

Sermon-Based Small Group Bible Study

Provoking Grace: God Chose the Rejected Son (Genesis 25:19–28)

Open

Select one of these “ice breakers” to get the conversation going toward the study.

- What is a favorite story told in your family about your birth or childhood (or if you are a parent, the birth or childhood of one of your children)?
- What is your favorite TV family? What do you like about them? (Bonus points if you answer “the Simpsons”)
- Do you have siblings? How are you alike, and how are you different? Or if you’re a parent with more than one child, how are your children alike and different?

Dig

After reading Genesis 25:19–28 together, discuss these questions.

1. The story of Jacob makes more sense when we remember two generations before Jacob, God made a promise to Jacob’s grandfather, Abraham (Abram) in Genesis 12:1–3. Let’s read that text. What do you see in it that would put even more stress on Isaac and Rebekah conceiving and having sons?
2. The story of conflict between brothers recurs in Genesis. Look at Genesis 4:1–16; 21:1–14. What do these earlier stories have in common with what God warns Isaac and Rebekah about their sons in our text?
3. God’s announcement that the son born second will be served by the one born first reverses the usual way things were done in the culture in which this family lived. Can you think of other biblical stories in which the one seen as lesser is given greater standing? What do these stories tell you about God? About human ways of ranking people?
4. Jacob’s name in Hebrew meant “one who grasps” (as he grasped the heel of his brother at their birth) or “one who tricks.” Later Jacob will indeed be a trickster (Genesis 27:1–29), but will also be tricked (Genesis 37:12–36). Right now, what are your thoughts about God giving grace to a trickster? About allowing him to be tricked?

Summary: The birth of Jacob shows God at work to fulfill his promise to bless the world’s peoples through Abraham’s seed, but in a way that seems the opposite of blessing. Jacob is part of a family fully of the conflict, rivalry, and dishonesty infecting the generations before his and continuing in his offspring. Yet in the end, God does his work in Jacob and through Jacob, as Jacob becomes a key link in the family of Jesus generations later. God truly exercises his grace in unworthy people, entering the messiness of history to bring his blessing.

Reflect

Use any of these prompts to encourage group members to apply the text to their own experiences.

- Pastor Bryan framed this text and sermon series by noting that we can't provoke grace because it is a gift, but grace is a gift provoking us. How does the idea of a free, undeserved gift from God strike you? Comforting? Challenging? Mysterious? Hard to believe?
- Have you ever noticed God's grace at work in unlikely people or situations? If you can recall such an experience, describe it.
- The recurring pattern in the Bible of God exalting the lowly is seen in this text. How do you react to that? Is it comforting? Frustrating? Mysterious? Nonsensical?

Pray

Invite the group to pray together using any of these suggestions.

- What needs have you heard from others in the group that we can pray about?
- How have you experienced God's grace recently? Let's give thanks for that.
- Is there something in your life that seems backwards or upside down as compared to God's promises? Let's offer that situation to God for his work and wisdom.