



Unit .03

Session .02

God's Gift of Love

Scripture



Genesis 29:21-35

21 Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.” **22** So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. **23** But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. **24** (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) **25** And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?” **26** Laban said, “It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. **27** Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.” **28** Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. **29** (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) **30** So Jacob went in to Rachel

also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years. **31** When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. **32** And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, “Because the LORD has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me.” **33** She conceived again and bore a son, and said, “Because the LORD has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also.” And she called his name Simeon. **34** Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, “Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.” Therefore his name was called Levi. **35** And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, “This time I will praise the LORD.” Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.

How do you think this might have caused Jacob to think deeply about his own lies and deception toward Esau?



99 Essential Doctrines

God is Love

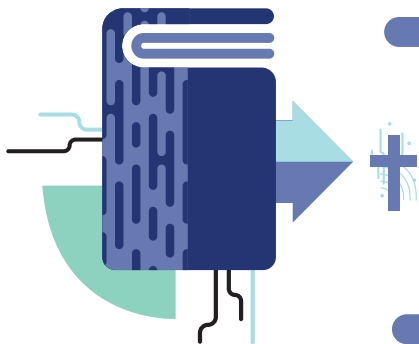
To say that God is love is to say that God is the essence of love, or that perfect love both resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection, a sign that points to the perfect love that resides within God. The greatest act of love by God toward humans isn't the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in Christ so that we might become reconciled to Him.

Main Point

Love is a gift from God and is meant to be shared with those around us.

What would you say to someone who says the Bible allows a husband to have multiple wives?

What do we learn from this account about God's love toward those who often go unloved by others?



Christ Connection

Jacob's love for Rachel was deep, persistent, and yet flawed by sin; he played favorites. However, Jesus loved the world and gave His life to save sinners, including the outcasts and the unloved.

Why should God's never-ending, never-failing love be a constant source of encouragement for us in all aspects of our lives?

How have you seen God develop your love for others through an understanding of His love for you?

In Defense



Unlike the atheistic worldview, the Christian worldview can easily account for the existence of love. Atheism must reduce “love” to nothing more than a chemical process in the brain or a feeling we get under the right biological conditions and nothing more. Such a belief is understandably difficult for many atheists, who have to admit that their “love” for their kids can be reduced to the chemical and biological impulses of their brains. The struggle is this: Many have an intuition that love is real and something more than a collection of chemicals. However, the Christian worldview offers a comprehensive picture of love, including the emotional feelings we get as well as how love goes beyond emotions and into action for someone else’s good. The Christian worldview believes love is a real thing, because God—who is love—is real and has first loved and pursued us. Therefore, we can in turn genuinely love others.



Head

Why is it a good thing that God disciplines those He loves?

How has God's discipline been a positive thing in your own life?



Heart

Do you tend to think of God as an overbearing judge in the sky or as a Father who loves His children and wants their best?

What ways might God show His love for us? What is by far the greatest way God has shown His love for humanity?

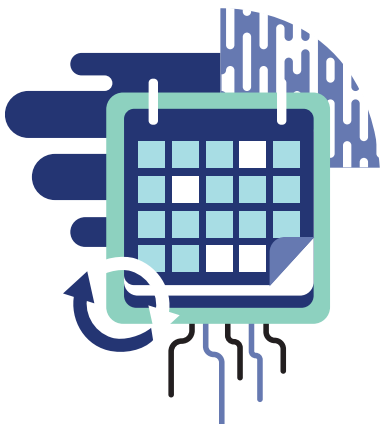


Hands

Why should Christians actively seek to reflect the love of Christ to others?

What can you do to show someone who may feel unloved how much he or she is loved by God?

