

Review: *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

DAY ONE

Read Genesis 33:1-8

1. As chapter 33 begins, Jacob prepared to meet his brother for the first time after twenty years of exile. When he saw Esau coming with four hundred men, he put the women and children in front in order of their rank. What do you think Jacob's demeanor communicated to Esau as he approached him (verses 1-3)?

2. Esau responded to his brother's return in an unexpected way. He ran to meet Jacob, embraced and kissed him and they wept together (verse 4). Our Commentary, page 66, states that we find a similar story of forgiveness and reconciliation in the story of the Prodigal Son. Refer to [Luke 15:11-23](#) and note a few similarities.

NOTE: Esau's tender, affectionate greeting reverses the kiss Isaac gave Jacob when Jacob stole Esau's blessing. *Collegeville*

3. We last read in [Genesis 27:41](#) that "Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing." Here, Esau's response to Jacob suggested that he forgave him. We do not know how Esau made the journey from anger and hatred toward his brother to forgiveness and love. From your own life experiences, what might be some of the things that softened Esau's heart?

4. After their emotional reunion, Esau looked up and saw the women and children and asked, "Who are these with you?" (verse 5) Summarize how Jacob presented his company to Esau in verses 5-8.

5. Do you think that Jacob was being scheming and manipulative or was he truly seeking reconciliation with his brother? What actions from this passage support your point of view? See the Commentary, pages 65-66, for some ideas.

6. **CONNECTION:** Twenty years have passed since the twin brothers have last seen each other. Jacob bows to the ground as he meets his brother and Esau responds with loving forgiveness. In the New Testament, Jesus teaches us to love one another and pray for everyone, even those who may have hurt us. Holding on to hurt and resentment can be harmful to everyone involved in a dispute. How can we resolve disagreements with love and respect, as we move on to forgiveness, tolerance and understanding? Share some thoughts.

Read and record Psalm 133:1. Today, write a prayer asking God to show you how to let go of any resentments that harden your heart towards a family member.

DAY TWO

Read Genesis 33:9-14

7. Following the reconciliation of the brothers, Jacob offered generous gifts to Esau. Record Esau's gracious reply from verse 9.

THINK: Today's world encourages us to have more and more. How many of us could say without hesitation, "I have enough"?

8. Jacob would not accept Esau's refusal of his gifts. Complete verse 10 below in which he attempted to persuade Esau.

if I find favor with you

for truly to see your face

since you have received me

9. In verse 11 Jacob urged Esau to accept the gifts he offered and Esau ultimately accepted Jacob's offer. Why do you think it was important for Esau to accept his brother's gifts?

NOTE: The word for *gift* in verse 11 is *b'rakah* from *brk*, meaning "to bless." The same two words were used frequently in chapter 27, when Jacob stole Esau's blessing from Isaac. Its use here in 33:11 is deliberate. Jacob is returning the blessing to Esau. *Miller*

10. The last time Jacob and Esau lived together, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob, and Jacob cheated Esau out of his blessing. In their reunion, the subject of possessions and ownership came up, but this time it was radically different. Look up one of the following verses and record what Scripture teaches about possessions and treasure.

Proverbs 15:27

Matthew 6:19

Acts 4:32

11. Esau assumed that Jacob planned to join him in Seir, but Jacob declined his invitation with various excuses (verses 12-14). In this story of reconciliation between the brothers, no words were exchanged about the events that led to their estrangement. How important are words in expressing repentance and seeking forgiveness? How important are actions?

NOTE: Verses 12-17 show that the reconciliation is not total and, further, that Jacob does not intend to share the ancestral land with his brother. *NABRE*

12. CONNECTION: Jacob wanted to give gifts to Esau instead of taking something from him as he had done before. Esau did not want to take anything from his brother, a big change from when he begged his father to give him some of the blessing given to Jacob. Now, it seems that the brothers' hearts were more generous and loving and no longer self-serving and greedy. As clearly seen in the story of Jacob and Esau, wealth and possessions can be the source of good or evil, generosity or selfishness. God blesses his people with earthly treasures, hoping they will use their riches for good. Describe someone you know who uses his or her wealth in ways that bless others and how that inspires your own generosity.

Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19. Today pray for the wisdom to use the things you have been given by God for the benefit of all.

DAY THREE

Read Genesis 33:15-20

13. Today we read that Esau offered to leave some of his people with Jacob. Once again Jacob refused Esau's proposal. Record his answer at the end of verse 15.

NOTE: The brothers now have different life-styles and goals. Jacob has no intention of joining Esau in Seir (v.14). Esau again understands, and the polite exchange in verse 15 allows each to go his own way (vv. 16-17). Jacob returns to Succoth, near Peniel, where he builds a house for himself and "sheds" (sukkot) for cattle. He becomes a sedentary for a time. *Scullion*

14. When their meeting concluded, Esau returned to Seir. Jacob told Esau he would meet him there but changed his plans. Jacob journeyed to Succoth and settled there (verses 16-17). It is clear that Jacob was reluctant to travel with Esau. What reasons might he have for this? (Refer to Genesis 31:17-18 and note Jacob's original intended destination.)

