

# GENESIS

FAVOUR IN THE EYES OF THE LORD



**A SERIES OF DAILY DEVOTIONS ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS  
FOR LENT 2015**

## Genesis 6:5 and 8

The LORD saw man's wickedness  
every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was  
only evil all the time  
but Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD.

This Lenten Devotion Booklet for 2015 was produced by members of St Stephens Lutheran Church Adelaide South Australia. These are the personal words and thoughts of members of St Stephens.

Some sections of Genesis contain confronting story's about family favouritism, jealousy, abuse and violence. They show the cruelty and pain that humans inflict on each other both within and outside families. But also they show the healing love of the Lord that comes to people in these situations. Unresolved conflicts and hurts can be addressed through professional counselling which is available from Lutheran Community Care (ph 8269 9300) and similar organisations.

Thanks to seven year old David for the front cover picture.

## INTRODUCTION

Genesis 1 – 11 tells the story of the origins of the whole created realm and the origins of humanity, in the so-called primeval history, while Genesis 12–50 tells the story of the origins of the children of Israel, in the so-called patriarchal narratives.

However, the stories are not simply about what happened in the beginning, in the murky mists of pre-history, with little relevance for today. In fact, stories about the origins of the world and of Israel are told and retold as a way of depicting the way things really are today. The Bible's formative stories as told in Genesis paint pictures of profound theological truth, about the wonderful blessings God has conferred upon creation, upon humanity in general, and upon his chosen people Israel, all knitted together as a harmonious whole within God's awe-inspiring web of life.

The authors of Genesis are skilled story tellers, stirring the hearts and firing the imaginations of countless generations of readers. Through these stories the Spirit continues to instil deep faith in the God who created and still preserves this startling world and loves and forgives his wayward children, while making and fulfilling the most incredible promises to them.

The congregation owes a debt of gratitude to Yvonne and Colin for ensuring that the sixth St Stephen's Lenten devotion booklet sees the light of day, and those members who have taken the time to write the devotions. Special thanks go to Jenny for formatting and printing the booklet. Far beyond this task, Jenny has done a sterling job in the office keeping the show on the road during the months we have been without a pastor. Her tireless efforts and her buoyant spirit are truly commendable.

The sheer size of Genesis makes it impossible to cover the whole book in this slender volume. So the booklet commences with chapter 5, the descendants of humanity from Adam to Noah. May your Lenten devotion rekindle your faith while instilling a renewed appreciation of the first book of the Bible.

*Peter  
Australian Lutheran College*

**Genesis 5:1 - 20**ANCESTORY

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The Bible's genealogy shouldn't be a boring topic. Instead, all the scriptural genealogies should inspire us, and be beneficial to our spiritual formation. Ironically, some people are quite interested in reading lists of baseball players, pages of fine-print stock quotations, or even notices of obituaries printed in daily newspapers.

This chapter of Genesis is a genealogy – a list of the descendants of Adam down to the time of Noah and the great flood. God is more interested in people than we are, not about their deaths, but about their faith and life journeys. For faith, two of these individuals mentioned in Genesis 5 – Enoch and Noah – are listed again in Hebrews 11 as having pleased God by faith. For life journey, the genealogy represents a remnant of godly individuals in an ungodly age. Clearly in this part of the Scripture, it was a period of decline in which all but a few went the way of Cain in spite of the teaching and pleading of Adam, Seth, Enoch, and the other early preachers of God's grace. Another aspect we can dig into this genealogy is that God is keen to protect family relationship – its value, its existence, its model, and the fact that God generally works in and through families to call people to himself. The likeness of godliness in a family is important and needs to be learned and passed on to our posterity.

**Prayer**

Our faithful, gracious and merciful God, protect and bless our families while the world around grows increasingly wicked. Amen.

In Genesis 6:5 the Lord saw the 'wickedness of the human race ... that every inclination ... was only evil all the time.' Initially, the Lord had (with a lot of joy and satisfaction) described his creation of, and his relationship with, Adam as so 'very good', but now, he says with hurt and deep regret 'I so wish I had NOT done that!'

We too can optimistically and naively invest heavily in relationships - relationships that give such joy and such satisfaction. But, through some action of a person, it turns into something hurtful and deeply regretted and, we too are left with a tangle of deep and difficult emotions.

In Genesis 6:7 the Lord with deep hurt yells out a simple and final solution to his hurt. "These beings I so lovingly created ... I will wipe them out! ..... And, yes, the other living things I created too! – Everything!" What once gave such joy, now produced such anger and pain.

But life after a broken relationship is never simple - or final. By Genesis 7, the Lord had pulled back from his angry and highly desired simple and final solution. For the Lord (and for us) creating and giving life to a special relationship is a huge emotional investment. The Lord's creation had become an undeniable part of Him (as ours can be for us) and it compromised him (as ours can us).

There was one element of the situation that simply could not be ignored. There were loved ones (caught up in the situation) to take care of. The Lord said "Noah .... I love you I cannot NOT take care of you .... go, take your family into the ark .... it will give you the immediate protection and care you need ... Oh, and take animals too ..... they will help meet future ongoing needs."

And so the separation took place and an estimated 2 billion people died for their own sins. And for this separation, the Lord wept forty days and forty nights.

Things had ended very badly. And after the flood the Lord saw the likelihood that His new relationship with Noah would also turn out badly. And history would repeat itself.

But, the Lord made a decision so that history would be not repeated. The Lord decided that, with Noah, he would not enforce the separation. Instead, the relationship with Noah would be bound by an agreement that would have, at its centre, the Lord's inseparable forgiveness and, with that forgiveness, there would never be separation.

**Prayer:** Lord, teach us to practice your inseparable forgiveness. Amen.

**Genesis 6:9 - 7:16**

**WALKING WITH GOD AS NOAH DID**

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As a Sunday School teacher I know the children always love the story of Noah's Ark. They see it as a story of a man who followed God's word, even when it seemed crazy, and collected all the animals so they can be saved from the flood. They tend not to think about why there was a flood or about all the people and animals that died. They focus on those who were saved, and of course, colouring in a rainbow at the end of the story.

When we are older we can also see the despair that God felt at the corruption and violence that humankind brought the world and his wish to cleanse it. But God made a covenant with Noah to save his family. We remember this covenant in the cleansing waters of our baptisms that washes away our sins and makes us part of God's family.

Despite the story of death and despair we know that God loves humankind so much he gives us another chance, saving Noah and his family, and saving us through Christ Jesus. So let us always be prepared, walk with God as Noah did and remember God's covenant with us.

**Prayer**

Dear God, thank you for your Covenant, and for leading us by your own example. Help us to make the right kind of promises and to keep them so that we follow in your footsteps. Keep us safe in your love and guide our actions so that we reflect your work through our actions. Amen.

**Genesis 7:17 - 8:22****JUDGMENT AND REDEMPTION**

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In these passages we are reminded that despite our perversity, God still cares for and loves us. We must also remember that we cannot rely on his love and leniency to condone our sinful natures. In Genesis we read that humankind had turned its back on God and instead of repenting of their sinful ways continued to exploit his clemency. God was so grieved by his creation that he determined to obliterate humankind and all that lived on the face of the earth. Only Noah, who was a righteous man, and his family, would be saved from destruction in order to begin a fresh start. It has been suggested that the flood is testimony to God's timeless judgment on us and that we must eventually all face that same judgment.

The world as we know it is not the one that God intended it to be but has continued to this day to be a world of tyranny, indulgence and self interest. As we approach Easter we ponder once again on God's grace in giving us the possibility of salvation. We can thank God for a Saviour, who has saved us from our sins making us ready to meet God, free from all condemnation and guilt, because he took our punishment in his death on Calvary's cross. As the earth was cleansed during the flood so are we washed clean by the blood of Jesus on Calvary.

**Prayer**

Father God, for what you have done, for what your hands have made, and for the way you continue to sustain us, we will love you with all our hearts, and with all our soul, and with all our might. Amen.

This passage says (whether the seemingly unusual and difficult verses 2 and 4 are considered or not)

- The Lord said there was a major problem - the evilness of the human race.
- The Lord defined what the problem was - every inclination of the human heart was only evil all the time.
- The Lord said what was exacerbating the problem
  - the population on earth was large (estimated by some to be around 2 billion people) and increasing,
  - people were living too long and
  - the evil influence of the gods that the people had.
- The Lord announced what he would do to manage the problem - he would decimate the population and shorten its lifespan.
- The Lord talked about his feelings
  - of grief and regret over his dearly loved creation and
  - of the 'favour' he had for Noah.

What the Lord saw on the earth was nothing like it was when he took walks with Adam in the cool of the afternoon. What he had once embraced with love and described as 'very good', he now rejected with anger, grief and regret. His planned use of his wonderful creation had failed catastrophically.

And yet, even though there were around 2 billion reasons not to act and only one reason to act, the Lord did act in love to provide his justice – and he did it just for Noah.

### **Prayer**

Lord, teach us to act in love and in justice when we too see 2 billion reasons not to.

In previous chapters of Genesis we have seen that the human inclination towards evil is a reason for God's decision to wipe out all of humanity, apart from the family of Noah, in the flood. After this cleansing of his creation, God declares that in spite of human depravity he will never again send a flood of this dimension. This promise is made to Noah and all his descendants, who according to Genesis 10 are to be the ancestors of all humanity.

In the latter half of Genesis chapter 9, after Noah discovers the inebriating effects of wine, we have the story of two brothers, Shem and Japheth who cover the shame of their father. It seems to me that their behaviour, rather than that of their brother Ham, reflects God's generosity in Genesis 3, when he covered the shame of Adam and Eve by giving them leather skins.

