speaking to him in the depth of his being. Knowing God is far more than knowing words about God. I would submit it is even more than having knowledge of the Bible. Knowing God is far more than knowing about God. Or knowing the history of God’s dealings with his people. Knowing God comes into our experience, into the depth of our life and we come on an experiential level to know the God of the Bible. It’s an awesome moment when we meet with God for the first time in our life. Jacob meets with him.

The dream shows him that he must be more than just a man of the earth. There is a heaven and a ladder between earth and heaven. Sometimes what we are doing in our dream tells us something about the conscious state. It’s interesting in his dream that Jacob is passive. He is not ascending the ladder between heaven and earth. He is simply watching angels ascending and descending upon the ladder. He, Jacob, is still very much a man of the earth. Not yet godly. But before he is done ultimately in his life he’ll put himself on the ladder.

He encounters God. When he encounters God his life begins to change. We will never undergo change in our life until we really meet up with God and begin to understand and know who he is. Who he is that calls us to follow him.

Jacob had some limitations in that initial experience with God. It’s fascinating to watch him as he matures in his understanding of God over the years. In that first meeting with God he places two limitations on God. He reduces God to a God of a place. He says in Genesis 28:16 “Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it. How awesome is this place. This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven.” So Jacob builds a shrine there.

If you were to ask Jacob, where can a person meet God, he would not respond, “God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. You can meet God anywhere.” He’d say, “There’s one place I know in all the earth where you can meet God. He’s God at Bethel.” While we realize the inadequateness of that probably if I polled this group and asked you, where have you most felt the presence of God in your life, most of you know the place that is still hallow to you. That when you return to it, you feel a special sensitivity.

There are places in my life when I have a chance to walk and be in there’s something that comes over me. I am momentarily lifted out of ordinariness and I sense this place is special because in it I met God.

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Jacob will come from understanding that God is just God of a place and that was the religious idea in those days. Some people said we met God here. We worship the God that revealed himself here. People met God in different places. Jacob will eventually come out of that narrowness but he does meet God in the place.

Then cunning like and he shows his nature by attempting to manipulate God through bargaining. He prays a real iffy prayer. Jacob is a dealer. Had he lived today he would have been a businessman and a successful one. He attempts to establish a contract with God. He says in verse 20 "If you will be with me..." There come with that five if's. The ifs aren't stated but they're all assumed in succeeding phrases. Jacob's contract with God has these five clauses. If you will be with me, if you will watch over me in my journey, if you will give me food to eat, if you give me clothes to wear, and if I return safely to my father's house then Yahweh will be my God and I'll tithe." Strictly contractual. I do this for you, God, you do that for me. I'm faithful here you be faithful there. You don't break your contract, I don't break mine. Does that sound like anything you hear in the body of Christ today? There's certain terms of the contract. I do mine and you do yours. We shake on it and let's all be prosperous. That's exactly Jacob's understanding of God.

The funny thing was that he didn't even need the contract for he just had God's word. Where God assured him he had the promise. I am the Lord God of Abraham and Isaac and I'll give you the land on which you're lying. Jacob is still trying to wheel and deal with God to get it when he already has it.

Jacob is like a lot of people who want to cut a deal with God in return for safety, health and prosperity. Positive thing about his transformation is at least for the first time in his life he's recognized a power higher than his own. That brings change when you begin to live with that.

The third great factor in Jacob's transformation – not only does the face suffering and not only does he come to face someone greater than himself – but he comes to care for someone other than himself.

Delightful, tremendous story. What a romance. He stumbles out of the wilderness, comes to well where there were shepherds whom he asks if they know his mother's brother Laban. They indicate they do and in fact Laban's daughter is approaching. When she approaches although it's not the time to roll the stone from the well because in those days the large stone on it, it would take a lot of strength to move the stone. The shepherds would wait until all the flocks were in and then they would move it and all the flocks could be watered at one time. But when Rachel comes, Jacob is smitten. The first time we read about him doing anything for anybody other than himself is when he rolls the stone away for Rachel. You know he's making progress in his life when he finally does something for somebody else. It also shows he has some physical strength to tackle that stone by himself.

