

## Genesis 29:1-30 — The Painful Path of Maturity

**May 15, 2016**

It is great to have you. We are studying the book of Genesis. This morning we are in Genesis 29. Take out your notes and open your Bibles or iPads.

We are studying the life of Jacob. Jacob is the grandson of Abraham. Abraham's son was named Isaac. Isaac had twin boys named Esau and Jacob. As we learned last week, Esau and Jacob were as different as night and day. Esau was a hairy man. He was so hairy that whenever he sat on the couch, he left more hair on it than a golden retriever. When he had an itch, he left a hairball around the house. Jacob was the exact opposite. His skin was as smooth as a newborn baby.

Neither Jacob or Esau deserved to be the next patriarch. Esau's character was a mess. He lived for fun, food and females. He married three pagan wives because he thought one woman wasn't enough. Jacob wasn't any better. He was single but he was a con man. He was a ripoff artist par excellence. He ripped off his brother twice and his blind father once. Stealing from family members are not the career highlights you want listed on your resume. Jacob lived a lonely life. Nobody trusted him. His name became synonymous with cheating in Hebrew. That is not the kind of legacy you want to leave of your life for the next generation.

When Jacob cheated his brother out of the family inheritance by ripping off his blind old man, Esau was so angry he planned to kill Jacob. Jacob ran away to

save his life. In deceptive Jacob style, he told everybody he was running to his mother's brother to look for a godly wife. That was only partial truth. He was running to save his skin.

Last week Jacob had a come-to-Jesus moment. He was about 70 miles out of town. He was in the wilderness. He was low on supplies and fearing for his life and his brother hunting him down with his bow. He was sleeping under the stars with nothing more than a rock for a pillow. God broke into Jacob's life in a dream. It was a dream of God reaching down to him from heaven with a stone staircase. On the stone staircase reaching from heaven to earth God was sending his angels up and down. We know from the rest of the Bible that God sends his angels to watch over those who will inherit salvation. God showed Jacob he was sending his angels to watch and protect Jacob's life as he faced uncertainty, fear and hunger each day. God promised to take care of Jacob and bring him back to the Promised Land. God also promised to make an entire nation from him.

Last week, at the lowest moment of Jacob's life, we saw God giving him amazing grace he didn't deserve. That is the same thing God does with us. He gives us grace at our lowest moments in our life. A grace we don't deserve. In John 1:51 Jesus said to Nathaniel that he is the stairway from heaven to earth that Jacob saw. He is the grace of God reaching down to save us at our lowest times in life, a grace we don't deserve.

Today, Jacob's story continues. He finally arrived in Paddan-Aram. He came to the home of his mother's brother. He was looking for a wife. For all the

ladies that watch day-time television, this is your Sunday. This chapter reads like a pimped out episode of the Young and the Restless. It is daytime soap opera with love triangles, betrayal and broken relationships from beginning to end.

My game plan this morning is simple. I want to immerse you in the story. I want you to feel it. I want you to experience the anger and betrayal. When we are done experiencing this chapter, we will wrap up with one major point of application and a little grace that we all need. Let's dive in.

Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east. As he looked, he saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep lying beside it, for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place over the mouth of the well. Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran." He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" They said, "We know him." He said to them, "Is it well with him?" They said, "It is well; and see, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!" He said, "Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered together. Water the sheep and go, pasture them." But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep." Genesis 29:1–8 (ESV)

After Jacob woke up from his dream at Bethel, Jacob resumed his journey. The Hebrew says "he picked up his feet." Before this he was apparently dragging his feet. Last week we learned he didn't have enough room in his luggage to carry a pillow. He used a rock. If you don't have enough room for a pillow, that means you are probably not carrying supplies with an animal. You are backpacking and carrying your supplies yourself. I picture Jacob like one of those hitchhikers walking down the road. He had a worn out backpack, ripped jeans and sneakers with holes. He was in serious need of a shave and a bar of soap. He was tired. He was depressed. After God assured him of his love and

that God was watching out for him and would take care of him, he picked up his feet. He picked up his attitude. He didn't know what lay ahead but he knew God would be with him and God promised to take care of him. God's angels were watching over him. We don't know for sure that Jacob had absolutely nothing with him, but we do know he called these "the days of my distress."