The action of God in covering Adam and Eve as they leave the garden, together with God's rainbow-signed promise to the earth and all humanity after the flood, and the action of Shem, ancestor of Jesus all point to God as the Saviour God. These actions point us to the time when God would cover our shame and alienation, together with the sins of all people in Jesus. Because Jesus, carrying our sin, hung naked for us on the cross, today we can live in God's presence clothed with his loving acceptance and filled with his life, as the forgiven and liberated children of our heavenly father.

Clothed in God's love, and equipped with his spirit we receive many opportunities to make things easier for those around us for whom life is difficult, bringing hope and life also to those who feel shame.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, thank you for your loving plan in Jesus to rescue all people, even though through sin we were far away from you. Give us, your forgiven people generous hearts towards our fellow Christians and towards those who have not as yet come to know and experience your love. Amen.

**Genesis 11**

**ABOUT THE TOWER OF BABEL**

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In Genesis 11 God destroys the first world because of what the human beings were planning to do. Because of their selfishness and weakness they wanted their name to be remembered by every generation to come - without God's promise. But the question was this, who was following God at that time? Because the scripture said, let us go down and destroy the building that man has built.

I think those who came down were God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three came down to destroy the building. Therefore Jesus said in John 8: 58 "Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." For this reason, for our weaknesses, God offers his son and shows us how much he loves us from the time he began to create the earth and all the things that move around on it.

We need to be an example to others like Jesus was for his disciples. He also was an example for us. And what he does for us, we can do for others. Instead of magnifying every mistake, we can turn mistakes into beautiful heart acts of forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation.

My conclusion today, God gives us 66 Books of the Bible in addition to God's Holy Spirit to guide us and instruct us. Because of our superior exposure to his word, God expects a higher standard for us. We can study human strength and weakness, the successes and failures in the lives of Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, Moses, Judas, and many more.

**Prayer**

Dear Lord, take our weaknesses and turn them into beautiful heart acts of forgiveness. Amen.

**Genesis 12**LET GOD TAKE THE LEAD

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Abram (who later was called Abraham) is a man of great faith and obedience to the will of God. He took his first step onto his journey of faith following God's will when God visited him in Ur. Abram's hometown, Ur, is one of the biggest cities of Sumerian civilization making it a well-developed place at the time. However, this did not stop him from following God's guidance and obeying his will. It is his extraordinary faith and trust in God that made him known as the father of faith, the father of all who believe. Before God, his faith is credited to him as righteousness. His footsteps are the guide to those who wish to travel down the path of faith (Romans 4:1-22).

Abram has many strengths, but even the greatest man has weaknesses. When famine struck, Abram feared for the life of his family. Instead of waiting for provision from God, he moved, with his family, to Egypt. When they reached Egypt, out of fear for his life, he lied about the identity of his beautiful wife, claiming she was his unmarried sister. Once again, he did not wait for protection and provision from God.

Every year we have new resolutions. Every time we welcome the new-coming year, we like to set goals for ourselves, to renew our body and mind and even our soul. We always hear from people to set-up achievable goals instead of ideal goals so that we can build-up self-confidence and a sense of achievement. However, when we are busy struggling with ourselves, we tend to forget that the most important thing is actually to let God be the lead in the whole thing, especially when it comes to renewing our souls. On our own, we are not capable; but with God, anything is possible. No will or conscience of man can renew one's soul, if it is not to accuse others, it is to appease sins (Romans 1:18-32, 2:1-16). Let us come before God with humility, renew our relationship with him and be even closer with him in his words.

**Prayer**

God our Lord,

Please renew our souls;

Please remind us to seek guidance from you when we are struggling;

Please lead our lives as only through You can we change and please you;

Please help us so we are justified by faith and have trust in your protection and provision always.

**Genesis 13****ABRAM - PATRIARCH – PEACEMAKER - PROVIDER**

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Abram is out of favour with Pharaoh and had to leave Egypt where he has lived in luxury and accumulated wealth. Together with his wife and wealthy nephew Lot, their flocks and herds and riches, they gradually travel back to Canaan, Abram's former home.

In Canaan good pastureland is soon eaten out by the animals of Abram and Lot. Their herdsmen begin vying for the best grazing areas. This results in dissention and bad feelings. Abram takes the initiative to resolve the possible conflict. In spite of family ties it is best to part ways. Situations like this can become so destructive and hurtful in families. They exist amongst Christian families too. Being aware and erring on generosity can soften hard feelings.

Abram gives Lot the choice of land. Lot's character is revealed by his choice. He takes the best share of land even though it will expose his family to Sodom, a city known for its sin. He is greedy, wanting the best for himself, without a thought for his uncle Abram's needs.

Life is a series of choices. When we stop making choices in God's directions, all that is left is the wrong direction. God is with Abram, just as Abram trusts his God, who favours him. Lot's good pastures provide temptations to destroy his family. Is our choice a Sodom? God does expect us to reach into places like Sodom, without becoming like them.

Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice for us in the Sodoms of this world. He is the Peacemaker. The Prince of Peace.

This incident in the life of Abram and Lot is a great example of a choice that makes a difference.

**Prayer**

Lord, you give us the grace to make choices that keep us connected to you, rather than the easier and more attractive choices that have no lasting value. Make us more like you, peace loving and generous. Amen.

**Genesis 14****AND HE (MELCHIZEDEK) BLESSED HIM AND SAID,**

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“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. Genesis 14:19-20

What we read in Genesis 14 is not much different to what is happening in the world today and what has happened many times over the centuries. Kings and countries make wars on each other for various reasons. Some are righteous wars and many seem senseless, but always innocent people get hurt and always there are refugees, displaced people. These people often become part of the spoils of war and are taken into captivity by the victor, losing everything and in many cases, their life.

This is what became of Lot, son of Abram’s brother. He and his household and all his possessions were gathered up, with everything else in Sodom, and carried away by the conquering army. When Abram heard of the capture of Lot, he gathered the trained men from his household, numbering less than 400, and went out against a very much larger force, to rescue his kinsman. He divided his forces and attacked in the night “and routed them and pursued them to Hobah north of Damascus. Then he brought back all the goods, and he also brought back his kinsman Lot...” Abram’s actions are pure foolishness from the viewpoint of a strategy for war, but his faith gave him the strength of conviction and the victory.

On his return he is greeted as a hero and welcomed by the king of Sodom and also by Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High, who welcomes him with bread and wine saying, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth: and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand”! This is a double blessing as he blesses Abram in the name of God, and he blesses God for giving him the victory. In return, Abram gives Melchizedek a tenth of everything which is his way of honouring God for his victory.

God blesses us with bread and wine, his body and blood which he shed for us on the cross for our redemption, every time we eat at his table and accept in faith this precious gift. Surely we should then, like Abram, be prepared to readily share the gifts and talent he so generously gives to us, so that we may be a blessing to others.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, open my eyes to the needs of others, and give me the faith to confidently share the generous gifts of wealth and the talent, that you so freely give to me. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

**Genesis 15****GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAM**

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“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward”. Whether “shield” or “sovereign” is meant, the reference is to the Lord as Abram’s King. Though Abram was quite rich, God himself was Abram’s greatest treasure. But Abram was childless and he said (to God) ‘a servant in my household will be my heir’. Then the word of the Lord came to him and said that man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir. Abram believed God, but he asked for a guarantee of the Promised Land. To reassure Abram God took him outside and drew his attention to the stars, this is how numerous the offspring of Abram would be through his son who would surely come.

While Abram believed in God, here his faith is more clearly defined and focused. His faith is in the promise of God to provide him a son.

Three things about this faith of Abram.

- It was a personal faith, meaning Abram believed in God. Abram, like us could falter, though he needed reassurance which God gave him. When his biggest test came (to sacrifice Isaac) he did not falter. Would we have that strength?
- Abram believed in the presence of God, his faith was based upon the promises of God.
- Abram’s faith was a practical faith, and a sensed need – the need of a son.

We can learn so much from Abram’s faith, in our own daily lives. We are at times so troubled and don’t know what to do, surely this is the time when we talk (in prayer) to God and tell him our concerns. God is always there for us and we remember his words “he who believes in me will have everlasting life”.

We have found in our personal lives, God is our refuge and strength. We thank him for his most gracious love given to us in our daily lives, and our faith in him has been our strength.

If God is for us, who is against us? He did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all.

**Prayer**

Thank you Lord for your unfailing love for us all. May our faith in you be our solid rock. Amen.

12TH DAY IN LENT

Sunday 1st March 2015

**Genesis 16**  
**MEASURES**

DESPERATE TIMES – DESPERATE

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A while ago, I was talking to some long time friends and having a bit of a brag about our gorgeous grand-daughters. Their daughter has been married for a couple of years, so I cheerfully said to them ‘No sign of grandchildren yet?’

The response I received was ‘No – they can’t have children.’ I felt like such a klutz! What a tactless question. Infertility and childlessness can cause deep grief to couples and also to people who are not in a relationship and therefore the possibility of having a child is even more remote. It is a cause of grief to family and friends who are close to people who are unable to have children. It is usually a hidden grief.

Sarai and Abram were in this position. Yet God had made promises to Abram about his descendants. Sarai and Abram decided to give God a helping hand, and Hagar became a surrogate mother to Abram’s child. This was a complicated situation in those days as it is today and Hagar became so distressed that she ran away.

Hagar was the first person in scripture to receive an angelic visitor. Wow! God took a special interest in Hagar who was being exploited by Sarai and Abram. God did not discriminate against a slave girl, but provided her with comfort and the promise of many descendants to come.

**Prayer**

Lord – you know our private fears and grief. Help us to listen to and understand the fears and grief of others. Amen.

