

Foundations: Jacob III--BEING DECEIVED
Genesis 29:9-25 (AFBC 9/24/17)

This morning, we take a third look at the patriarch Jacob. If you haven't figured this out already, let me assure you that Jacob's story is, if anything, fascinating.

Last Sunday, we found Jacob traveling to Haran, trying to stay away from his brother—for good reason—he wanted to kill him. He had stolen his father Isaac's blessing from his brother Esau, employing a scheme that their mother, Rebekah, had devised.

Today, we would likely call this a dysfunctional family. Still, God assures Jacob that He will get him through this latest crisis and keep the promises He's made to Abraham, Isaac, and now to the conniving Jacob as well.

But the tables get turned in Genesis 29. Jacob, the trickster, gets tricked by his father-in-law-to-be in what has to be one of the most unusual love stories ever. We'll only have time to read a portion of the story; so, if you're not familiar with it, I encourage to look at the rest of this chapter when you get a chance.

...There you will find a remarkable story concerning Jacob and his wives—yes, that's plural—his wives, Leah and Rachel. It reads like a soap opera, friends, complete with love, jealousy, deceit, sibling rivalry, in-law problems, even surrogate mothers! (And you thought that was something new!?!?)

Again, this is Jacob, son of Isaac and Rebekah, who came into the world holding onto the foot of his twin brother, Esau. Jacob literally means, "he grasps the heel." The figurative meaning is "He deceives." It's where we get the phrase "pulling your leg."

Jacob lived up to his name when he enticed his brother to sell his birthright for a bowl of soup and then deceived his father into giving him the blessing intended for Esau. But when Jacob got married, well... let's just say the "grasper of the heel" got his own leg pulled!

We'll pick up the story at verse 9 of Genesis 29. Jacob has fled to a distant place to seek refuge among his mother's relatives. This is where Jacob meets the love of his life (vss. 9-11):

“While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, for she was a shepherdess. When Jacob saw Rachel, daughter of Laban, his mother’s brother, and Laban’s sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle’s sheep. Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud.”

These were tears of joy, friends. Jacob took one look at Rachel and he was a goner! Smitten with love!

That large stone covering the mouth of the well was very heavy. The shepherds normally waited until all of them had arrived before moving it, but with a rush of Rachel-induced adrenaline, Jacob single-handedly moved the stone and watered her sheep. That was all it took to win Rachel’s heart. Jacob sensed it and kissed her... on their first date!

Sometimes you just know. All the bells and whistles sound when you meet that special someone. Of course, you do have to be careful about false alarms! There’s something to be said for long courtships--but what a rush when it happens this way. You’ll not only move stones--as Jacob did--but mountains too, if necessary.

There may be lots of differences between you, but that’s part of the attraction. Opposites really do attract!

So what if she’s outgoing and likes to have lots of people around while he’s rather introverted and shys away from crowds. She admires his depth and quiet intellect, while he likes how she can make friends in a way he only wishes he could. Bulldoze those mountains right on out of here--they’re in love--it has to work, doesn’t it?

Well, back to Jacob’s story. Rachel takes him home to Daddy. His name is Laban, and he’s the brother of Jacob’s mother. Uncle Laban also gives Jacob a kiss and invites him to stay and help out with the sheep (wink-wink). Let’s continue the story:

Genesis 29:15ff.: After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, Laban said to him, “Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be.” Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes (dull), but Rachel was lovely in form and beautiful. Jacob was in love

with Rachel and said, “I’ll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.” Laban said, “It’s better I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me.” So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

What a love story! Seven years he would have to work for her Daddy, but it was worth it--the love of his life would be his! Now, fast forward seven years, and pick up the story at verse 21:

Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her. (Not the best choice of words, maybe, but let’s continue...) So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob lay with her... Then vs. 25, “When morning came, there was Leah!