This trip was good for him. He went from a guy that constantly hung out with mom in the kitchen to carrying a heavy pack and walking more than 500 miles. That was some serious roughing it. If that doesn't make a man out of you, I don't know what would. This trip was his version of Marine bootcamp. This is probably the first time Jacob carried anything this heavy in his life. It was good for him. It didn't hurt him. Hard work turns boys into men. It changes their character. It matures them. God used this long hard trip that pushed his limits to change Jacob emotionally and physically.

Jacob finally arrived in town, and he came to the community well. He saw three flocks of sheep lying beside the well waiting to be watered. There were probably three shepherds with the sheep. They weren't doing much. They were playing with blades of grass, drinking coffee and clucking like women that drank too much espresso. You know the drill. Their purpose in life at that moment was nothing more than watching grass grow.

Jacob finally asked the guys, "Where do you come from?" They tell him they came from Haran. Haran! Good news! The GPS worked. You hate to have the GPS not working when you are walking 500 miles.

Jacob said to them, “Why are you lazy dudes sitting around clucking like a bunch of hens? Water the sheep and take them to pasture so they can get some grass. After all, if I can walk 500 miles with a hundred pound pack, you guys should get to work.”

The shepherds give him an excuse. “Nobody is strong enough to move the stone off the well.” They need to wait for assistance because the stone capping the well is too heavy for them to move.

In the Middle East, capping a well with a stone was common practice. That kept people from falling in. It kept animals from falling in. It kept dirt and debris out of the well. It is no different than putting a lid on the mayonnaise jar. If you don't keep a lid on the mayonnaise jar I am not coming for lunch. You would be amazed at when ends up in the mayonnaise jar when you don't use a lid.

While the three shepherds were waiting for the rest of the shepherds to arrive so they had enough horsepower to roll the stone away the heavy stone, the lazy shepherds told Jacob Laban was well and his daughter Rachel was coming. Rachel was a shepherdess. She was arriving with her sheep. Later we learn she was a beautiful woman. She was probably the reason those three guys showed up early. They were more interested in spending time with Rachel than spending time with the sheep. That is the way young men work.

I want you to picture the scene. Jacob — the lonely guy — was looking for a wife. He was on the road traveling for months by himself. He just completed Marine bootcamp. He was working out all day by carrying his stuff and hiking with a pack. There were a bunch of wimpy, chatty guys who were too

wimpy to move a rock. There was a beautiful woman coming toward Jacob. The other three shepherds were interested in her. There was a huge rock capping the well that three of these shepherds working together were not strong enough to move. What do you think was about to happen? You guessed it. Jacob was about to show off his strength for the pretty lady.

While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father. As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month. Genesis 29:9–14 (ESV)

Rachel showed up. As I said, she was a drop-dead gorgeous kind of a woman. She didn't use makeup because she didn't need makeup. Jacob was in top shape. He went from the physique of Steve Rogers to looking like Captain America. He decided to impress Rachel and single-handedly moved the well-cap stone weighing 700-1,000 pounds. Jacob was apparently a complete stud at this point in his life. I am not the only one who noticed this. Jewish tradition considers Jacob to be giant and a man of superhero strength. I don't know exactly what happened to Jacob or how he became so buff. All I know is the Jewish rabbis thought he turned into quite a stud. You get the idea that Jacob — a.k.a. mama's boy — took the Captain America serum.

Understandably, the other shepherds were embarrassed. I am sure they were hitting on Rachel because she was a knockout. It was clear there was a

new sheriff in town. Jacob was the stud. The other shepherds were wimps. Rachel was captivated by the man with the muscle. Nobody messes with a guy that does superhuman feats of strength.

Jacob then watered Rachel's sheep. He was apparently not just all muscles but he had compassion and etiquette. He served Rachel. He honored Rachel.