**Genesis 17****GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM**

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In two previous chapters God has repeated His covenant to Abram but in chapter 17 of Genesis it is now time to implement it. God asserts Himself as 'God Almighty'. The terms of the agreement were simple – God would give many blessings to Abraham and his descendants. In return Abraham and his descendants would obey God.

Historically names were very important so when God changed Abram and Sarai to Abraham (father of many nations) and Sarah he was giving them a new beginning, the beginning of his covenant. For the people of the time their obedience lay in all males being circumcised and following God's commands. This Abraham faithfully carried out. Although the covenant would remain in place for all their descendants through their son Isaac, Abraham's other son Ishmael would also have many descendants and many blessings.

Abraham's initial disbelief at him and Sarai producing an heir, who would have many descendants, at their age (ninety nine and ninety) is very understandable. And yet as we follow Abraham's story there is much evidence that uncertain he may have been, yet he followed God's instructions without question.

With the coming into the world of the Saviour our new life begins with our baptism when we are accepted as children of God, receiving his mercy and grace. Our godparents accept the responsibility for us until we are old enough to accept the challenge of keeping our side of the agreement for ourselves. Our part of the bargain is, like that of Abraham's time, to be obedient to him. Obedience means we take seriously the command that Jesus, our Saviour, gave to us when he commanded us to 'love one another' as the greatest of all commandments. It is only through love that we are able to carry out all of the other commandments - to love God and to treat fellow human beings with the love, respect and dignity that we are meant to, even when this may not be easy to accomplish.

Throughout our lives we need to make decisions. Many of these decisions will have consequences that none of us can predict or visualise. The best way to make decisions is through prayer and listening to God speaking to us.

It is through the Gospel that we are able to share in the blessings of God's promise to his people. We are made part of God's family through baptism and this entitles us to receive his blessings through Jesus Christ

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father we thank you for the covenant you made with your people of long ago and for giving us your Son, Jesus Christ, that we too may know the blessings that you give to us day by day. Help us always to follow in his steps with love and obedience in our hearts. Amen.

**Genesis 18:1 - 15****DO WE ALWAYS TRUST GOD?**

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Abraham welcomed his three visitors one of whom was the Lord. He was in awe of the Lord. He wanted to give his guests the best hospitality he could. He immediately sent one of his servants to slaughter a prime quality calf for a meal, while instructing Sarah to prepare food in a hurry. Sarah stayed in the background probably not wanting to mix with such important guests. After they had eaten, the Lord asked where Sarah was, knowing that she was listening at the other side of the tent.

The Lord told Abraham in a year Sarah would have a son. Sarah had heard this statement but she didn't trust the Lord. She knew she was well past the age of child bearing. To make matters worse when she heard the Lord say this, Sarah had laughed. She found it hard to believe in such things. Later she denied laughing.

However Abraham trusted the prediction the Lord had given.

Sarah didn't trust God.

She didn't believe, that with God, nothing is impossible.

Are we like Abraham or are we like Sarah?

**Prayer**

Dear Lord, we pray that we can have the faith of Abraham to trust fully in our God. Amen.

**Genesis 18: 16 - 33****A COURAGEOUS AND FAITHFUL PLEAD**

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After reading Genesis 18: 16 - 33, I wonder how brave am I when I pray?

Abraham prays for Sodom when the Lord wants to destroy the city because “the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous”. So Abraham pleads for the righteous ones. I believe he is also deeply concern about his nephew Lot and the family who are living in Sodom. Abraham asks the Lord: “What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it?” He gradually decreases the number of people in each plead down to ten righteous people. Surprisingly the Lord says yes: “For the sake of (number of people), I will not destroy it.”

As easy as it sounds Abraham stands up to God six times. However, Abraham humbly knows that he is “so bold as to speak to the Lord...” and he is: “nothing but dust and ashes...” He pleads again to God: “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak...” Clearly he needs great courage and a lot of patience while waiting for his reply.

When we look back at the beginning of the scriptures, the Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him.” We can see, God loves Abraham and he knows it. Therefore his courage and faith really comes from knowing who he is speaking to - the almighty loving God, the one that listens and never fails.

**Prayer**

Dear Lord,

As I plead, guide me in my prayers,

Give me courage to stand firm before you,

Give me patience to see your light of grace,

I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who pleads for me. Amen.

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How can the Bible include in its pages such a gruesome story? Sodom and Gomorrah starts with Lot offering his two daughters as an outlet for the sexual frenzy of the wicked citizens so that they don't gang rape his angelic guests, and it ends with God venting his anger by destroying the cities with a heavenly firestorm. How can this be, and what's the message for us today?

By choosing to live in Sodom, Lot has become involved in compromise situations where he can do nothing but choose the lesser of two evils. The highest of all virtues was hospitality, to which he feels compelled to sacrifice even his own daughters. It is also worth noting that other OT references to Sodom and Gomorrah make far more of their injustice towards the poor and needy than their sexual depravity. Even in Genesis the 'outcry' that has reached God's hearing (18:20-21; 19:13) indicates a total breakdown in social order and the rampant exploitation of the vulnerable that results. And the fire and brimstone could well be shorthand for the self-destructive effects of indifference to the welfare of those who need the most help and protection, rather than a literal reference to external divine intervention.

Despite everything, at the heart of the story stand the angels' tireless efforts to rescue Lot and his family from destruction. And far from Lot's 'salvation' arising from any superior morality, God saves him simply by sweeping him up in the blessing that Abraham has been commissioned to bring to the nations, starting with God's chosen people Israel (12:1-3; 19:29). Lot doesn't seem interested in being saved; he hesitates and virtually has to be carried out of the city bodily (19:16). And even when he is safe he uses his rescue as a bargaining chip to plead for more benefits from God, the liberty to choose where to live from now on rather than head obediently to where the Lord has directed him (19:18-22).

Furthermore, hasn't God agreed to save Sodom for the sake of 10 righteous people? (18:32) How is it that now God says his hands are tied while as much as one righteous person remains in the city? (19:22) Maybe we are permitted to reframe this story as a story of amazing grace.

**Prayer:** Lord God, grant insight into the self-destructive effects of indifference to the plight of those less fortunate than ourselves, but even greater insight into your amazing grace, for the sake of Jesus Christ, the one you have chosen to bring your blessing to all nations. Amen.

In hindsight, Lot saw his decision to take the plain (and leave the poorer hill country to Abraham) as an advantageous and great decision - it had resulted in wealth, social status and a position of influence in Sodom. Yes, Sodom had its problems, but, with his wealth and influence he would manage. Sodom was home, and, it was his and his wife's intention to stay there and hold on to what they had.

However, the angel came and cut across his security and said "No, Lot. It's a bad decision to stay here. For the good of you and your family, go to the hills" There he could benefit from his family Abraham's protection". Lot did not want to go.

Further, this angel had created a situation that Lot decided he would take control of. Using his influence and social position, Lot decided he would negotiate with the homosexual crowd outside his house. The angel saw Lot's decision fail, and he rescued Lot from the consequences of his decision by pulling him back inside his house.

Again, Lot tried to take control of the situation - this time using his influence and the resources he had control over. So, he offered them his two daughters in an attempt to distract the crowd from what they wanted. The angel also saw this was a bad decision and rescued the girls from the consequences of Lots decision by blinding the crowd.

The angel told Lot to take his family and escape the coming destruction of Sodom (and all he held dear) by going to the hills and living near Abraham's protection. Lot put up a weak manipulative argument about not doing that and, instead, to move to Zoar. He would take his status and his influence to Zoar and continue to live in the culture of the plain. The angel said "OK. Go to Zoar" and under his breath probably said "But this time you won't be rescued. You (and yours) will have to live with the consequences of this decision".

Lot learned quickly his influence and status did not work in Zoar. It gave no protection at all. He and his daughters fled from Zoar in terror. He went to a cave in the hills in Abraham's territory - where the last shameful incestuous incident of this reading took place.

Lot went to the cave - and decided to stay there – in the territory of Abraham – his benefactor. Lot became a depressed and controlling recluse who was easily tempted with alcohol. It blurred the pain of his losses. In this context and situation the girls felt their isolation too was complete. Both their influence over Lot and so their options to leave were nil.

In the territory of Abraham - their family – the girls were trapped in a family politic that was run and controlled by a father who looked after his own interests - his way, and took little to no account of the needs and wants of his daughters.

In the year 2015, and in all cultures around the world, including Lutheran Australians, there are girls (in particular) but also boys, women and men who are caught up in a family politic and live in a world that is not sane and from which they cannot escape.

### **Prayer**

Lord, we pray for those caught up in a bad family politic. Move us to build ways based in your love for people to escape and transition to become whole and healed people.

**Genesis 20****BEING FAITHFUL IS THE BEST IDEA**

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To start devotion writing, I opened my Bible. When I saw the heading of chapter 20 of Genesis, I realised that I was lucky that I had read the whole of Genesis before, not only this chapter. Otherwise I would probably finish this article by telling my thoughts of a horrible husband.

Seriously, was Abraham really a bad husband? Well, in my opinion, maybe he was, sometimes. I mean, I will never send my wife to another guy just for saving my own life. But Abraham did, and he did that twice! Twice!

Ok, let's just say, he was an ordinary guy. I wonder why God still chose him, still made him into a great nation, and still blessed him. I wonder, why God always said, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." (Oh, Isaac actually did the same thing to Rebekah as his father did to his mother, by the way, which was not a very good example he had learnt from his dad.) Why did God love to mention these people's names together with his own? What made Abraham, Isaac and Jacob different?

I think the answer is simple: faith. They all had strong faith.

When Abraham left his comfortable home in Haran as God had told him, he was seventy-five. The old man didn't hesitate. When God asked him to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering, he didn't question. Abraham just did what the Lord asked him to do. He showed that he was faithful to God. And God blessed him.