15. "Jacob shows very brotherly feelings towards Esau but he also behaves with great prudence. This is one of the patriarch's prominent virtues: he always manages to act circumspectly in the difficult situations he often encounters." (*Navarre*) Define the word prudence and describe why it is an important quality in a leader.

16a. In verse 18 we read that Jacob finally came safely to the city of Shechem in the Jordan valley of Canaan in the Promised Land and camped before the city. According to verse 19, what did Jacob do concerning the place on which he pitched his tent?

b. This was the second purchase of land in Canaan by the Israelites. Record some details of the previous purchase made by Abraham in Genesis 23:17-20.

NOTE: This brings him through the Jordan Valley where Succoth is, to the promised land, to the city of Shechem, which Abraham also reached when he entered Canaan (12:6). Here, Jacob acquires some land where he builds an altar: in a way he somewhat formally takes possession of the land even before he reaches Bethel, which will be where the patriarch settles down to live until he goes into Egypt. *Navarre*

17. What did Jacob do after he purchased the land near Shechem according to verse 20?

NOTE: [Jacob's well is the] site where Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman (John 4:6). The well--the only one mentioned specifically in the New Testament--was said to have been used by Jacob's family and flocks (John 4:12). It is not named in the Old Testament, but traditionally, the site is said to be near Shechem and John's narrative probably connects it with this location as well (John 4:5; cf. Gen 18:33). In the sixth century, a Byzantine church was built over what was believed to be the well; a restored church was never finished. *Catholic Bible Dictionary, Hahn*

18. CONNECTION: Despite their reconciliation, Jacob chose not to live with Esau. He may have realized that, despite their amicable family reunion, his time away may have made it hard for him to live as a family near Esau again. In Genesis, we have read about many difficult familial relationships which are not unlike those we encounter in our lives. Occasionally, some relationships with friends or family members seem to function better at a distance. That gives us the space we need to pray for help in resolving any conflicts we might have. What are some ways our faith helps us to keep these relationships healthy despite the distance and past conflicts?

Read and record Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 25:1. As you pray today, ask God to show you how to live in peace and harmony with others in your life.

DAY FOUR

Read Genesis 35:1-5

NOTE: As a reminder, we are not able to study all fifty chapters of Genesis in this twenty week study so chapter 34 is not included.

NOTE: Chapter 35 includes several episodes that seem at first glance to be isolated incidents in Jacob's life. In actuality each one relates to the whole cycle of stories about Jacob, showing that his life has come full circle during his absence from his father's house. The conniving, energetic youth who fled from his brother Esau has become a cautious father and protector of his land. This part of the narrative appears to be a compilation of stories from different sources; as a result we find incidents that appear to duplicate previous episodes. *Collegeville*

19. In verse 1 God spoke to Jacob after a silence of ten years (see Genesis 28:10-12; Genesis 31:3). He told him to settle in Bethel and make an altar there. We have read passages about altars erected by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Home altars for family worship have long been a tradition in Catholic homes. Comment on your familiarity with this tradition or how you would feel about using one.

20. In verse 2 we read that Jacob prepared his people to get ready for the move to Bethel. Note how you would explain the spiritual meaning in today's world of one of the preparations the people were to perform.

Put away foreign gods

Purify yourselves

Change your clothes

NOTE: The burial of the "foreign gods" and the assorted trinkets are a sign of a religious reorientation and acceptance of the supreme God, El, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v.4). *Scullion*

21. After all was in order, Jacob said to his people: "...come, let us go up to Bethel." Record his reason for making an altar there (end of verse 3). (Good memory verse)

22. According to verse 4, Jacob's people gave him all their foreign gods and the rings in their ears and he hid them. Before beginning their journey to Bethel, Jacob was preparing his people to worship the one true God, turning them from idol worship. Look up one of the following passages and record what is written about idol worship.

Jonah 2:8

Habakkuk 2:18

Colossians 3:5

23. Describe what happened according to verse 5 as they traveled through pagan territory.

NOTE: The terror or power of the protection of God is also described in Exodus 15:16; Exodus 23:27; Deuteronomy 2:25.

24. CONNECTION: Today we read that God told Jacob to go to Bethel and he promptly answered his call. Before starting the journey, he realized his sons and their families needed his leadership if they were to inherit the covenant promises. While we imagine a leader to be a strong personality who handles even the toughest situations clearly and calmly, the leaders that God chooses, like Jacob, are often not like that; they must depend on his power, strength and wisdom to accomplish the task. Have you been called to lead but felt reluctant and unsure? Did you feel God's presence when you needed it? Describe a leader who embodies effective Christian leadership.

Read 1 Peter 5:2-4 and record a verse that reflects good Christian leadership. Pray today to be open to saying "yes" the next time you are asked to be a leader.