When Jacob was done watering her flock, he couldn't hold back his emotions. He broke down crying. He was a guy in touch with his emotional side. He sounds like the perfect catch. Muscles, caring and emotionally sensitive. He was so sensitive that he couldn't stop kissing Rachel as he cried.

Just so you guys don't get this wrong. This was not biblical validation for kissing a girl on the first date. This was an emotional meltdown kind of kiss. Jacob was on the road for months. He was alone and far from home in a foreign land. It was scary. It was hard. This moment is like coming home from a foreign missions trip when you are gone the entire summer and when you come home, your parents are waiting for you just past security with a big poster that says, "Welcome home!" Your girlfriend or boyfriend is waiting to see you. You run to each other, hug each other and kiss each other. It is so good to be home! It was that moment for Jacob. He was finally back with family. He had a place to belong. He had a home. This is too good to be true.

After Jacob got some self-control and calmed down, he explained who he was. Next Rachel had her meltdown. She was so excited she left Jacob standing at the well and ran to tell her father, Laban.

Laban heard and he had a meltdown then ran to meet Jacob. Everybody was crying. Everybody was hugging. It looked like the final scene of a movie where the credits roll and say, "...and everyone lived happily ever after." There is more to the picture than meets the eye.

Jacob and Rachel were thinking about love and romance. Why was Laban crying for joy? The last time the other side of the family showed up it was Abraham's servant that came looking for Rebecca. He paid a huge dowry to acquire her for Isaac. When Laban heard Isaac and Rebecca's son Jacob showed up and he met Rachel, his daughter, at a well just like it happened one generation before, what do you think Laban was thinking? Dollar signs! He was thinking about money. This become painfully obvious as we follow the story.

Jacob settled into Laban's family. He hung around the house for a month. After a month of your in-laws living in your house they start to become out-laws. That is what happen with Jacob.

Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. Genesis 29:15–20 (ESV)

Jacob was living off Laban for a month. He was eating all Laban's Doritos. Jacob made super nachos and left his dirty dishes in the sink and wiped his fingers on the couch instead of the napkin. The water bill and the electric bill

were through the roof because Jacob loved to sing in the shower and use the bubble bath. I am sure Laban's hospitality was starting to feel a little old.

Laban was a snake-in-the-grass. He was a schemer and trickster like Jacob, except on steroids. Laban took cheating, deceiving and manipulating to a whole new level. As Jacob hung around the house, Laban noticed he was smitten with love for Rachel. Laban knew that a man in love with a woman will do anything to get her so Laban spun his web.

Laban said, "You shouldn't be staying with our family and helping with the business for nothing. What should I pay you? What do you want your wages to be?" I suspect Jacob was already feeling guilty for being a freeloader. Proper etiquette would have been for Laban to offer Jacob a salary and help him get on his feet. Laban flipped it around, making Jacob feel guilty by asking him to name his price.

This is like somebody saying, "You are living in my house. You are eating my food. You helped me cut the lawn. How much should I pay you?" You are not going to say \$30 an hour. You are going to low-ball because you are grateful to stay in the house. That is what Jacob did. He didn't name a price.

Here is where things get fun. Laban had two daughters, Leah and Rachel. Rachel was a cover model. To get that point across there is an interesting word-play in the Hebrew earlier in the chapter. In the Hebrew when it says Jacob watered Rachel's camels, it says he watered over her. Jacob literally drooled over Rachel. She was an amazing beauty. It says she was lovely in form and appearance. She was shapely and had a perfect complexion.

Instead of a salary Jacob offered to work for Laban for seven years to have Rachel as his wife. The reason he needed to work was because he was penniless, even though he was worth millions. In this culture a typical dowry was the price of three years of labor. Jacob was so in love with Rachel he offered to pay a double dowry to Laban. What should have happened was Laban should have counter offered and brought it to within the the going rate. Laban should have even offered to go less than the going rate for family. He didn't. He took advantage of Jacob's passion for Rachel and tried to get from Jacob all the money he could get. When a man is in hot pursuit of a woman he is willing to do anything to get her. Laban, the trickster, took advantage of Jacob's love for Rachel to get more than three years of free work.