It seems that God prefers faithful persons rather than good persons.

No one can be perfect. No matter how hard we have tried, everyone makes mistakes. But I think being faithful like Abraham, is always the best idea.

**Prayer**

Dear God, we know that we have all sinned and are not perfect. But please help us to be faithful like Abraham, to follow your orders without any hesitation. Amen.

**Genesis 21****GOD'S UNEXPECTED GIFTS**

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This reading brings us very close to the intimate heart of God with the story of Sarah conceiving to Abraham when he was 100 years old. It foreshadows the story of Mary, an equally mysterious and biologically improbable event, when a virgin woman gives birth to Jesus, the Son of God.

This Genesis story brings us in to the amazing works of God fulfilling his promise to Sarah and Abraham in Genesis 18, that even in their old age, God would give them a son. And in good time, God gave Mary his own son. Both stories of new life and loving fatherhood make poignant reading during Lent. We are on a journey with Jesus who knew, as God did, where he was headed.

Babies bring joy. They bring laughter, amazement at the miracle of life and contentment, in spite of lack of sleep. They inspire great contemplation of the mystery of creation and of each individual life. To have this gift, God's unexpected promise fulfilled, to that old couple is a miracle that changed their lives.

How often, in times of sadness, loss, despair and crisis, do we reach out to God in prayer, to have God respond with gifts of change in our lives? Perhaps God improvises a bit on the response to our requests and in the process grants us insights in what following God's way means. But repeatedly, we come to know that God's presence is real, bringing tangible love and hope into our lives.

**Prayer**

God of mystery and power, we bless you as the best listener we could ever have. Thank you for birthing newness and unexpected gifts into us when we reach out to you, just as you offered Isaac to Abraham and Sarah of old. Amen.

## READING IN TWO PARTS:

**Part 1: Genesis 22:1 – 19**IN THE DARKNESS OF FAITH

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What kind of God is this, demanding that a father kill his only child? Like a dream, a nightmare, the story unfolds, but unlike many of our night-time fears, the intervening angel rescues Abraham in the nick of time.

Every day millions of people ask God questions: 'Why? Where are you?' No such questions are put on the lips of Abraham. His response – to God, to his son, to an angel – is a trusting 'Here I am'. Martin Luther wrote: 'Abraham closed his eyes and hid himself in the darkness of faith and therein he found life eternal.'

Can we follow Abraham's example – when a plane disappears, when brutal murders happen, when sickness or an accident invades our life? We have many questions about events, situations, people, but isn't the essence of faith to override our questions with trust. In Hebrews 11, the great chapter on faith, it says Abraham acted like he did because he was sure God could raise people to life. His 'Here I am' was a phrase of complete trust. In a similar way Mary responded to the angel Gabriel's astounding news with 'How can this be?'

When the angel reassured & explained how this would happen, she replied 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'

May we have faith like that too.

**Prayer**

Ever-faithful God, when the unexpected happens, to us or to others, give us faithful eyes and trusting hearts. Help us to walk not by sight, but by faith. Amen.

**Part 2: Genesis 23:1 - 20**

## WHAT'S THE POINT?

As Paul Simon sang, 'What is the point of this story? What information pertains?'

It's a real estate negotiation. Abraham wants some land where his recently deceased wife can be buried. (He'll be buried there too when the time

comes). The seller, Ephron, appears to be a really generous man. 'I'll give you the field', he says. A negotiating ploy, it turns out. He knows Abraham feels compelled to buy, and in the end he charges him an exorbitant amount. The point? An ordinary story becomes a major milestone. Just as it happens for so many of us: a casual encounter leads to a marriage, a minor purchase is the start of a profitable business. For Abraham, who described himself as an 'alien and a stranger', it was a declaration that Canaan was now his homeland. There was no turning back. God had promised him a new home, and purchasing this land meant that Abraham had 'clinched the deal' with God. His new life had begun.

So, let's keep our eyes and ears open. Our senses need to be alert, because the seemingly insignificant may be life-changing. The writer of Hebrews says, 'Don't neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it'. (Hebrews 13:2) Biblical history is full of such things, the most obvious being the world-changing death of an itinerant teacher on a Roman hanging tree.

There may always be a point to any story.

### **Prayer**

God of seeming chance and luck, open our eyes and ears to your ways. Help us to listen and learn from you, in any situation, at any time. Amen.

**Genesis 24**

## HOW ROMANTIC!

Well, what can I say? How romantic! In our culture of today, it just doesn't happen like that. Love at first sight. Living happily ever after. Sure, a lot of cultures in our world today still practice arranged marriages – and it works – often, where we would say, the women are suppressed by dominating men, who even have the right to kill their women for whatever reason that we would never tolerate in our society. For us in our culture, that just doesn't work.

For us, does marriage still work? We condone relationships that are called partnerships, or defacto, or homosexual or a myriad of other things in between. We support and care for them all, as God does. But it leaves an ache in my heart, and I am sure that it does in God's heart as well.

And then of course we see the most loving of marriages – including Christian marriages - ending up in divorce. Divorce statistics are continually rising. Single parent families are struggling.

What has happened to our promises: *from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance.*

It seems to me that many people have lost the concept of marriage. I think that people need to have a commitment to the concept of marriage, before they can even have a commitment to the person that they marry. And if the commitment to the person becomes a struggle, at least the commitment to marriage, is often enough to get the marriage back to where it needs to be.

My Mum always said that marriage is a bonus to an 'already good life'. There are a lot of people who have a very good life without marriage.

Maybe that is all too simplistic. What does God want for us in our relationships?

God does not leave the marriage of Abraham's son to chance. This marriage affects the destiny of his chosen people. Arranged marriages were the custom of the day. This couple, Isaac and Rebekah, who have never previously met, meet, and come to love each other.

But this reading is not only about marriage.

The reading is also about faith in God and about trusting in him. It is also about knowing that God knows the needs of his people and that he answers prayer.

The playing out of the story is amazing. Firstly, the trust of Abraham, then the faith of his servant, the response from Rebekah, and then the support from her family. All of them following God's lead. All of them part of his plan.

### **Prayer**

Dear Heavenly Father. Help us to continuously put our trust in you. Help us in our commitments to our relationships, not only in our marriages, but to all those we love and care for. Amen.

**Genesis 25**TWO SONS

---

This chapter is about the tale of two sons.

The first one is about Ishmael and Isaac who were born of the same father, Abraham, and of two mothers, Hagar and Sarah, respectively. It tells us that Abraham and Sarah's device, having a child through Hagar, won't help.

The second one is about Jacob and Esau who were born of the same father and the same mother, namely, Isaac and Rebecca. It tells us that even their so-called pure-blooded line, as in the twin's case, does not guarantee our merit from God.

The choice of God was not dependent on man's birth or his character. The choice was in the heart of God, and is revealed in the promises he has made known to us. Therefore, when a choice was made between the twin sons of Rebekah, it was the promise itself that blessed Jacob and not of human works.

God's promises to us and the way he keeps them, make us thank him and love him more and more.

**Prayer**

Lord God, I thank you for all the promises that you have made known to me through your Word. Help me believe and know that they will be fulfilled, not because of my merits, or works, or my amiable personality, but because of your grace and love. Amen.

**Genesis 26**ISAAC'S WELL

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Isaac is connecting with God; more specifically, connecting with the god of his father Abraham. At this historical stage Yahweh is understood as a god who belongs to a particular tribe or family, not a place. His blessing is given to Abraham's descendants. The other tribes can see the visible signs of this blessing in Isaac's prosperity and so, pragmatically, attempt to gain it for themselves.

The wells are a sign of bounty. In a sense, God is the well. Jesus says in John 4, at Jacob's well, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

In Genesis 27 we'll read about Jacob stealing Esau's blessing. That blessing is limited; once given it can't be taken back or shared. But here the wells seem to be limitless; as the herdsmen of the area jealously claim each well, another is always available.

Are the herdsmen wrong to claim these wells, or is Isaac selfish? Should he choose to actively share these blessings, rather than passively waiting for them to be taken? Is God stingy with his bounty, or are we?

**Prayer**

Dear God,

Thank you for all you give us, every day.

Forgive us when we keep your gifts, and you, to ourselves.

Help us to be a part of your endless generosity. Amen.

**Genesis 27:1 – 45** DOES GOD NEED HELP TO FULFIL HIS PROMISES?

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In today's reading, Isaac, believing he is about to die, sends his first-born son, Esau, off to hunt and prepare food so that when he returns, Esau can receive his father's blessing, usually the birthright of the first-born son. Rebekah, mother of the brothers, overhears Isaac's plan and sets about to thwart Isaac and trick him into blessing Jacob. Rebekah plans the deceit, prepares the food and necessary disguises, and coaches Jacob on what to say.

Previously, in Genesis 25:23, while Rebekah was pregnant, God told her that, of her two sons, "the older will serve the younger." As the boys grew into men, Isaac, who loved wild game, preferred his hunter son, Esau, while Rebekah favoured the quieter Jacob. Later, Esau would recklessly give over his birthright to Jacob for a pot of stew.

Isaac knew of God's promise to Rebekah concerning his sons, and also, quite likely, that Esau had despised his birthright, yet he was prepared to try to get around God's plan for Jacob by his own means. He acted in secret. Rebekah only found out about it because she overheard their conversation.

Rebekah also had trouble believing that God would fulfil his earlier promise, and acted in her own strength to try to have it fulfilled. The result is disastrous. The family is torn apart. Esau, enraged, declares that he will kill Jacob, and Jacob flees to his uncle to hide.

How often do we have trouble believing God will fulfil his promises to us? Sometimes we may give up on a promise, and lose hope in it ever being fulfilled. Other times we may plot and scheme to give God a helping hand.

