

**GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 25 (32:1 - 33:20): Some Summary Thoughts:**

**Conversion vs. Sanctification:** The journey that marks Jacob’s life is extremely instructive. In the macro sense, it reminds us that, while “conversion” (i.e., the initial submission to God in faith) may occur quickly or even over a period of time, “sanctification” (the continual life of trust in God) is a lifelong process that takes turns and twists where God’s leading is assured but can usually only be discerned in hindsight.

**God’s Actions to Empower His Chosen One:** As we noted in the lesson, chapters 28 and 32 form major benchmarks in the life of Jacob as they relate to the Presence, Promise and Power of God to provide completely for those He calls to serve Him. Both settings include ramifications of hostile estrangement between siblings. The contrast is unbelievable from a human perspective:

- Chapter 28: God appears to Jacob, promising His Presence and Power will be with him in his departure from the Promised Land on his journey to the unknown (28:15). This promise is to the conniving Jacob, the one who secured his birthright and blessing through guile, and who agrees to serve God, but only under five conditions (28:20-21). This is the Jacob who, at this stage, appears to be only looking out for number one.
- Chapter 32: Fifteen or more years later, God appears again, this time to a humbled, contrite Jacob, who now credits God for his many blessings (wives, children, wealth, livestock), but this time God seems to appear not as a benefactor, but as an antagonist! Having experienced the Divine Presence manifested in protection and blessing earlier when he was not contrite (28:11-17), Jacob now is confronted with the Divine Presence in conflict and opposition, when he is contrite. One possible lesson to be drawn is:
  - *“As unsettling as it may seem, the narrative of Jacob should remind us that often before God fights for us, He may have to fight against us. Within this context, we should realize that there may be times where we only come to recognize the true source of our blessings and life when we experience God’s crippling touch.”*
- Even more instructive than the contrast and conflict depicted, however, is the fact that although struggle dominates the text, Jacob could not struggle (and prevail) if God did not choose willingly to enter the struggle! This aspect of God’s character is even clearer as we think of His action through His Son for our benefit on the cross. In Chapter 32, we come more clearly face-to-face with the majesty of God’s gospel as we contemplate the aftermath of Jacob being crippled by God’s touch. In his “weakened” state, Jacob can ask for and receive that which only God can give – His Blessing. It is as a consequence of this blessing that Jacob can now appear before his hostile, estranged brother in Chapter 33, giving total credit to God for who he is and what he now has, and appealing to Esau as a humbled supplicant *who now sees in the face of his brother, the face of God* (33:10)! In Divine irony, as Jacob prepares to re-enter the Promised Land, humbled and blessed, he experiences God acting as he presumed Esau would act, and Esau acting toward him as he had previously experienced God.
  - In part, these texts serve to remind us that, despite our earthly fears, our lives and futures are not controlled by the human obstacles in our road, but by the God who stands before us, behind us, and beside us! Jacob’s future was never more secure than when he limped forth to meet his brother.

**Reconciliation:** The story of Jacob is one of growing trust in God and one of reconciliation as a consequence of God’s transforming touch. Our God who can do the surprising and unexpected is truly a God who reconciles and expects the same of His chosen ones. In 2 Cor 5:17-21, Paul describes God’s act of reconciling the world through Christ and calls for those reconciled to be messengers and ministers of reconciliation. Similar calls echo from Rom 5:10-11; Col 1:20-21; Eph 2:15-16; Matt 5:23-24.