Daily Devotions



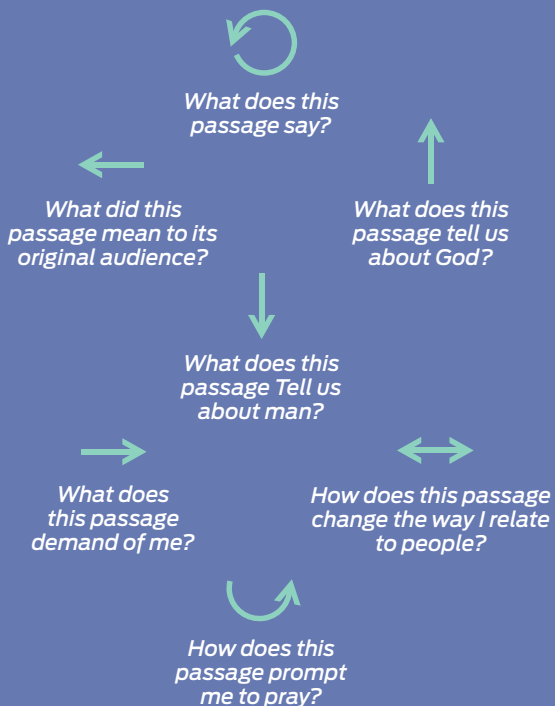
Day 1

Genesis 29:1-12

As Genesis 29 opens with Jacob reaching his destination of Paddan-aram. There he saw shepherds and their sheep around a well with a large stone covering its opening. In short time, Jacob met Rachel—the daughter of his uncle Laban—whom he would fall in love with and marry.

Despite Jacob's deception and shortcomings, God promised to carry on His covenant through him. God promised to be with him. And we can see God watching over Jacob, guiding his path, and caring about the details in the way He provided a wife for Jacob. This is the same lesson we learn over and over against as we read these biblical accounts—God loves His children and provides for them.

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



How have you seen God guide, direct, and confirm your steps as you follow Him?

Genesis 29:13-30

What exactly was Laban thinking when he agreed to Jacob's request to work seven years for the right to marry Rachel? Did he expect that his older daughter, Leah, would be married before the seven years were up? Did he suspect Jacob's infatuation with his younger daughter would fade?

We don't know, of course—Scripture doesn't tell us—but this account, along with the ongoing motif of deception in Jacob's life reminds us of our need to live with integrity. God's people are called to speak the truth at all times—nothing we say should even look like a lie (Prov. 12:22; 2 Cor. 8:21; Col. 3:9; Heb 13:18). We live with integrity because we want to reflect God's nature to the world and because we find rest, joy, and salvation in His truth, Jesus Christ.

What ways can you live with increased integrity at home, school, and in your community?

Genesis 29:31-35

Leah was in such a difficult position. She was married to a man who did not love her. A man who actually despised her most likely because of the deception she had been part of. And to make matters even worse, her husband was also married to her sister, the one he truly and openly loved, and the two would become bitter rivals (Gen. 30:1,6,8,15).

We should not gloss over Leah's pain here—a deep pain produced by sin, particularly Laban's and Jacob's. We need to remember that sin always has consequences—in our lives and the lives of others. But we shouldn't miss what God brought through Leah's adversity; the beauty He brought from the ashes. Leah's sons were part of the nation God built. Levi would be the one from whom the priests would come. And Judah, his kingly line would be the one from which the Savior of the world would come. Trials and pain often push us away from God, and the tragedy is that when they do, we can miss the beauty of God's work as they happen.

How has God used trials, adversity, and pain in your life for good?

Genesis 30:1-43

For the third generation in a row, we encounter the theme of barrenness as God forms the nation He had promised Abraham. And once again, as Abraham and Sarah had done, we see people trying to take matters into their own hands. Echoing Sarah's demand for Abraham to have children with her maid, Hagar, Rachel demanded that Jacob have children with her maid, Bilhah. Abraham's grandson had two sons with Bilhah. Then when Leah stopped having children, she gave Jacob her maid, Zilpah, who also bore sons for him.

God used these sinful choices for His good, but they were not without consequences. Rivalry and favoritism would not be confined to Jacob and his four wives. It would spill over onto their children, as with Joseph.

Learning from our sins is important; it is one way we grow in holiness. But it is also important that we learn from the sins of others. Surely Jacob knew the stories of his grandfather. But tragically, Jacob chose to repeat their mistakes.

What lessons have you learned from your failures and how can you encourage others by sharing them?

Genesis 31:1-55

Jacob traveled to Paddan-aram to find a wife and to flee from his older brother's wrath. Years later, he had that wife—and three others—as well as many children and considerable wealth because of a shrewd arrangement he had made with Laban. Once again the uncle and nephew found themselves in a match of wits.

But it was time for the wayward son to return home; God had told him so (v. 3). And so, as only seemed fitting, Jacob snuck away with his family and possessions, running from Laban without telling him. Of course this didn't go over well with Laban, who chased Jacob and his daughters, catching up to them a week later.

The interaction between Jacob and Laban reminds us that relationships, even within families, can be messy at times. And in order to experience the type of reconciliation the Bible calls for, it is also important to be reminded that both parties bring their individual sin into the relationship. So, we should constantly be asking ourselves, "How has my sin contributed to the situation? How can I try to make things right?" If Jacob or Laban had asked themselves that question, maybe their relationship would have been different.

Are there any relationships in your life that need healing? What steps can you take toward reconciliation this week?