**Prayer**

Dear God, please help me to trust you, especially when things are not going to plan. Help me to keep hope alive; knowing that in your kingdom, all things work together for good for those who love you. Amen.

**Genesis 27:46 – 28:22****EVEN IN OUR DEVIOUS SCHEMES,  
GOD IS TRUE TO HIS FAITHFUL PROMISES**

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With a mother's uncanny insight Rebekah knows that Esau plans to kill Jacob. Not content to cheat his older twin brother out of the birthright, the right of inheritance, Jacob has now also succeeded in cheating him out of the patriarchal blessing, handed down from Abraham their grandfather. Esau is furious. Fratricide is called for. So Rebekah tells Jacob to flee to her brother Laban in Mesopotamia till Esau cools down. Rebekah knows too that Isaac may not weep too many tears if Esau takes Jacob's life, having been thwarted in his plans to confer both birthright and blessing on his favourite son Esau, who is a chip off the old block. Isaac and Esau share a love of hunting and fishing and then wolfing down the game they bring home, always heavily garnished. So Rebekah tells Isaac a different story to get him to agree to Jacob's departure. She doesn't mention the death threat, but speaks instead of her anxiety that Jacob may marry outside the clan, may marry a non-Israelite, a woman who doesn't share their beliefs and their values. That is enough to persuade Isaac that Jacob should be sent on his way.

As Jacob travels to far-away Haran where he will spend the next 20 years, God appears to him by night at Bethel and repeats the age-old promises of blessing made first to grandfather Abraham and subsequently to father Isaac. In view of Jacob's specific circumstances, the promises include God's presence and protection in unfamiliar territory and in due course a safe return to Canaan. But it is worth asking whether such great promises (repeated in even greater force at Genesis 35:9–15) have ever been made to one as undeserving as Jacob. God's word is unequivocal. Jacob's offspring will be as numerous as the dust of the earth (28:14). And Jacob and his descendants—his twelve sons and all successive generations of Israel—will inherit the whole land of Canaan. And in Jacob and his offspring all nations on the face of the earth will be blessed. During the era of the patriarchs, the fulfilment of the promises was patchy and piecemeal. But in Jacob's greatest son, Jesus of Nazareth, the promises have been fully realized: the family of faith is as numerous as the dust of the earth, the land we have inherited is our membership in the body of Christ, and the task we have been given is to live and breathe and share the blessings we have received and thereby exude joy among the nations.

**Prayer:** Like Jacob the conniving cheat, we think our neighbour's there to beat. Teach us God to be a friend, on whom our neighbour can depend. We're told to strive with might and main, to win God's grace or all's in vain. We fail to see that from day one, God's grace is ours in his dear Son. Amen.

**Genesis 29**TWO SISTERS

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Pride and Prejudice has nothing on this story. After I read this I asked my sister 'What if we married the same guy, then he made our servants pregnant?' She was lost for words. That really got me thinking. These were real people with real emotions. Sure, times have changed enough that marrying multiple people is illegal, but sisters can have tense relationships and will often fight to be best (like my sister and me).

What if you are Leah, always second best? Then you were married, and were going to be happy, but then it turned out your husband was very rude to you. He married your sister and loved her much more than you. You were still second best. Then you became pregnant with many boys, and so your unfair husband loves you but your sister loathes you. How would that be?

Or maybe you are Rachel, always the best until your sister had more children than you. The husband you first thought could bring you happiness looks down upon you. You have lost your sister to him, and can't seem to find a way out of this horrible mess.

I wonder if they made up. I wonder if they conquered their envy for each other and became grateful for what they were given. I wonder if from this experience they learnt the importance of having a good relationship with each other, and decided to cherish it.

**Prayer**

Dear Lord, may I love my family, and may I never feel competitive with them. Amen.

**Genesis 30:1-24**TANGLED WEB

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This is a troubling passage. I find myself responding with sadness and anger. Rachel seems to be infertile, which seems to have made her life untenable. Without children it seems that she would have been disgraced and effectively outcast from her people. Other women may have been the problem. Perhaps in a patriarchal society motherhood was the only salvation from other's expectations.

Rachel then gives her servant, Bilhah, to Jacob to sleep with, in order that she (Rachel) might have a child. Bilhah is obviously not just a servant, but a slave. When a child is born of the relationship somehow Rachel claims the baby as her own and says that God has vindicated her (v.6).

In later verses Rachel's sister, Leah, gives her own servant to Jacob with the same outcome. Leah then claims, in verse 18, that God has rewarded her for what is effectively dealing in slaves. Over the course of having several of her own children, Leah declares that God has gifted her, remembered her and taken away her disgrace.

I find it troubling that the servants and children are treated as chattels and are 'given' and taken, but I also find it disturbing that God's vindication is claimed in the midst of abusive human power relationships. To trade in people defies what we today know as human rights. This is a tangled web of slavery, shame, scheming and giving thanks.

We know that Rachel gave birth to Joseph, who was responsible for saving the nation of Egypt in years of drought. Does this fact justify the denial of Zilpah's (Leah's slave) liberty and independence? Does Rachel's shame justify the denial of human rights of Bilhah?

Despite the mess, God's love remains, God's grace continues and God's overarching plan of redemption persists through oppression and through broken individuals – you and me.

We just need to be careful that we don't build theology by claiming blessings support our point of view.

**Prayer:** Loving God, thanks for the blessings you shower on us every day. Thanks for persisting with your broken people, seeding promise and hope, grace and love. Amen.

**Genesis 30: 25 – 43**

## DECEPTION: PART OF GOD'S PLAN?

I struggled with this reading.

In the preceding chapter we read of Laban's deception towards Jacob, resulting in Jacob marrying Leah (the first born daughter) rather than Rachel, the one he loved.

After a further period of service with his father-in-law, Jacob finally takes Rachel as his wife. Their son Joseph is born, and Jacob desires to return with his family to his homeland. During Jacob's stewardship, Laban has been richly blessed, and his flocks have increased significantly. So, when Laban asks what he can give Jacob in return, Jacob devises a cunning scheme of his own. He asks only for all the speckled and spotted sheep and goats from Jacob's flocks, usually a small proportion of the total flock. His plan (which mystifies me) results over time in an amazing increase in his flock, at the expense of his father-in-law. In effect, Jacob has used Laban's own tactic (of deception) against him.

A New Zealand acquaintance of ours, Valerie, was employed as a caring companion for a wealthy English Lady, who was of a somewhat cantankerous nature. Soon after arrival Valerie was asked whether she had any television programs she particularly liked to watch. On naming *Dancing with the Stars*, she was informed by Her Ladyship "I don't watch that one". When Valerie asked to watch it in her room upstairs, she was informed that she had to stay and watch another program with her employer. Several similar situations arose subsequently during Valerie's time there. But, in a small way, Valerie had the last laugh. When the time came for Valerie to be replaced by the next companion/carer Jean, she related her TV choice episode. So when Jean was asked her favourite program she mentioned that she did not like *Dancing with the Stars*. Predictably, Her Ladyship then insisted that they watch it together!

As indicated earlier, I am not sure what message for us is revealed in this reading. Of one thing I am certain: God is not telling us that his plans for us involve deception and sneaky schemes. In this new Lenten season we reflect again on God's amazing and deceit-free plan of salvation for all believers.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thankyou that we have no need for elaborate deceptive schemes to gain favour with you. As we look forward again to the joy of Easter morning may our hearts be grateful for the abundant and undeserved blessings you shower on us each day. Amen.

**Genesis 31**

AS HIS MOTHER REBEKAH AND HIS WIFE RACHEL  
TAKE THE RAP FOR JACOB,  
SO JESUS TAKES THE RAP FOR US, HIS BROTHERS

---

As Jacob once overstayed his welcome at home (chapter 27), he has now also overstayed his welcome at the home of his uncle and father-in-law Laban. Like their father, Laban's sons are furious that Jacob has benefited so handsomely from his 20 years with them, marrying their sisters and gradually procuring the major share of their livestock. Starting to fear for his life, once again, Jacob, his wives Rachel and Leah, and their children, slip away from Haran under cover of darkness and set out for the land of Canaan.

Unbeknown to Jacob, Rachel has stolen the household gods, precious objects of a pagan faith, possibly tokens of inheritance for Laban to hand to his first-born son. When he discovers that Jacob the presumed thief and his family have fled, Laban sets out in hot pursuit. Twenty years earlier the sight- and hearing-impaired Isaac had tried to establish which of his twin sons was standing before him seeking his blessing. He trusted what he felt and smelt, that Jacob was in fact Esau because that's who he said he was and who he smelt like and felt like. He placed no faith in the higher senses of seeing and hearing, the senses associated with believing and obeying. Now it's Laban's turn to be hoodwinked while trying to establish the truth, this time by his daughter Rachel. As in blind man's bluff, Laban feels about in the baggage, in one tent after the other, moving from cold to cool and on to warm. When he reaches Rachel's tent he's piping hot, because she has concealed the gods under a camel's saddlebags on the tent floor and is sitting on them. The clever con-artist says, 'I can't get up, dear father. Come no closer. The way of women is upon me'. As Rachel knew he would, Laban jumps back in fright and flees from the tent. It's a clever trick. Bloody bodily emissions were to be avoided like the plague. Rachel is every bit as cunning and deceptive as her husband.

