

Sermon-Based Small Group Bible Study

Provoking Grace: Grace Covers Our Messes (Genesis 28:1–9)

Open

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

- Are you a neat freak or someone who thrives on a little chaos?
- What household task do you enjoy doing most? Least?
- When something needs to be done, do you like to take the lead or stand back and follow others’ lead?

Dig

After reading Genesis 28:1–9 together, discuss these questions.

1. Compare the words of Isaac’s blessing in verses 3–4 to his earlier blessing in Genesis 27:28–29? What differences do you see?
2. Compare Isaac’s blessing in verses 3–4 to these earlier texts: Genesis 1:28; 12:3. What do these comparisons suggest about Isaac’s changing outlook on God’s blessing and plan?
3. Look at what Esau does and why he does it in verses 6–9. Is he doing what his parents instructed his brother to do? Taking a shortcut? Trying to improve on the original instruction? What do you think is right about his action and its motives, and what is wrong?
4. Take a look at Genesis 26:34–35. What is happening with Esau and marriage? What does this suggest about his character? His understanding of God?
5. For each of the characters in this story—Jacob, Esau, Isaac, Rebekah—try to capture the character’s approach to God and his grace at this point. What does each still have to learn?

Summary: The lessons of divine grace take a lifetime to learn. In this story we see Isaac emerging from a willful stance to a more submissive one, while Esau remains willful and self-centered. God’s plan operates by God’s grace. We cannot redirect it or “help” it with our effort or cleverness. But in receiving God’s grace submissively, we can participate in it.

Reflect

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

- How have you seen people, including yourself, attempting to take a hand in God’s plan without submitting to God’s grace? What was that like? What did you learn from the episode?
- What do we forget when we attempt to take over God’s plan—about God, God’s grace, ourselves?
- Relying on grace can seem lazy and passive, like we do nothing because God has done everything. How does a proper understanding of grace (we might think of Isaac as he is beginning to emerge in this story) actually produce something active and dynamic?
- Realizing what God’s grace is and does provides us with a huge sense of relief, a big burden lifted. Has that ever been true for you? Describe the difference God’s grace made for you.

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?
- What's an area of life in which you need to surrender control and submit to God's grace? Can we pray for God's help in that area?
- In what ways are you thankful for the relief God's grace gives? Let's offer thanks for those.