DAY FIVE

Read Genesis 35:6-15

25. Today we read that Jacob and all who were with him left Shechem and began the journey to Bethel (Luz) in the land of Canaan (verse 6). Describe his actions when he reached Bethel and the reason for them according to verse 7.

NOTE: [verse 8] The narrative does not mention Rebekah's death, only the death of her nurse who had accompanied her from Paddan-Aram to Canaan. (Gen:59). That the site of her grave, under an oak tree below Bethel hill, was named "Oak of Tears/Weeping," suggests that Deborah was loved and that she probably raised both Jacob and Esau. *Agape*

26. When Jacob came to Bethel from Paddan-aram (by way of Shechem), God appeared to him again and blessed him (verse 9). In verse 10 God told Jacob that his name would no longer be Jacob, but Israel. Why do you think this name change was repeated by the ancient author (see Genesis 32:28)?

27. God continued speaking to Jacob. The first command he gave Jacob was, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply" (verse 11). Under what circumstances were other Old Testament figures given this same command?

Genesis 1:26-28

Genesis 8:17-18

NOTE: One cannot fail to notice how frequently God now speaks to Jacob (cf. vv.1, 9, 11). Obviously, the sacred writer wants to stress that God accompanies Jacob and that they are on familiar terms now that he is once again in the promised land; even though God did not leave him unprotected when he was abroad. *Navarre*

28. Then God repeated the covenantal promises to Jacob. Record God's words in the second part of verse 11 and verse 12.

29. After God finished speaking, Jacob worshiped the LORD (verse 13-15). Select one of his worship activities from the following list and comment on its similarity to liturgies we use today.

Jacob set up a memorial pillar of stone.

He poured out a drink offering and oil on it.

He gave the place the name of Bethel which means, "house of God."

30. **CONNECTION:** After many detours and false moves, Jacob at last began to live the life to which God had called him. He began not only to listen to God who "had spoken with him" but also to follow his commands. In our lives we too are sometimes called by God but take an indirect route before finding our true path to him. Recall a time when you or another were called by God for a task that took some time until starting his work. Or maybe you are feeling called to begin a long-awaited journey. What physical, mental and spiritual resources help us to discern that spiritual path?

In Psalm [119:105](#) we read that "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." As you pray today, ask God to show you the right path to follow in life.

DAY SIX

Read Genesis 35:16-29

31. After some time, Jacob and his entourage left Bethel and journeyed towards Ephrath. While they were still on the journey, Rachel was in childbirth. Summarize the details of the birth from verses from verses 16-18.

32. The meaning of the name Rachel would have given the child was "son of my sorrow," but Jacob renamed him, Benjamin, meaning "son of my right hand." In the ancient world, it was thought that a name could determine the destiny of its bearer. Comment on whether you think Jacob was acting out of love for Rachel and his newborn son or for some other reason in making the change.

NOTE: Rachel's tomb: Her traditional resting place is still memorialized in Bethlehem today. The evangelist Matthew assumes knowledge of this tradition when he speaks of Rachel weeping over the slaughtered infants of Bethlehem (MT 2:16-18). *Ignatius Study Bible*

33. From verses 19-21, note what Jacob did to mourn the death of his beloved wife, Rachel, and what he did after she was buried.

NOTE: Verse 22 includes an indiscretion committed by Jacob's son, Reuben, and then notes that Jacob now had twelve sons. Their names and the names of their mothers are included in verses 23-26. Notice that one of Jacob's children is not mentioned. Why do you think that is?

34. In verse 27 we read that Jacob has finally returned home to his father, Isaac, at Mamre (Hebron). It had been more than twenty years since he left home. This verse referred to his father and his grandfather, Abraham, as resident aliens. Look up the word *alien* and describe what it means in this passage.

35. Isaac was one hundred eighty when he breathed his last (verse 28). In verse 29 we read that the brothers were united again to bury their father. How does this meeting clarify the reconciliation between the two brothers, Esau and Jacob?

36. CONNECTION: Though Jacob took on the mantle of leadership, fulfilling God's plan, he still remained an alien in the land promised to him and his offspring after him. He was blessed with a new son, but lost his beloved wife in childbirth. And although he is reunited with his brother Esau, it is to bury their father, Isaac. Life is always a series of ups and downs; it will never be completely smooth and joyful until we get to heaven. Think about your life right now, both the good and the unpleasant, knowing that God is with you. What are some ways that faith helps us to see hidden blessings in the sorrowful or troubling times of life?

Read and record Luke 3:5-6. Let thoughts of this promise, given to us by Jesus as hope for eternity, lead you into prayer.

NOTE: We will not study the following chapter, chapter 36, which concerns Esau and his descendants. Esau and his family did not live in the land of Canaan, which effectively ceded the Promised Land to his younger brother, Jacob. Esau's descendants formed the nation of Edom, "in the hill country of Seir." Jacob and his family settled in the land where Abraham had settled and were left to fulfill the promise God made to Abraham.

Read pages 64-66 in *The Book of Genesis* by Lawrence DiPaolo, Jr., Ph.D. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, Catholic Edition. Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.