Twenty years earlier, Jacob had been afraid that Isaac would work out that he wasn't Esau and would receive a curse rather than a blessing. Rebekah had encouraged him to proceed with the deception by saying, 'If that happens, let the curse fall on me, my son'. Twenty years later, Jacob is so confident that nobody has stolen the household gods that he says that if a culprit is found, he or she will die. Earlier, Rebekah was never mentioned again after Jacob's original departure from home, despite her promise to

make contact with Jacob once the coast was clear. And Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin. Mother first, then wife, with Jacob in the mix both times as they vanish from the story. Finally and ultimately the curse of sin and deception and death falls on another, Jesus of Nazareth, and we unfaithful and undeserving Jacobs go free and live.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, as we recall the sacrifices made for Jacob by his mother and his wife so that he might live, we are reminded of the willing sacrifice of your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour, on our behalf. Enter the darkness of our hearts, as you entered the darkness of the tomb. And lead us into the brightness of your pure light, to rejoice in your pardon and to grow in your love. Amen.

**Genesis 32: 1 - 32**THE NAME CHANGE

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I find the third patriarch, Jacob, to be the most fascinating man of the Old Testament. In Genesis we are told much about his life: from the intriguing moments of his birth, through to his trickery and dishonesty; from his cunning business dealings, to the many adventurous travels he took during his life span up until his death in Egypt 147 years later. We read of his interesting and complex relationships with his parents Isaac & Rebekah, sibling Esau, wives Leah & Rachel, father-in-law Laban, and with his twelve sons. But at every stage of his life Jacob, with all his faults and failings remembered to worship God.

In today's reading we are given an account of Jacob wrestling with 'God'. As Jacob in great fear anticipates the next day's meeting with his estranged brother Esau, he (v 9-12) calls on and acclaims God, confesses his unworthiness, asks for protection and reminds God of the many promises that he had made to Jacob. All alone that evening a 'man' whom Jacob recognised as God himself, came to wrestle with Jacob until daybreak. When Jacob refused to release his adversary without a blessing, God tells him that he shall no longer be called Jacob (meaning liar, deceiver, cheat), but Israel (one who has striven with God and wins). This name change and seeing God 'face to face' is a life changing event for Jacob.

Maybe you have, like Jacob, experienced a faith strengthening 'name changing' episode in your life when you felt God came to wrestle with you?

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, let Jacob's prayer be an example for us – to call on your holy name with praise and thanks giving, to confess our sins and to ask for your blessings claiming the promises that you made to us at our baptism. In Jesus name. Amen.

**Genesis 34**THE DECEITFULNESS TRAIT

---

So the story goes that Jacob's daughter Dinah was raped by the son of the ruler of the area. Of course Jacob, as a father, would have been deeply distressed at the news and may have entertained the idea of revenge. However, it was two of Dinah's brothers that took it upon themselves to dish out the revenge for their sister's defilement. Even while they said 'yes' to the ruler's son's request to marry their sister, they were already planning to murder all the males living in the ruler's city to complete their revenge.

Reading how Jacob's sons deceived the ruler and his people reminded me how Jacob deceived his father Isaac to receive the blessing that was rightfully Esau's. Although deceitfulness seems to be a family trait, God still kept his promise to Jacob (see Genesis 28:13-15). We too have many traits and behave in ways that are not pleasing to God. But despite these all too frequent shortcomings, God still considers us his children and deserving of forgiveness, and we thank the Lord for that!

**Prayer**

Dear God, we thank you that despite our shortcomings and our sinful nature, you sent your son Jesus into the world to save us. Amen.

**Genesis 35****GOD'S ASSESSMENT**

---

Thank God that he does assess us and our situation. Our reading today gives us sample of God's assessing.

Take time to read Genesis 34. There's no mention of God. There are examples of the misuse of sexual ability. The whole community is affected. But God has been assessing. 35:1a says, "Then God said to Jacob."

It's the same God who assessed Jacob's situation when he was fleeing from his brother Esau – verses 6:7. Chapter 28 gives more detail – 28:10-17. Read on 28:18 – 22. Jacob looks at God's assessment with a series of "ifs". Jacob is willing to have God as his God if God will keep his promises.

Jacob knows the double standards of his household and community. He wants them to be under the influence of God who is faithful to his promises, who rescues. Look what happens 35:2 -5. Notice the name given to this place – Bethel "House of God" – verse 7.

Where were we on Christmas Eve/Day, New Year's Eve/Day, Epiphany? Were we in "Bethel, God's House", hearing again his promises, his assessments? Do our children, grandchildren, friends in our community sense God's grace in our lives? (Do read Philip Yancey's book, "Vanishing Grace.")

Lent is a special time when we hear again God' assessments:

- He assessed the state of the world – John 3:16,17
- Jesus said, John 8:31 "If you hold to my teachings (assessments) you are truly my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
- We so easily forget that Jesus assesses also individual churches and congregations. Do read His letters – Revelation, chapters 2 & 3." Revelation 4 begins with these words, "After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open...."

The "next generation" doesn't always follow in Christ's footsteps.

**Prayer:** Lord, forgive us for passing by the door that opens to show your assessment of our needs and your "restoring grace". Thankyou for turning around us and our loved ones and allowing us to view afresh the presence and power of your forgiving grace. Amen

**Genesis 36**THE END OF ESAU'S STORY

---

This chapter has six groups of names, includes sons, chiefs and kings. Esau had right to obtain the blessing of material world, but he had no right to obtain the most important blessing of the Lord, i.e. the birthright.

Esau was the son of Isaac, he had a brother called Jacob. When Isaac's wife Rebekah became pregnant, the babies jostled each other within her (Genesis 25:21-22). The Lord told her: "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the elder will serve the younger." (Genesis 25:23). The Lord never errs. Esau means hairy. Esau also called Edom, which means red. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob because of red stew. At that time, Esau lost his inheritance as the firstborn of Isaac. Esau also married two women who did not know the Lord God Yahweh. Esau lived an evil life. When Isaac was old, he wanted to give his older son the blessing, but Rebekah helped Jacob to get Isaac's blessing by cheating. At last, Esau lived by the sword; he hated his brother Jacob and tried to kill him. Esau, the father of the Edomites settled in the hill country of Seir and built his kingdom, and was the long-time enemy of the Israelites.

In the Bible, there are numerous incidents about the Edomites raging battles against the Israelites.—However, God's rescue often came to the Israelites when they cried out to the Lord in their distress.

**Prayer**

Dear heavenly Father, thank you so much for teaching us how to believe you and depend on you. Please confirm and strengthen our faith in you. Thank you for loving us. Fill us with the knowledge of knowing your will, so that we have spiritual wisdom and understanding to do your will. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Genesis 37**I HAVE A DREAM

---

“I have a dream,” called out Martin Luther King Jr to the more than 250,000 people on a march on Washington DC for work and freedom on 28 August 1963, in front of the Lincoln Memorial,

*“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘... that all men are created equal.’*

...

*I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by ... their character.*

*I have a dream today!”*

King was 34, when he proclaimed his vision of a just society, and he paid for it with his life five years later. Joseph was a young man, just 17, when he witnessed the injustice committed by his brothers. Both dreamers had something in common: Their vision of protecting life. This is what they were hated for — placing life over profit.

Like Joseph who was sold by his brothers for 20 shekels of silver, so was Jesus “sold” and betrayed by one of his brethren, Judas, for 30 shekels of silver, the price the Law had fixed for a slave's life. His resurrection proves the victory of life over death - that “your sheaves gather around mine and bow to my sheaf.”

I have a dream today ... the dream that we will listen to each other's vision of life and peace. Visions protecting you and me, and our children and grandchildren and great grandchildren, that *“they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by ... their character!”*

**Prayer**

Lord God, father of your son and our brother Jesus, you have given us visions of life and peace in times of despair and sorrow. We ask you for the strength to bring into practice what we are dreaming for and to become people who know how to forgive hatred and to provide life. Amen.

**Genesis 38**THE VALUE OF A PROMISE

---

This story teaches us about the value of keeping your word.

Judah loses his first two sons, not because of their marrying Tamar, but because of their own thoughts and actions. It seems like Judah does not consider this when accepting that God has taken both Er and Onan. Er is described as an evil man, so it looks like his life was taken because of those actions, while Onan thinks selfishly of receiving extra inheritance if Tamar remained childless, as her son would have received Er's share of the inheritance. Because of Onan's selfishness, his life was also taken.

The story doesn't tell us about Judah's youngest son, Shelah, however we do know that Judah did not want to lose his youngest son as well. This was the impetus for Judah's actions, regardless of Shelah's actions or character. As a result, Judah was tricked by Tamar, who knew that Judah had not kept his word. She gave birth to twin sons and Judah learnt a lesson in shame.

What I learn from this story is to consider the broader picture of why some things happen the way they do, and to accept that God knows so much more about the intricacies of complex situations. I need to acknowledge when I make a pledge to another person, doing so with the intent of keeping it and the strength to hold to it when the time comes. It is not honourable to withhold what you have promised, and you cannot ever feel secure that such dishonesty will not be found out.

**Prayer**

Lord, help me to keep my promises to others and to trust your goodness through all that occurs. Amen.

**Genesis 39**

**JOSEPH IN THE HOUSE OF POTIPHAR:  
STAND BY ME**

---

The British Museum holds an Egyptian papyrus from the 12th century BC which details the complicated story of two brothers, Anpu and Bata, where the downward spiral of their relationship begins when the wife of one seduces the other brother. This, the oldest of plots, remains grist for the Hollywood mill!

But in Joseph's case his temporary fall from grace in Potiphar's house is recorded as a mere blip on his upwardly mobile journey to a position where he is able to be a blessing to his family, even to the cruel brothers who had sold him into slavery in the first place. Joseph might fall out of favour with his brothers and in this scenario, with his master, but as this passage repeats several times, God blessed him and others through him. Indeed, the story of his rise, fall and rise again, clearly written after the Exodus, prepares us for Israel's similar history in Egypt. Here in particular, we already see God at work to save his people hundreds of years in the future. And us, thousands of years further on. I think the cycle of Joseph stories are the most wonderful in the bible.

