

Jacob: Lessons in Parenting Genesis 33-35

Parenting can bring out the worst in us; but it can also bring out the best if we'll learn from Jacob's failures and follow his successes. No family on earth is beyond hope of redemption or beyond need of growth.

Turn to Genesis 34

Here's something I've learned in the last 8 years...

There is nothing like parenting to bring out the worst in me

- For 33 years I thought I was a patient person, kind, considerate, slow to anger
- But then I had kids... discovered a side of myself I'd never seen!
- Who knew I could yell? So unlike me!
- Turns out I am WAY more selfish than I thought... and it just took kids to teach me that

Parenting is the hardest and most stressful job I've ever had

- **for that reason, it can bring out the worst in us**
- **We'll see that in Jacob this morning... Jacob at his worst, failing as a parent**
- We'll study his failures to learn what NOT to do as parents

But then we'll end by looking at his successes...

- Because with God's help, Jacob turned some things around in his parenting
- He's proof that parents are never beyond hope... we can learn and grow
- We can get better at parenting and bless our kids even if we've blown it in the past
- We'll learn how to do that from the second part of Jacob's parenting story

Now obviously, I will be speaking primarily to parents – this is directly relevant to us

But if you're not a parent, please don't tune out... because...

1. It is never too early to start learning how to be a good parent!

- If you do have kids one day, at that point, you won't have time to learn anything!
- You will be a sleep-deprived, overwhelmed zombie just trying to survive!

2. Whether we're parents or not, all of us are products of parenting

- The way your parents raised you has enduring effects on your life, both for good & bad
- **Your parents did some things right**
 - You need to acknowledge those things, thank God for them, follow their example
- **But your parents also did some things wrong**
 - All parents do, myself included.
- **You need to recognize what your parents did wrong so you can avoid their example**
 - **You see, sin is inherently generational**
 - We tend to follow the examples we learn from our parents, including negative
 - If you're not paying attention... you'll fall into the same bad habits you learned
 - Jacob inherited his father's sins & passed them to his sons
 - Doesn't have to be that way – you can be the break in the chain of generational sin
 - Recognize where your parents fell short
 - Pray that God will help you become the break in that particular chain of sin
 - That He will begin to grow you now so you don't pass that sin on to anyone else

So let's look at Jacob's example as a parent – begin with what he did wrong...

Bad Parenting 101

In c33-34 Jacob makes 2 massive parenting mistakes

1. Compromise with Sin

- **Read 33:18 Settles safely in the city of Shechem** – sounds good!
- **Just one problem... Read 28:20-22**
 - Jacob had made a promise / a vow to God
 - If you bless me, protect me, provide for me... which God had done
 - Then I will make this place your house = build an altar and worship here
 - This place = **Bethel** – place where Jacob first encountered God -
 - But a wilderness – no town, no stream... no name! Not called "Bethel" yet
 - Not an inviting place to settle down
- **So Jacob made a *little* compromise (*map*)**
 - Jacob started in Haran and gets most of the way to Bethel...
 - But then finds a nice little town called **Shechem** that had lots to offer
 - sat at the intersection of trade routes through the Promised Land
 - wealthy – lots of produce and goods available
 - A much easier place to live than Bethel – more comfortable, more pleasant
 - So Jacob buys land and builds his altar in Shechem instead of Bethel
 - maybe he figured he'd go the rest of the way in the future... "next year"
 - maybe he figured this was close enough... "Come on, I'm 90% there!"
 - Whatever his reason, Jacob chose to make a compromise
 - Chose that which was easier and more pleasant over that which was obedient
- **That seemingly small compromise cost Jacob's family incredible pain and suffering**
 - That's the next part of the story where we find Jacob's second failure as a parent...