It gets better. Laban had two daughters. The older was Leah. Unlike Rachel, who had a shapely figure and flawless complexion with perfect cheek bones and teeth, it says Leah was soft on the eyes. That is a very polite way of saying she wasn't attractive. While everybody wanted to look at Rachel, nobody wanted to look at Leah. What makes this even funnier is Leah's name. Her name in Hebrew means cow. Are you getting the picture? You have a sister that nobody finds attractive whose nickname is "he Cow" and you have a younger sister that men literally can't take their eyes off.

It tells us Jacob served Laban for seven years but to him it seems like only a few days. The picture we have is after working a long day in the field, Jacob was thrilled every night to come home and see Rachel. They would walk in the field together. They held hands. They talked. They shared everything about life

for seven years of dating. Rachel was passionately in love with Jacob. Jacob, a man built like Captain America, couldn't get Rachel out of his mind. Every night they counted down the days on the calendar as they got closer to their wedding. This looked like the perfect relationship. It was a match made in heaven. You have Captain America engaged to Christie Brinkley. Life was good and everything was perfect in paradise ... or so they thought.

Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" Genesis 29:21–25 (ESV)

The seven years passed and Laban was not prompt. Apparently he continued to hold out and try and get more free work from Jacob. Under pressure, Laban finally kept his word.

In this culture, the wedding was a week-long party. The first day had the reading of the vows and making the commitments. Of course, there was the wedding night. The reception was a non-stop party for a week where everyone ate and drank until they resembled bowling balls. This is where Laban decided to trick the trickster. On the wedding day, the bride wore a veil to hide her face. Jacob wouldn't see his bride until the wedding night. It was also interesting that the Hebrew word for feast in this passage is the word for drinking party. Laban's plans were to not serve a lot of food. He served a lot of alcohol. He planned to get Jacob smashed with plenty of beer and wine. At the end of the night, when Jacob had a hard time walking a straight line, Laban sent Leah under cover of

darkness into the wedding chamber instead of Rachel. Apparently Rachel was sequestered against her will. Leah was the woman behind the veil and the wedding dress. Jacob married the wrong woman. With the lights out Jacob spent his wedding night whispering Rachel's name in Leah's ear as he poured on Leah all the passions, romance and dreams he saved and planned for Rachel during the last seven years.

While this was Laban's wicked idea, he was not the only one to blame. Leah secretly had a crush on Jacob. Every time Jacob took Rachel for a walk and held her hand, Leah — the girl who couldn't get a date — longed to be Jacob's girl. For seven single years she wanted Jacob to be interested in her instead of her stunning sister. For seven years of singleness all of the love and care Jacob poured out on Rachel, Leah wished she had for herself.

She agreed to steal her sister's wedding night and make it her own wedding night. She agreed to trick Jacob into marrying her and steal his virginity. On the wedding night, every time Jacob whispered in Leah's ear and touched her body Leah relished being in her sister's shoes and taking the moment of her sister's greatest joy because of her beauty and taking it for herself. Are you seeing the bitterness of the love triangle? Are you beginning to feel the emotions of Leah and anticipate the devastation of Rachel?

When Jacob woke up the next morning, he freaked out. It was the wrong woman in the bed! He make love to the wrong woman all night long.

When he confronted Laban, he was powerless. Laban told Jacob the only way for him to get the Rachel was to finish the bridal week with Leah. Stay

married to Leah and then he could marry Rachel. To get Rachel, Laban made him agree to work another seven years. He had to pay another double dowry.

What could he do? He was stuck. Jacob was tricked into marrying two women. Rachel, whom he loved and who loved him, plus Leah who was unloved but secretly had a crush on him. In this strange marriage Leah was determined to outdo her younger and more beautiful sister in wifely obligations. Each of these sisters spent the rest of their lives vying for Jacob's heart, his thoughts and his affections as they tried to outdo one another and become the more fascinating woman in his life. This is like a man having a wife and a mistress. The problem is the wife and the mistress live in the same house and eat with him at the same dinner table. This is a recipe for disaster. It doesn't go well.