God is not still. He is not silent. He has a plan. As God worked through Joseph He also works through us. Our problem is that we can't see what He plans for us at the end of our tunnel which is often filled with pain, betrayal and disappointment. Even Joseph had no idea what was in store for him. But it was good. We should take heart.

**Prayer**

Guide our path dear Lord and reassure us that your plan for us is for our good. Amen.

**Genesis 40**INTERPRETATIONS OF DREAMS

---

Genesis Chapter 40 describes how Joseph is asked to interpret the dreams of two prisoners.

The king of Egypt jailed a wine steward and his chief baker for offending him and Joseph was assigned to them as their servant.

One night, both the wine steward and the chief baker had a dream. The following day the wine steward asked Joseph to interpret his dream.

Joseph told the two prisoners that it is God who gives the ability to interpret dreams, implying Joseph's ability to interpret dreams was bestowed on him through God's will.

The wine steward described his dream to Joseph. Joseph explained that in three days the king would pardon him and restore him to his position as wine steward. At this point Joseph asked the wine steward to remember him when everything is going well for him, and furthermore to mention Joseph to the king and help him get out of prison.

Encouraged by the explanation Joseph gave the wine steward, the chief baker described his dream to Joseph as well. Joseph interpreted the chief baker's dream to mean that in three days he would be released, but instead of being reinstated to his position he would be executed.

Joseph's interpretation of the two prisoners' dreams came to pass in three days, on the king's birthday. The king released both the wine steward and the chief baker. The wine steward was restored to his position but the chief baker was executed in the manner Joseph prophesied.

Despite Joseph's request, the wine steward never gave Joseph another thought and forgot all about him. So Joseph spent another two years in prison.

The text in this chapter clearly states that Joseph's interpretation of the prisoners' dreams was guided by divine intervention and not purely a result of his own talent. However, it also shows that Joseph, imperfect like the rest

of us, relied on the wine steward to facilitate his release from prison instead of placing his trust in God to guide him.

In today's context we are reminded that our focus should stay with a direct relationship with God. We should always look directly to God for help and regardless of how his will is conveyed to us, remember it is only he who can ultimately really help us.

### **Prayer**

Dear heavenly father, please help to remind us that it is you and only you who can be ultimately relied on for grace, help and assistance, and that through prayer, we convey our pleas directly to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**Genesis 41**DREAMS

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We have all experienced the absolute relief one feels upon waking from a nightmare. We are able to breathe a sigh of relief and say to ourselves: "Thank God it was only a dream!" Nevertheless, it can still upset and bother us for some time afterwards. We can even wonder if it was some kind of omen and if we are being pre-warned of something terrible that is about to occur. We can spend much time trying to interpret dreams and indeed some people even make a living out of claiming they can. As Christians how seriously are we to take our dreams? We know the apparent science behind dreaming, sub conscious dealing with what has happened in the conscious mind during the day, or something like that. But is there more to it? Does God speak clear messages to us, his followers, whilst we sleep?

Dreams are mentioned often in the scriptures and it is obvious that our Lord can and does use them to communicate to people. Of course, what isn't always obvious is what is being revealed. We are not Pharaoh and we don't have a Joseph explaining our dreams to us; telling us exactly what God is about to do. But we do have the ability to ask our God for guidance, wisdom and discernment and yes, I believe, even with the interpretation of our dreams.

**Prayer**

Thank-you Lord for the Joseph story, it's certainly an amazing one! You never left Joseph, just as you never leave us. May we too use the gifts you have given each of us in a way that is pleasing to you. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

**Genesis 42****AN UNEXPECTED MEETING:  
JOSEPH'S STATESMANLIKE RESPONSE**

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Genesis 42 is the beginning of the story of Joseph and his family being reunited. Natural circumstances (drought) lead to a totally unexpected encounter between Joseph and his brothers (minus Benjamin). Since they last saw each other, things have changed and Joseph is now in charge. How will he manage it? It's a bit of everything really. There's a brief, expected show of anger, followed by application of the political acumen he possesses. He remembers the 'bow down' dream and realizes it is being fulfilled, but he decides on political caution as he skilfully leads a process of discovery to determine whether or not reconciliation with his family is a worthwhile proposition. On another level, there is the sense that he is desperate for family news and reconciliation. It's the gracious reaction of a powerful but 'good' statesman.

Later in the chapter, there's the deep anguish of Jacob as he takes in the absence of a second son and the potential future loss of his favourite son.

It's all so familiar to us—a typical human, family drama involving powerful players. Compare this with another powerful interaction—God meeting us. God has both lead roles in our drama, but his reactions to the scene are unique. As the one in charge, God doesn't first seek to form an opinion on whether or not it's worthwhile restoring his relationship with us. God's grace is totally unconditional. As the anguished father, he surely went through more than the trauma of Jacob, before sending his son to take care of our mess.

**Prayer**

Heavenly father, thank you for the unconditional family reconciliation you give us and for going through the anguish of sending your only son Jesus to be the provider of it. Amen.

Concerned for his famished household during the seven years of drought, Jacob finds himself in a no-win situation. He is trapped between his refusal to let Benjamin out of his sight for fear that he will never see him again, and his knowledge that if he doesn't let him go back with his brothers to Egypt, the governor of Egypt (Joseph still veiled) won't give the brothers any more grain to keep the family from perishing. Jacob believes he has lost his favourite son, Joseph; he can't bear to lose his other precious son by Rachel, his equally beloved Benjamin. But grudgingly he finally gives in to the fervent appeals of his fourth son Judah and lets Benjamin go, as the lesser of two evils.

Earlier, when the brothers had returned home after their first visit to Egypt and found their money placed back in their bags, their guilty fears had come flooding to the surface. Now back in Egypt, Joseph still appears to be motivated by a desire for cruel revenge for what he suffered at his brothers' hands many years ago. Invited to a banquet in the great man's palace the brothers may well have thought it was to be their last meal alive.

But maybe Joseph was also starting to plan their reconciliation. As he had once been Jacob's spoilt son, Joseph now spoils his brother Benjamin by making his helping five times bigger than the others. Joseph wants to know if his siblings will mistreat Benjamin the same way they once mistreated him. To find out, he will shortly give his brothers the chance to flee from Egypt and return to Canaan unharmed, leaving the 'spoilt' Benjamin to his fate as they had once abandoned the spoilt Joseph to his fate, to their father's endless grief. But this time their spokesman Judah says, 'No, our father Jacob has suffered far too much at our hands. We are deeply sorry for what we have done, to Joseph and to him. And I, Judah, am willing to take the rap and stay on as the man's personal servant, in the place of Benjamin'. Family harmony is finally restored by a heady mix of repentance, compassion and a willingness to suffer in the place of another, guided from start to finish by God's unseen hand.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, thank you for the hard knocks we sometimes suffer when we let jealousy get the better of us, or when we retaliate against people who we believe have wronged us. Thank you for all those events in our lives that lead to a growth in maturity. By your loving Spirit, fashion us in the image of Jesus, so that we become more compassionate and more forgiving. In his dear name we pray. Amen.

**Genesis 44****SOMETHING HAS CHANGED**

---

Have you ever done something wrong you really regret?

When taken as a whole, the story of Joseph and his brothers goes the full circle. History seems to replay, eventually leading back to God.

Here was a kid named Joseph who was Dad's favourite, who hassled his older brothers with his dreams of grandeur. The brothers became angered by this snotty little brother of theirs to the point of selling him into slavery. The father is lied to and grieves over a lost son.

Joseph then has a spectacular rise to power in Egypt eventually meeting his brothers when they are really down on their luck. Although overjoyed at seeing them again, he still continues playing power games with them. There is a difference this time though. Joseph now has wisdom to temper his actions.

A previous chapter has an incident resulting in the 10 brothers leaving Simeon in prison in Egypt, whilst they return to Jacob and cause him yet more grief. As if the loss of another son isn't enough, they are compelled by Joseph to return with Benjamin, the other favourite of their father and Joseph's true brother.

Something has changed though. In contrast to their treatment of Joseph many years earlier, there's an astonishingly protective care for Benjamin. They seem willing to go to any lengths to safeguard him. Reuben ransoms his own sons to Jacob if his protection fails, and as the story unfolds in the following chapters, all 10 brothers offer themselves as slaves, rather than leave Benjamin behind when he is accused of stealing a silver cup. Finally Judah begs to be Joseph's slave in the stead of Benjamin.

The regret of the brothers' treatment of Joseph has given them a complete change of heart and ensures they won't make the same mistake again. Their new sacrificial attitude has the potential to make everything is new.

"No-one can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending" (Unknown)

**Prayer**

Lord, remind us that repentance is never too late. You wait, delighting in every opportunity to turn us around and make us new. Amen.

**Genesis 45**COMING BACK TO BITE YOU

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Cleaning out the fridge is one of my worst domestic jobs. Why is it that old food makes its way further and further back, lurking hidden in the depths of the fridge? A little piece of unused pumpkin or that single slice of ham that never made it into a sandwich. The worst experience is opening a container and not even recognising the contents. It's turned into an alien; changed colour, grown fur or even separated into solid, liquid and gas.

Now these morsels try to hide, but you'll always find them. Eventually a terrible smell will lead you to them and force you to deal with it. It seems that nasty hidden things only get worse over time.

"The truth will out" was Shakespeare's way of saying that sins will always come back to bite you.

I wonder what Joseph's brothers talked about on their way home from Egypt; why Joseph had to instruct them "Don't quarrel on the way." Perhaps there was debate about which of them was going to 'fess up' and tell dad what they'd done to Joseph so many years before? Or whose fault it was way back then? Or if it was still possible to carry on the lie that they thought Joseph had been killed by an animal? Since dad and Joseph were about to meet up, I guess they had no choice but to finally confess the truth. After all those years, that hidden sin must have been festering.