The third great event shatters his egocentricity. He falls in love. What a transition from going from mother dependence to the love of a woman. And Jacob was so in love with Rachel that he went to work for her. That will tell you whether a man, girls, is in love with you. Will he go to work for you?

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Laban couldn't have expected he invest his time all those years of raising daughters and not get paid for it. Some people when they fall in love really don't fall in love. They fall in love with love. The love is not in a real person. One way to tell whether a man loves a woman is whether he will work for her or is simply in love with himself. Women, young ladies, if the man you're wanting to marry is not willing to work for you don't marry him.

John Sanford has said, "The man who is unwilling to work to develop the relationship psychologically with a woman but only wants an unconscious instinctual relationship wants a woman just to be an extension of himself. Not having learned to love a woman for her own sake he tries to fit her into a box of his own devising and have her live in a bundle of unconscious expectations. He then sees the woman not as a person in her own right but as someone who is to make him happy. That is, his mother. If she disappoints him in this he turns sour and may punish her by having nothing to do with her."

Jacob was not such a man. He worked for 7 years. Genesis 29:29 says that although he worked for 7 years it just seemed like a few days. It's true that when life is flowing and energy is pouring into consciousness as it does when we are in love time flies. Time speeds by. It's only when life is not flowing. It's when it's not filled with energy. It's when our creativity is blocked that life becomes dull and boring and we start counting the minutes on the watch. Life when it's flowing is moving fast.

Then comes the shock. On his wedding day, Jacob is tricked by Laban and given Leah instead. Now he knows what it's like to be deceived. He who was the artful manipulator and the deceitful one is now beaten at his own game by his father-in-law. Galatians 6:7-8 "Don't be deceived, God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows that will he also reap."

When Rachel was finally given to him a week after his wedding with Leah one striking thing about his love for Rachel is unlike other men of the day who valued women for their productivity in giving birth to children, his love for Rachel continued even when she was childless. He grows to be man who puts another ahead of himself. Who learns to love.

How can we grow in the depths? What may our adversities be teaching us? Adversities do teach us if we will let them. Are we learning what we can rather than fighting them in a negative sense?

How can we come out of self to love another? How can we come out of our own hurt, out of our own world, out of our own feelings and come into really caring for another and be willing to work at really loving. Jacob comes out of self to love Rachel. Not a perfect lover by any stretch of the imagination. He had glaring faults as we will see. But he did come out of self to love Rachel.

Then we see that you come out of the depths by yielding your will to God's. Monet penned these words "O the bitter shame and sorrow that a time could ever be when I proudly said to Jesus, all of self and none of thee. Yet he found me. I beheld him bleeding on the accursed tree. And my wistful heart said faintly, some of self and some of thee. Day by day his tender mercy, healing helping full and free, brought me lower while I whispered, Less of self and more of thee.

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Higher than the highest heavens, deeper than the deepest sea, Lord, at last thy love has conquered. None of self and all of thee.”

Our father, there was a time in all of our lives when we said to you, all of self and none of thee. There may indeed be friends here this evening in this building who have said that consciously or unconsciously, None of thee, God. I'll wait until later in my life if I pick it up even then. But let me go now. Let me do my thing. Let me do it my way. All of self and none of thee. We pray for these that tonight they will realize that growing in the depths of their life will mean turning self over to God. Accepting the claims of Jesus as Lord and Savior. Others have come to know you but are saying some of self and some of thee. Lord, let me walk on two sides of the street. Let me when I'm doing my thing in the world, do my thing. Then when I'm serious about spiritual things, let me be serious about those. But let me go as I am, keeping you close enough to not be distant. And distant enough to not be close. Some of self and some of thee. Take my life and let it be holy consecrated Lord to thee. No just less of self and more of thee but none of self and all of thee. With our whole heart and mind and soul and strength we pray to serve you. In your wonderful name. Amen.