

Genesis 50

Our Tombstone and Epitaph

Read Genesis 50:1-14: We have mentioned in various places that Jacob is our example of the average believer. The end of his life is sweet; despite having an involvement in regrettable decisions and setbacks throughout his life.

Sanctification is not a linear process. Ministry and changing lives is a messy business. Jacob ultimately leaves for eternal paradise with a legacy of faith on earth. We might not choose to do things the same way again; but God uses all things (good and evil) to somehow glorify himself.

As believers, our quest is to not only preach to the choir, so to speak. We want our lives to be a fragrant platform for the gospel to the surrounding world.

If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Romans 12:18)

Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:7)

Jacob essentially re-invented himself; but it took a long time for this to happen. God had to bring him to an end of himself. God had another identity for Jacob, which we know to be Israel. God leads us to embrace our new identity in Christ.

There is a well-known character in the Charles Dickens classic, A Christmas Tale. Ebenezer Scrooge was a man who lived for himself. When he found himself at death's door, he began to see the impact that all his decisions had on others. He begged for a second chance; and it was granted to him. He completely changed the lives for good for those in his immediate circle. I considered this tale as our children were growing up. I asked myself these questions in advance. "What if my kids became drug addicts or God haters?" In future retrospect, would I have been willing to try harder, pray more, and minister to them even more to avoid that bad outcome? Accordingly, I found myself spending hours day after day finding fun ways to teach our children bible stories. As a result, I ended up becoming involved in the AWANA children's ministry. I eventually became the Director of their Sparks program, which specifically ministers to K-2nd graders for 23 years. All said, I have discovered that answered prayers frequently involve a lot of work. God will provide supernatural results, but we need to put our shoulder into it and stay steadily stay the course.

I have also been able to identify with Jacob in another way. Jacob concluded that his life was a failed effort. He was wrong about that. I too have often felt like I was

losing; while I was really winning. Our emotions are not always good indicators. In fact, my failed attempts in business have been used hugely, while my successes have had marginal effects on others. I had years of hard-to-believe *bad luck* in the organic citrus growing and packing business that positively impacted others.

And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.”¹⁰ So Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh. (Genesis 47)

Like Jacob, my losses and struggles became sources of prayer and inspiration to many of my employees and friends. There is nothing more compelling than personal testimony. It is bad enough to have broken dreams and setbacks; but it is much worse to subject others to adverse outcomes. Your venture can become their nightmare.

Fortunately, I had read the book of Job enough times to visualize what was happening to me. There were times that almost every incoming phone call was bad news. I knew that God loved me and he was good to me...but I certainly was not looking forward to what each day would bring. It is hard to be melancholy (at best) for days, months, and even years at a time. Every day can be like a swift kick in the shins. I just kept praying and going forward. I was seemingly on an obstacle treadmill from early morning pre-dawn until late at night...while things only got worse and worse. It was clearly supernatural. Seeing the impossible *bad luck* was actually encouraging to me. At least I knew what was going on in the spiritual world. It was not just my errors in judgement.

One example was finding out that one of my citrus packers was apparently a witch who infamously was known to curse people living in the local Indian reservation. I know that I have nothing to fear from a witch; but that is an illustration as to what was resisting me. Another example was ironically that the Witch Creek Fire completely burned down my citrus packing shed, packing equipment, grove equipment, and supplies. It is amazing to reflect on how perfectly a local wooden pallet manufacturer leased property around my packing shed. He had made 30' tall stacks of wooden pallets, 5-rows deep in nearly a complete circle around my facility. It was essentially a massive collection of firewood kindling that was completed just in time for the huge wildfire to come through. The fire burned so hot that it actually melted the block walls. Shortly thereafter, the local water district informed me that they were turning off my water allocations for the 5 organic citrus groves I had already developed and heavily invested in. All said, I found myself in massive debt without any repayment capacity. As a result, we

almost had our home repossessed numerous times that year. The debt collectors were calling day and night; causing my wife to become terribly stressed. I had recalled previously bragging how much faster I would pay my fruit growers than other competing citrus packing sheds. Now I had become the slow payer.

Every morning I would step into the shower and see all of the hair that had fallen from my wife's head in the shower drain. She was at her wit's end. She could not take anymore. Everyone was telling me to declare bankruptcy. I had seen my dad blame the government for his bankruptcy years ago, and I swore to not do that. We could no longer afford tuition at our kid's Christian school.

The good things were less visible to the naked eye. My wife's faith was growing. My Mexican Catholic field workers were apparently lighting candles for me in their churches and praying for me. One person even lit a candle for me in the main Catholic Church in Mexico City. These poor people were also taking an offering amongst themselves to help me pay for payroll tax penalties and other wearisome and unending burdens. Our church friends had taken a discreet collection to cover four months of back mortgage expenses! I was even given a job by a bible study friend in construction to pay my bills. Our boys were also forced to work on our farm, which built a lot of character and perspective that has carried them through life.