2. Check out

- when life got hard, Jacob got passive. Disengaged; results were tragic...
- **Read 34:1**
 - Very bad idea!!
 - Incredibly dangerous in that era of history for a young woman to go alone
 - Like a stroll alone through North Korea!
 - But don't blame Dinah – she was only around 15 – didn't know better
 - Whose fault is this? Her parents' – especially her father's!
 - He should have said "no," or gone with her, or send someone to protect her
 - But Jacob's checked out – not involved with his kids – doesn't know or doesn't care
 - Let's vulnerable daughter do something dangerous... results predictable
- **In the city of Shechem... a man named Shechem – son of the ruler**
 - saw this beautiful young woman with no escort
 - so kidnapped and raped her – tragic but not surprising in the ancient world
 - What is surprising: he falls in love with her – asks his dad to get her as a wife
- **Read v5-7**
 - Jacob's lack of emotion should shock us!
 - No rage?... no grief?
 - Ironically it's his sons who have the right response – "grieved, very angry"
 - At this point in story, they're more righteous than their dad – they care!
- **Shechem wants Dinah for a wife, so he and his father Hamor negotiate for her**

- **Read v11-13**
 - Notice: Shechem speaks to both Jacob and his sons
 - But only “Jacob’s sons answered...”
 - He checked out – so his sons check in and lead the family
 - BUT you get a hint that they’re leading the family in a bad direction: “with deceit”
- **Read v14-15**
 - “All your men must be circumcised if you want our sister as your wife”
 - Jacob’s daughters must have been quite a catch because the Shechemites agree!
 - While they are recovering from incredibly painful surgery...
- **Read v25**
 - When parents check out, children can end up doing awful things
 - **Used God’s command of circumcision as a tool for murder**
 - like inviting people to be baptized, then holding under till they drowned!
 - This isn’t justice – it’s genocide – slaughtered every man
- Simeon and Levi are the ones responsible for this bloodshed – they are guilty
- But ultimate fault lies with Jacob – his compromise & passivity led to this violence
- **This second sin** is my personal temptation!
 - When kids are disobedient, whiny – I want to check out – hit escape
 - want to slip in to other room to check phone or watch TV
 - or avoid the whole situation by staying longer at work than I need
- Such a common struggle for so many fathers – check out when family needs you most

Parents: what we must recognize is the pain and destruction that results from compromising with sin or checking out...

- **This family of believers end up murdering innocent people! Worst sin of all!**
 - maybe the rapist deserved punishment, but not everyone else! = Genocide!
- **So ch34 is a warning: if it happened in Jacob’s family, it can happen in ours**
 - Parents, if we make compromises with sin...
 - live with a little disobedience because it makes life easier, more comfortable
 - Or if we check out...
 - by throwing ourselves at the TV, internet, or into career, hobbies
 - We’re setting our families up for a Gen 34 kind of moment
- If you compromise & check out: you set your family up to make nightly news for all the wrong reasons!

That’s the bad news – but here’s the good news – God isn’t done with this family!

- God will bring lots of healing in ch35... and even more later in Genesis
- By end of book, Jacob’s family will be a success story in many ways
 - there’s forgiveness, love, a legacy of God’s faithfulness
- **So Jacob’s family also proves that no family on earth is beyond hope of restoration!**
- You may feel like you have failed as a parent, that you have doomed your children
- But think about it...
 - if your kids haven’t slaughtered a medium-sized town
 - then your family is not as bad as Jacob’s
 - so if his family can be healed, so can yours!!
- God’s grace is without limits – He can heal any wound and recover any loss
 - True for the family you were raised in as well – there’s always hope!

Restoration is possible for any family... and it begins with the parents taking the lead...

Good Parenting 101 – how to be a good parent, step #1...

