

Back to the Beginning: God Works Despite Us

Gen 29:31-30:24

1. Are you a planner and do you make plans? How do you feel when things don't work out as planned? How do you feel when things work out well for someone who does no planning or preparation? What does this mean (if anything) for the making and fulfilment of plans?
2. In our usage, 'love' and 'hate' are terms used to describe internal states and emotions but in the first century world, the terms have a group orientation, with 'love' conveying the idea of 'attachment to', 'allegiance to', 'loyalty to' and 'hate' conveying 'detachment from' 'not showing allegiance to', 'not being loyal to'. How does this understanding inform our reading of Genesis 29:31? What about other verses like Matt 6:24; 22:37-38; 10:37; Lk 14:26. In light of this it has been suggested that Paul's famous triad in 1 Cor 13:13 (faith, hope, love) might be best translated: "personal loyalty, enduring trust in another, group attachment, and the greatest of these is group attachment." What do you think of this?
3. Reflect on and discuss the names given to Jacob's sons in the following table.

Name	'Mother'	Meaning	Explanation
Reuben	Leah	'see a son'	The Lord has noticed my misery, and now my husband will love me.
Simeon	Leah	'one who hears'	The Lord heard that I was unloved and has given me another son.
Levi	Leah	'attached'	Surely this time my husband will feel affection for me, since I have given him three sons!
Judah	Leah	'Yahweh be praised'	Now I will praise the Lord!
Dan	Rachel via Bilhah	'vindication'	God has vindicated me! He has heard my request and given me a son.
Naphtali	Rachel via Bilhah	'my struggle'	I have struggled hard with my sister, and I'm winning!
Gad	Leah via Zilpah	'fortune/luck'	How fortunate I am!
Asher	Leah via Zilpah	'happy/blessed'	What joy is mine! Now the other women will celebrate with me.
Issachar	Leah	'rewards/wages'	God has rewarded me for giving my servant to my husband as a wife.
Zebulun	Leah	'dowry/gift', 'honour'	God has given me a good reward. Now my husband will treat me with respect, for I have given him six sons.
Joseph	Rachel	'may he add'	God has removed my disgrace. May the Lord add yet another son to my family.

Note that the name for Leah's daughter Dinah is not explained at all. This reflects the importance on sons in this period and daughters were not considered important.

4. How do you feel about God using Jacob, a conniving, cheating, stealing man driven by his passions, to achieve his purposes? What does this tell us about God? What does it tell us about ourselves?
5. It was stated in the sermon that if you are still here, then God has not finished with you yet. What do you think about such a claim? What should be your response to this?
6. .What conflict are you currently facing that seems impossible to resolve? Share this with the group and pray for each other.
7. Many of the problems in Jacob's family resulted from failing to consult God except when they wanted something from him. How prone are we to do this? Spend some time in confession of our failure to seek God, obey him, pray to him, and praise him.
8. We must never forget that despite our failings, God still loves us and that he still works despite us. Finish with thanking him for his mercy and grace towards us.