We’re not told exactly how this happened—but you have to wonder! Was it a really dark night, or was Leah wearing a veil, or had young Jacob done too much partying? Whatever, Jacob was deceived, and he woke up the next day with the wrong woman. Can’t you hear Jacob protesting, “This is not who I thought she was. This is not the person I intended to marry.”

Does that sound familiar? It’s estimated that 80% of people say something like this at some point in their marriages. Granted, the circumstances are different, but the results are the same. If I had only known what he or she was really like, I would never have said yes. This is not the person I married!

Oh, but it is! It’s just that those same differences that seemed so attractive while you were falling in love are so distracting now that you are married. It’s why so many couples experience far more conflict than they ever imagined they would.

Some of this is inevitable due to the differences between men and women. Someone pointed out how different we are in a rather amusing way. I like this—I think you will too:

What is a cat?

- 1) Cats do what they want. 2) They rarely listen to you.
- 3) They’re totally unpredictable. 4) They whine when they are not happy. 5) When you want to play, they want to be alone.

6) When you want to be alone, they want to play. 7) They expect you to cater to their every whim. 8) They're moody.

9) They leave hair everywhere. Finally, 10) They drive you nuts and cost an arm and a leg.

Conclusion: They're tiny little women in fur coats.

But there's another question: **What is a dog?**

1) Dogs lie around all day, sprawled on the most comfortable piece of furniture in the house.

2) They can hear a package of food opening half a block away, but don't hear you when you are in the same room.

3) They can look dumb and lovable all at the same time.

4) They growl when they are not happy. 5) When you want to play, they want to play. 6) When you want to be alone, they want to play. 7) They are great at begging. 8) They love you forever if you rub their tummies. 9) They leave their toys everywhere. 10) They do disgusting things with their mouths and then try to give you a kiss.

Conclusion: They're tiny little men in fur coats.

Well, big surprise: men and women are different. But there are also differences between people--regardless of gender--that can cause you to wonder how you got stuck with the one you did. Those personality differences, for instance, can drive you nuts!

Just like each person is born with certain physical characteristics--you may have blond, brown, or red hair; your eyes may be blue, green, brown, or one of each...well, hopefully not all three. We also come into this world with differences in temperament. Any parent who has more than one child can tell you how they saw these differences in their children almost from birth.

Bill Hybells called this the "snowflake phenomenon." Just as there are no two identical snowflakes, no two human flakes are just alike. We're all a little flaky; and within marriage, these differences can begin to rub us the wrong way, as they say.

People are different in how, and how much, they relate to others. They are different in how structured they want their lives to be. Some of you have all your shoes arranged neatly on a little rack while others of you must look in more than one room just to find two shoes that match.

Some of you want everything mapped out with all the reservations guaranteed in advance while others feel finding your way and a

place to stay are part of the adventure. And what's more, some of you are married to each other!

So who's right; and who's wrong? Nobody is. These aren't ethical or moral issues. These are personal preferences. If you find yourself married to someone who is your opposite, you'd better find some middle ground to stand on together or one day you'll wake-up and discover that there's nothing between you but a vast chasm that neither of you is willing to cross.

And you'll never find that middle ground unless at least one of you--out of love for the other and commitment to the marriage--is willing to go past the middle. Or you can just keep on battling over who's right and who's wrong. But ask yourself, "Is winning this battle, is getting my way on this, more important than the survival of our marriage?"

Remember that what seems normal for you may not be normal for that person to whom you're married. Or for that person you work with or go to school with. It's just that within marriage, the differences multiply if either partner in the relationship insists that what's normal must always be what's normal for them.

As I speak with couples who are planning to be married--and, by the way, three sessions are required with each couple--I always ask them how much time they have spent with each other's families. Now, some may wonder why this matters. After all, they are not marrying the whole family. Oh, but they are!

The single greatest impact on the person you marry is their family background. Their sense of self-esteem, self-confidence, character, and value system were all formed within the family.