I was like a helpless turtle on his back. It is a very vulnerable and uncomfortable position to see how much grace you are receiving. Similarly, Jacob had bad thing after bad thing happen to him. We might ask God: "What is happening?" Unbelievers tend to fail to their weaknesses, but believers fail to their strengths. Jacob was extremely talented; but things just kept becoming inexplicably problematic. To a lesser extent, I had been successful and had some God-given abilities to run things in other businesses before. Now, suddenly, nothing was working out.

Jacob and I had to make the transition from *the knowledge* that God is good to having no choice but *to depend on it*. There is no substitute for reality. You must have *skin in the game* to become fully affected. For me the victory was not so much about believing that God was good. It was more about *manning up* to trust God in the unpleasant circumstances. In fact, I discovered that my refusal to accept bad circumstances was a large co-contributor to my discontent. I kept insisting that this situation is not appropriate for me. I had long since prayed about this business venture. Moreover, many years prior, I had previously been a certified and trained financial planner and analyst who had advised others on their finances. I was now the antitheses of what I had advocated. Now I was the one in big debt. I had been praying to God to figuratively make it *stop raining* on me.

The setbacks did not stop. So, then I prayed that God would make me strong enough that I could enjoy the *new normal* in my life. That prayer was answered immediately and it continued. This was the gamechanger I needed.

I had previously defined myself and I had been acting as my own advocate. I felt like I was being unfairly victimized. I learned that God wants me to hold back on working too hard on explaining or framing my circumstances; and let God handle my PR. When you do not know what to do next, always take care of the tiny and seemingly insignificant tasks in front of you. I do not get to choose how things will play out. I only get one card to play.

Today, my life is much easier, as I am still involved in organic citrus growing and construction...but I have learned to not prematurely draw conclusions. I always embarrass myself when I prematurely complain about what become *ugly blessings*. Managing our expectations can prevent unnecessary heartache. I think that the Holy Spirit seems to keep pulling the steering wheel out of my hands by inserting more unplanned left-hand turns. Today, many of my prayers get answered, all of the time, but there seems to be some small unsatisfying aspect to it all. God reveals that I may still want to be *the hero* or at least a notable contributor to the solution in the narrative, rather than being happy with the problem getting solved by others.

Be satisfied right now. I have also learned that satisfaction is largely reflecting on what God gave me yesterday, more so than what God might give me today. All of the psalms are about the person who is too focused on *the now*, and having to be reminded about yesterdays blessings. If you cannot savor the past, you are losing the effects of the blessings. I come from a long line of workaholics. I have noted that *rainbow chasing* can leave all kinds of family tragedy in our wake. Some of the most unhappy people are those who have accomplished their dreams. There is nothing there except more questions and doubts.

These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. ³⁹ That which was torn by beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. ⁴⁰ There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. ⁴¹ Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. (Genesis 31)

I have also learned that I can only pray and work. God's end of our partnership is that he controls the outcome. people and circumstances who *derail* my plans are

only tools in God's hands. The most objectionable things in life often are used to derail our misguided train which left God's track. I now see myself as working for God. If we look too closely at another person, (Christian or not) we will become disenfranchised. Somebody had to play that role in my life.

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. ¹⁸ Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, (2 Corinthians 5)

Looking past people's intentions can help prevent becoming bitter over things that my *opponents* are not even aware of. Conversely, we can under appreciate those who have looked past our own annoyances and who have pulled us through our trials. May God bless the anonymous souls who helped make contributions and grants to put our kids through school. I had always previously prided myself on being a helper to those who were in need. In the end, our debts eventually became current, our kids got through Christian school...and our daughter has been effectively serving in the CRU college campus ministry for years, and we are living a blessed life. God was using outside circumstances to change a stubborn heart and mind in both Jacob and in myself.

We don't really focus on how Jacob and Joseph effected the Egyptians. Jacob's legacy partially lived out in Joseph. If a man's son saves the world from starvation is that a credit to his dad in any way?

The ancient Egyptian embalming process took 70 days. All of the organs were removed and placed in storage jars for the afterlife. The body was salted over and over for 40 days. Salt kills germs and prevents decay. Afterwards the body was repeatedly covered with spices and good smelling treatments. Then it was wrapped, then it was placed in a sarcophagus. The Egyptians were misguided but their intentions to protect and honor Jacob was significant. This was a very long journey to the tomb, accompanied by many sincere Egyptians. The point is that we all long for eternity.

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Years later, many Egyptians were willing to leave their homeland and follow the God of the children of Israel.

Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. ³⁸ A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock. (Exodus 12)

Read Genesis 50:15-26: There is no need to accuse a guilty conscience. In fact, it has been observed that certain self-destructive behaviors accompany lifestyles where a person's subconscious is condemning them. The dirty deed done to Joseph decades ago is coming to roost.

Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. (1 Timothy 5:24)

It is interesting to see how terrorist shooters will turn on themselves and commit suicide right after their deed is done. God wants us to repent; but Satan wants us to give up on living. Grace is unmerited favor given by God. This is also like Jesus on the cross. What was meant for evil brought about good.

You might ask why Joseph did not want to be buried at the cave of Machpelah with his ancestors. Instead, he chose to be buried in Shechem, because it was where his son's tribal inheritances would be. In other words, Joseph was identifying with his sons more than his brothers.