1. Lead in Repentance - Read 35:1-6

- **Jacob first repents of his own sin of compromise**
 - v1 – God convicts him – “Time to fulfill your promise & go to Bethel.”
 - Jacob responded immediately – gathered his family and went to Bethel
 - That’s what repentance looks like – not just words, but actions
 - Repentance NOT just saying “I’m sorry, please forgive me”
 - Repentance = you turn from the sin and begin to obey
 - Side note: this repentance issue comes up a lot in marriages
 - E.g. Husband lies to wife or has affair or hits her
 - He feels convicted; asks for forgiveness; promises to never do again
 - Now that he’s repented, shouldn’t the wife welcome back with open arms
 - No, wait: that’s not what repentance means!
 - Good to ask for forgiveness and promise to not do again
 - But repentance requires follow-through – requires substantial action
 - Depending on the offense, repentance might take days... or years!
 - For Jacob, repentance likely took weeks
 - leave homes near Shechem and move everything to wilderness of Bethel
 - Jacob repented of his own sin... then he encouraged his family to follow his lead...
- **Leads his family to repent of their sin of idolatry**
 - Idolatry began with Rachel – his favorite wife – stole Laban’s idols
 - No evidence of Jacob being an idolater – didn’t know about the theft at first
 - But when he found out, he did nothing – let it spread to the kids, fester
 - Now he’s finally ready to step up – addresses the sin & encourages repentance
- **Parents, here’s what this looks like for us...**
- **First, we must model repentance in our own lives**
 - Must stop making excuses for sin
 - Instead, acknowledge it and turn from it – that’s repentance
 - Take a moment and think about your life... **Have you compromised with sin?**
 - Should do this but haven’t... shouldn’t do that but have...
 - Whatever sin you’ve been living with, it’s time to repent
 - confess the sin to God – acknowledge it was wrong and ask for help
 - if the sin was against someone else, confess to that person
 - If I’m unkind to Julie or the kids – I immediately ask their forgiveness
 - My kids will never be under delusion that they have perfect dad
 - But at least they’ll know they have a dad who’s quick to repent!
 - Repentance must begin with us – the parents!
- **Second, encourage repentance in our families**
 - When you see your spouse or kids sin, don’t be silent about it. Don’t check out.
 - Address the sin lovingly – balancing grace and truth – encouraging repentance
 - If they don’t repent, love them anyways – our love should be unconditional
 - But we must have the courage to address sin in our families
 - Unloving to stay silent – doing them no favors!
 - Pray and ask God to show you how

That’s the first step to good parenting... here’s the second...

2. Lead in Worship - Read 35:7-15

- **Jacob builds two altars – both in Bethel**
 - first in v7... then God speaks – reminds Jacob of the covenant promises God had given to his grandfather Abe – then Jacob builds 2nd altar v14
 - how you worshipped in Jacob’s day = a permanent monument to God’s glory

- Jacob led his family in worship
- **Parents, let's do the same – here's a couple simple ideas...**
 - **Pray with your kids**
 - Before meals and at night before bed
 - Keep it simple – no big words
 - *"Thank you God for giving me Luke. Thank you that you love him and protect him. Thank you that Jesus died to take away Luke's sins and mine, too. Please, God, help Luke to learn to love you and follow you. In Jesus' name, amen."*
 - **Help your kids give thanks**
 - **Psalm 78:4b**
 - Parents, we are responsible to tell our children what good things God has done for us
 - It is our job to teach them to see and give thanks for God's blessings
 - Humans aren't born grateful! Gratitude doesn't come naturally!
 - We must teach this discipline to our kids and help them practice it
 - Julie's excellent idea – when kids were young and fighting, whiny...
 - made them each name 1 thing grateful for in life
 - As they've gotten older, made it 2 things, 3, 4...
 - **Teach them how to give thanks = the essence of worship**

Let me wrap all this up with a big idea to take away...

Parents, our primary responsibility is NOT *for* our children, it's *to* our children

Let me explain

- So many parents live under crushing assumption that they're responsible **for**
 - that they are held responsible for the decisions their children make
 - that they're responsible for raising godly well-adjusted successful kids
- No!
 - Our children are human; they have free will to make their own choices
 - We cannot control them – can't control the outcome
 - Even the best parents sometimes have wayward children.
 - Proof: God!! Best father there is... and yet some of His kids are absolutely awful!!
- **We are not responsible *for* our kids... We are responsible *to* our kids**
 - That little change of preposition changes everything
 - We are responsible **to** our kids to be **models of faith, obedience, worship**
 - Jacob failed as a parent in ch33-34
 - not because of his kids' decisions
 - because of his own decisions to compromise & check-out
 - He failed because he didn't get his own life in order – he wasn't a good model
- **Our greatest responsibility *to* our kids = model what it looks like to follow Jesus**
 - **That begins with faith**
 - You enter a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ
 - If you haven't yet trusted in Jesus for eternal life... most important thing!
 - **For those of us who have trusted, our responsibility is to be a model...**
 - of worship and obedience
 - and when we fail, of repentance

No matter where your family is on the spectrum of healthy to unhealthy, we can all do better

- We all need God's grace
- We all need Him to heal and forgive and restore – beginning with us parents

So let's go to Him in prayer and ask for His help...