Their whole concept of marriage, work ethic, ideas about how to raise children and even how to have fun were instilled in the family setting. The importance they assign to their relationship with Christ and His Church--if they have one--is most likely related to the spiritual emphasis within their own family.

The family, with all its wonderful potential for good, is also the single greatest source of personal pain. No one ever grows up completely pain free--because there are no perfect parents.

"There is none righteous, no not one..." (Romans 3:23). Even the most loving parents make mistakes that wound their children, even

though it was the last thing in the world they intended to do.

Think about Jacob's family of origin. His own mother involves him in a plot against his older brother and elderly father--no wonder Jacob struggled with deception and trickery and even had to wrestle with God! If Rachel had checked out his family background, she might have run the other way.

Terrible struggles in marriage are often the result of earlier family problems--in some cases, generations of family struggles--for which neither party is responsible. For that marriage to survive requires hours of honest, painful, discussions and a lot of grace, forgiveness, compassion, and total commitment to the marriage.

Walking away is often easier; but staying together and working it out can be the pathway to renewed love and fulfillment in the relationship. And it's usually worth the effort!

So, we've talked about differences in temperament and family background. Often, there are also differences in expectations.

I heard about one couple who got married, went on a romantic cruise for their honeymoon. Soon after they got home, the bride called her mother. "How was the honeymoon?" mom asked. "Oh, it was wonderful," the daughter said.

"Everything was so beautiful, we were waited on hand and foot, we had a terrific time. But, Mom, as soon as we returned home, he began using really horrible language, stuff I'd never heard before--terrible 4-letter words--like cook and wash, dust and iron." Sometimes, our expectations are different!

Marriage always brings together two very different people. To start with, they're male and female; but then you have to juggle all these other factors as well. Don't let anybody tell you it's easy. Conflict is inevitable.

So how the couple deals with conflict is vitally important. Some approach conflict Eskimo style and freeze each other out, never resolving anything. Others go at it cowboy style, saying 'this house ain't big enough for the both of us.' In other words, somebody's got to go! That does wonders for a relationship.

Conflict is inevitable in any relationship, but Christian couples need to understand that there is a right and wrong way to deal with it.

There's a Biblical pattern for conflict resolution. Let me summarize it briefly:

1) Deal with it quickly. Ephesians 4:26 says, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry." Don't stuff conflict away in the closet--deal with it as soon as possible. As grandma put it, "Don't go to bed mad." She was just paraphrasing Scripture.

2) Have a reconciling spirit. II Cor. 5:18 says that God has '...reconciled us unto himself through Jesus Christ and given to us the ministry of reconciliation.'

Christians are not to have a spirit of accusation, intimidation, or conquest. We are to have a spirit of reconciliation. When things are not right, it's our hearts' desire to take the initiative in setting them right. By our new nature in Christ, we are reconcilers.

3) Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). It takes a lot of love to confront a problem quickly with a reconciling spirit. You must care deeply to risk speaking the truth in a way that it can be heard and understood--to express a hurtful truth in a helpful way.

Don't think that keeping the peace at all costs is more helpful in a relationship than being honest. This is not truth used as a weapon, but truth reaching out like a warm, loving embrace.

4) Get help if needed. In Matthew 18, Jesus says that if someone has wronged you, go to them and try to resolve it between the two of you. But if this doesn't work, involve others.

Don't put it off. Go to someone you both trust--another couple, a wise friend, your pastor, deacon, or Sunday School teacher, a Christian counselor--someone who can help you get beyond the crisis and get your marriage back on track.

Marriage is a tricky business. But it can and should be the most rewarding of all human relationships--if you will go about it with love, commitment, and honesty--understanding that this precious person the Lord has given to you will be different from yourself in ways that can complete you rather than just frustrate you.

Love your spouse/ pray / listen to / learn from your spouse, and refuse to settle for anything less than the wonderful source of mutual joy and fulfillment that God intends for your marriage to be.