As a result Rachel and Jacob's love never fully blossoms because there was always another woman in Jacob's head. Leah and Rachel never get past this. Their relationship was ruined for life. The only guy who was laughing was Laban who had more free work out of Jacob. Who needs daytime soap operas? The Bible has more drama than General Hospital.

Laban said, "It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years. Genesis 29:26–30 (ESV)

Steaming Jacob confronted Laban for switching the brides. "Look," Laban said, "in our country we do not give the younger before the firstborn." Laban reversed the tables on Jacob. He said, "Don't you know it is not right to put the

younger before the older?” Aren’t those words haunting? What did Jacob do to his brother and father seven years before? As the younger, he put himself in front of his older brother.

Seven years before, Jacob deceived his father by dressing as his brother, getting his father drunk and taking advantage of the fact his dad couldn’t see. Then Laban deceived Jacob by dressing Leah as Rachel, getting Jacob drunk and taking advantage of the fact Jacob couldn’t see in the dark on his wedding night.

Jacob stole from his brother items of immense value, the family inheritance and the rights of the firstborn. Leah stole from Jacob items of even greater value, his virginity and the purity of his heart for Rachel. For the first time in his life Jacob knew what it felt like to be lied to, cheated and ripped off. For the first time in his life he knew the feelings his father felt seven years before. For the rest of his life Jacob lived with Rachel and saw on her face every day the bitterness and rage she had against her sister who stole her man and her wedding night that she waited for for seven years. Jacob saw in Rachel’s eyes every day the pain his brother Esau felt every day when something of immense value is stolen from your hands.

Here is the difference. After Jacob stole from his father and brother, he left home so he didn’t have to face them every day. When Leah stole Rachel’s husband, Jacob could not walk away from that pain. He had to face it every day of his married life. Every night at the dinner table there was an uneasy peace

between the sisters where the slightest insult set these women into battle. Every night these woman schemed to capture his love and attention.

For the first time, Jacob had a strong dose of his own medicine. He understood what it meant to be on the receiving end of cheating, lying and deceiving.

Here is the point of the chapter. When God is committed to maturing us and growing us up to to be like Jesus, he sometimes puts into our lives people with the same sinful flaws we possess so we can taste the fallout of our sin. That is the way he helps us understand the devastation of our sin and repent of our sin. This was a life-changing experience for Jacob that served to help straighten the bend in his cheating heart.

If you are a person who isn't honest in business, expect that God — out of his love for you — will bring into your life business men or women who will rip you off so you can feel the pain of your sin.

If you are a person who is easily angered and uses harsh or unkind words and are given to angry outbursts, expect God to bring into your life someone who is harsh, unkind and vents their rage in your direction. In God's love for us, he allows us to experience the fallout of the same sins we inflict on others.

**Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. Galatians 6:7 (ESV)**

One thing we must remember is that God is not vengeful. He loves us. He doesn't hate us. If he chooses to allow us to taste the fallout of our sin not because he hates us but because he wants to change us. It is because he loves us and is drawing us to repentance and change.

My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.  
Proverbs 3:11–12 (ESV)

The purpose of God's discipline in our lives is always to make us more like Jesus. It is always to free us from sin. God loves you more than you can imagine, especially in Jesus.

## Conclusion

Next week begins the baby battle. As Leah and Rachel competed for Jacob's heart, they also competed to see who could give him more children. While Leah won the baby battle, she ultimately became the unloved wife. What I love about her is even though she sinned mightily against Jacob, against her sister and against God, and even though she felt unloved and forgotten, God doesn't forget her. God sheds undeserved mercy on her. One of her sons is Judah, through whom came David, through whom came Jesus, the Son of God. God chose to use the unloved, cheating, deceiving Leah in the family line of the Son of God, something she never deserved.

Leah is an incredible reminder that no matter how much you mess up in life, no matter how unloved and forgotten you feel, no matter how dark and hopeless your future feels, God is incredibly gracious and compassionate and will use you and your children for his glory in ways you and I can never imagine.



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