Jesus said "Whatever is hidden away will be brought out into the open, and whatever is covered up will be uncovered." But the outcome in this story has an amazing gospel twist. After everything he'd been through, it's sheer grace that made Joseph say "What you intended for evil, God turned into good."

It's like stealing an apple and covering up the evidence by burying the core in the garden; returning years later to find a healthy apple tree. Only God can change nasty hidden things into something life giving. In Joseph's case, the rescue of the entire nation.

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, in this season of Lent as we focus on death emerging into life, thank you for reminding us that by your awesome power, even buried sins and regrets can be transformed into something life-giving. Amen.

**Genesis 46: 1 - 27****DO NOT BE AFRAID TO GO DOWN TO EGYPT**

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As Jacob and his sixty-six family members approached the border of Egypt, near the settlement of Beersheba, he would have felt twinges of anxiety. Jacob's grandfather Abraham had been kicked out of Egypt; Jacob's father Isaac had been warned not to enter Egypt; and now Jacob is on the cusp of entering the land where his favourite son Joseph had been sold into slavery.

Beersheba too was a significant location in Jacob's ancestral story: Abraham had named the locality; Isaac had visited there and it was on this place that he had been promised by God that God would maintain the covenant with Abraham of producing a nation from his offspring. Now, Isaac and all of his family on the verge of eradication due to drought were preparing to leave the land promised to Abraham as refugees. All of the promises of his ancestors were to be destroyed on his watch!

But, just as God told Abraham; and God told Isaac; God tells Jacob: Do not be afraid. I will bless you with many descendents. I will give you this Promised Land. God's promises will be fulfilled, whatever the roadblocks and diversions.

God tells you this too: Do not be afraid. You are blessed. I will keep my promises to you.

**Prayer**

Almighty God, when anxiety arises and you appear far away; when all hope appears to be gone, help us remember your promises: We are blessed and we need not be afraid because you are with us now and forever. Amen.

**Genesis 46:28 – 47:31**FREEDOM AND SLAVERY

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Genesis 47:19-21 “Shall we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land in exchange for food. We with our land will become slaves to Pharaoh; just give us seed, so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate.” So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. All the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe upon them; and the land became Pharaoh's. As for the people, he made slaves of them from one end of Egypt to the other.

The Biblical narrative is interesting in this story for its impact on the family of Israel. With a broader vision we see the tragedy of people who lose their land and are enslaved when drought ravages their region. It can be understood as a story of a wise leader using the existing social structures (absolute monarchy and slavery) to save a people and their land from starvation and desolation. Collectivization and taxation in the face of extreme poverty are methods that have continued to be used across the eons.

We might wish that God had guided Joseph to develop systems for caring that did not involve slavery. Maybe then the institution would have been less pervasive, maybe Christians would not have used Scripture to support the continuation of slavery, maybe we wouldn't need to wonder if the coffee we are drinking or the t-shirt we are wearing is partly produced by slaves.

Today there are more people in bondage than ever before, perhaps as many as 36 million children and adults. Poverty-stricken parents believe they are securing their children's future by passing them to a family with more resources to care for them: adults are tricked into slavery by promises of education or work in the city or a neighbouring country; others become slaves in exactly the circumstances of the Egyptians in the Genesis story. There are always people who will take advantage of the hungry.

Throughout Scripture God calls out for freedom for the oppressed and against this diminishment of the human soul. Can we rise to this call?

**Prayer**

God of freedom and wholeness, guide us towards justice and use our hands in your service to the world. Amen.

Bless You.

May God go with you.

May the Lord keep you from all harm and watch over your life;  
May He watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Peace be with you.

When we bestow a blessing we are invoking God's protection or approval upon someone, or giving and sharing His divine gift or favour. What a special thing to do. I would imagine that if one received a blessing from a dying loved one, that experience would hold cherished memories. The dying person's last gift, reminding us we are loved, as they think about us, not themselves. Blessing us with words that give encouragement and hope that can sustain through difficult times, a promise to hold on to. One example of a death bed blessing can be found in Genesis 48: 1- 22. Joseph and his two sons come to visit his father before he dies and Israel leaves them with a precious gift, blessing them.

"May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm —may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly on the earth."

In giving his blessing, Israel recalls God's faithfulness and protection (a blessing in itself) which is theirs (and ours) as his heirs and gives them hope for the future.

### **Prayer**

May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; may the Lord look with favour on you and give you peace. And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you, now and forever. Amen.

**Genesis 49:1 - 27**FAMILY BLESSINGS

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It's amazing to see God's blessing upon a growing family. Jacob (Israel) was blessed with twelve sons, who all grew to have families which became whole tribes. In this passage we are reminded how our personalities and choices influence our children and grandchildren through the generations. Leadership, violence, love of the sea or land can all be taught.

The blessings we acknowledge are those which come through Jacob's sons Judah and Joseph. Both are royally blessed.

The lion Judah with eyes 'darker than wine', white teeth, and robes washed in wine reminds us of Jesus, born in the city of Bethlehem Judah. Jesus, descended of Judah, with eyes 'darker than wine' and white teeth, had robes washed in blood. Having robes washed in Jesus' crimson blood buys richly royal, abundant life for us. We can tie our donkey to a vine. There are plenty of leaves and fruit to share.

Joseph's brothers got rid of him in fear of him lording it over them. When they did bow down to him he'd saved the family in time of famine. Joseph knew what it was to be attacked, and he also knew God's saving love. We can't control the skies above or the deep springs but they both give us life-giving water. When we look towards rocks we know that changes have taken place over thousands and millions of years, but God's hand has given life through everything.

**Prayer**

God of family, thank you for blessing us royally. Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY

Sunday 5th April 2015

READING IN TWO PARTS:

**Part 1: Genesis 49:28-33**

THE LAST REQUEST

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In Jacob's last days, he instructed his sons to bury him in the tomb at Hebron, which was 350km away from his deathbed. Why did he ask his sons to carry his body 4 days camels walk to bury him there? His beloved people were there! Jacob spent his first 15 years with his grandpa Abraham. I believe Abraham had told Jacob many stories about how he experienced the wonder and grace of God, the exciting and warm family stories including how he got the tomb with pride and gratitude. Jacob's faith journey started and was nurtured since then. From the stories of the people lying in the tomb, (grandpa, grandma Sarah, father Isaac, mother Rebekah, and his wife Leah), Jacob knew that the almighty God was merciful despite people's limitation and small faith. He yearned to be at the destiny with his beloved people and be looked after by the living God.

The wordings in KJV and RSV are: Jacob 'said' to his sons about his burial. Well, how do I feel about my burial? I can only 'request'. I am asking a favour. I will be grateful if my wish is granted. I am treating every day as a bonus from God. I remind myself to say 'That's very kind of you' - I cannot take those kind gestures for granted.

### **Prayer**

Dear Lord, thank you for providing me with a tearless and painless home as my ultimate destiny. Please help me live with a grateful heart for all the kind doings and a forgiving heart when I get hurt feelings. Amen.

**Part 2: Genesis 50**

LIFE IN FULL SOMEDAY

v.14 "After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, together with his brothers and all the others who had gone with him to bury his father."

Joseph had grieved over the loss of his father for three or four months, yet no one should grieve forever. After that grieving, life must go on, and so he returned to Egypt. Those who have lost someone very close to them might have wanted to do something similar to what Joseph had done – return to Egypt – the world of his glory days. Perhaps not today, perhaps not this week or next week or month, because dealing with grief takes time, but life must resume in full SOMEDAY.

In Christian belief the inspired answer to death is resurrection. When a loved one dies, it is not only the person himself who dies. There is a sense in which the lover also dies, or at least a large part of him dies. Part of Joseph was buried in Machpelah's cave when he placed his beloved father next to Abraham, Sarah, Rebecca, and Leah. Part of us also lies interred when we bury a spouse, child, or other loved one. Thus, we also need to be resurrected. As we stand at that grave and hear the words of the service assuring us that the one who has died shall rise again, let us hear them not only as a promise for the deceased but as a promise for ourselves as well. Today a part of us is buried, but we shall live SOMEDAY again.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, in your promise, let grief be overcome, and sorrow conquered. Lord, see to it, and unfold the riches of your blessing in our lives. Amen.

## **PRODUCE A CONGREGATIONAL DEVOTIONAL BOOK?**

### **IT'S WORTHWHILE – TRY IT!**

This is the sixth of these Devotional booklets produced by St Stephens. One on each of the four gospels and Acts, and now this one on Genesis. There are around 300 copies produced and taken up each year. They go mainly to St Stephens members but some are requested by others including people from interstate.

To produce a devotional booklet, the bible selection that is to be studied is divided into 47 fairly equal parts. – one part for each day of Lent and Holy Week. The sections are then distributed to members of the congregation who are invited to write some devotional thoughts and a short prayer. If the word limit is set at 150 – 200, each devotion will fit on an A5 page.

We have found that producing a booklet is an uplifting spiritual adventure.

- It has people who normally don't have much contact working together on a great project.
  - Not only the coordinators but also the writers who discuss the texts often deeply with friends, neighbours and others they don't normally talk to about such things.
- The writings give the readers a refreshing new perspective on the writer, especially people who live in the congregational background or people who attend church infrequently.
- It gives the writer a new perspective on themselves particularly those who have done nothing like this before. Those who take a deep breath, take up the challenge and give their witness.
- The output is a refreshing, multi-styled set of devotions and personal witnesses to our God's amazing love that carries people through the season of Lent and Easter and through their lives.
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