

Finding Your Name

From Insecurity to Inheritance—the Lives of Isaac and Jacob

Jane Rubietta

INTRODUCTION

Finding Your Name: From Insecurity to Inheritance—the Lives of Isaac and Jacob contains several application tools at the end of each day's reading. Sometimes, though, it helps to have additional questions and journey-deepening suggestions, both to enrich personal study and application, and to make leading or facilitating a small group, book club, or study easier.

The daily readings have been combined to form a thirteen-week study guide. If your group is meeting for only six weeks, combine two weeks for each group session. There will be ample material to use during your meeting time. The questions below work well in combination with the application elements at the close of each reading. During your sessions, read aloud or review the passage of Scripture, and then discuss general impressions of the week's readings. You might close each session by asking how to apply the Note To Self, and then reading in unison the Traveling Mercy.

To get started, each group member should have a personal copy of *Finding Your Name*. It is helpful if they read the current week's selections in advance of the meeting.

Note: at the beginning of each session, you might want to remind people that silence is uncomfortable but good, and allows people time to process. Also, to honor confidentiality and to create a safe environment, adapt the motto, "What we say here, stays here."

GENERAL QUESTIONS TO ASK AT EACH SESSION

What stood out for you in these readings?
What Scriptures spoke to you? In what ways?
Where did you sense God tugging, or an *ah-ha* moment?

What emotional responses did you experience?
What will be different today? Tomorrow?

Close by reading the Traveling Mercy aloud, either as a group, or by twos to one another, so it is intimate for each person.



For more group ideas and resources, please visit [www. JaneRubietta.com](http://www.JaneRubietta.com). If your group is interested in a video conference call with the author, during or toward the end of your study together, please contact her at info@JaneRubietta.com.

You might want to consider the Deeper Devotion book, *Finding Your Dream: From Famine to Feast—the Life of Joseph* for your next group study. Ninety-one readings leading you deeper into your dreams—and God's!—inviting the Scriptures to take root and instigate change in our lives.

Week One

Readings: June 1 – June 7
Genesis 16:1 – Genesis 21:17

Digging In

1. The story of Sarah and Hagar is a classic case of “Be careful what you wish for.” What’s one of your such stories? If you could reframe your wish, what would it be? (Not that wishes really come true, but...sometimes that saying really pricks with truth.)
2. High profile people with enormous responsibility (even if the responsibility is only to their fan base) end up being complex and sinful. Politicians fall from grace because of their imperfections. What is comforting about Sarah’s inclusion in the Big Plan of God?
3. Where does funny fit into your life? One of my children told me this week, “Laughter is extremely important to me.” I agree—laughter has been a lifesaver in my own life, and seems to be a trademark when I speak (which surprises me). How about you?
4. What parts of Ishmael’s story do you relate to? Why?
5. When are you a “wilderness people”? What are your symptoms?
6. Hagar and Ishmael met up with an angel who turned out to be God in the wilderness. What’s one of your wilderness angel encounters?

Digging Deeper

1. We leap into enormous issues immediately in this section. What were you afraid of, as a child? What fears might be plaguing Sarah? How about Ishmael? Hagar? And how do fears control you today?
2. Real people people the wilderness, and you and I are among them. How do you recognize wilderness people, and how do you bless them (rather than avoid or merely tolerate them)?
3. Looking at Isaac reminds me that God includes all personality types in the forward momentum of salvation and calling. What disadvantages did Isaac have, growing up with his father (besides the obvious Altar Incident)? How about you? How are you sandwiched in your life with people of different personalities, professions, proficiencies? How do you find peace with your makeup vs. theirs? And how about that only child business for Isaac?
4. Consider the idea of wounded people wounding other people. How do you see this played out in Isaac’s and his contemporaries’ lives? How do you stop the cycle in your own life?
5. God asked, “What troubles you, Hagar?” (New Oxford Annotated Bible). It’s a brilliant question. How do you answer it, and what do you do with God’s next instructions, “Do not be afraid...”? God opened Hagar’s eyes, and she saw the well. Sometimes salvation is right around the corner, and if we quit now, we lose the sustenance waiting for us. How do you hold on? When have you quit too soon?
6. “God knows the fix he’s in,” the MSG renders Gen 21:17 about Ishmael’s situation in the desert. Wait with that truth: it is far larger and broader than just Ishmael. How do you access the reality that God knows the fix you’re in, and hears you?

Week Two

Readings: June 8 – June 14
Genesis 21:1-20

Digging In

1. Life is always full of “if only” moments—and don’t we love to whomp on ourselves over them frequently? What’s your biggest “if only” regret? Who in the sequences of Sarah-Hagar-Abraham-Ishmael might have the most “if only” moments? Which/what?
2. How do you learn to live in the possibilities and promises of today, with all its newness, rather than in yesterday’s regrets? There is a clear dividing line between the two (read Genesis 1-2) to help us separate them. Consider the statement, “Ishmael’s reality was much larger than his past mistakes and outrights sins. His reality was that God was with him. He didn’t deserve God’s presence.” Talk about that truth. Where does it lead you, personally?
3. When you were a kid, who was the perfect family that you just loved to hang out with? What did you love about that family? My friend Marsha had a perfect family, and I couldn’t wait to go to her house. Her parents were fun, funny, invited me to do fun things with them (like, swimming, boating, water skiing, ice skating, and once even golfing which was a dismal failure), fed me all kinds of yummy food, and Marsha and I had sleepovers in her awesomely decorated and cool bedroom.
4. Laughter turned to tears pretty quickly for some people in Abraham’s household. What messages did you get about crying, growing up? How do they impact you, now? What messages have you sent others about tears, and do you have the same standards for men as for women?
5. Water rights have caused major strife and sometimes even a (legal!) rifle shot or two, if someone is caught taking water from a ditch that doesn’t belong to them. Houses and ranches are sold with very clear delineations as to the water rights and usage in some of the U.S. What do you think about the treaty of Beersheba? Wells of course are necessary to survival in the desert, or any place without fresh water. This is the first treaty made in the Old Testament, and later, God would order the Israelites to make no treaties with the occupants of the land. (See Ex. 34:12, 15; Deut. 7:2, 23:6.) Why?
6. After solidifying the treaty, Abraham planted a tree, and called on the name of the Lord, the “Eternal God.” (Gen. 21:33,34) This tree would serve as a reminder for him and all his kin who passed by, of God’s presence and of God’s provision of water in the desert. What sorts of “trees” do you have?

Digging Deeper

1. The angel states in Gen. 16:11 that “the Lord has heard of your misery.” In the original language, the word for misery means affliction, suffering, distress, grief, hardship and misery. This word is used multiple times in Scripture in the context of God’s attentiveness to Israel’s anguish: Gen. 29:32, Ex. 3:7, 17, 4:11, among other instances, and is associated with deliverance. Wahoo! What does this communicate to you about God, and your own situation? Do you think it transfers to you? Why or why not?
2. Abraham is naturally distressed about sending his son Ishmael off into the wilderness (and we can question why he sent such scant rations with them, but without any good answers). What do we learn about God from the interchange in Gen. 21:11-13? And what application do you make in

your own circumstances. [Ultimately, is every child a wanted child? What hope does this offer for every child born into messy families (ha! All families)...]

3. “Do not be so distressed,” God says. What do you make of that? And do you think when we are in anguish over someone’s difficulties, that God says, “Don’t be so distressed, I will take care of that child,” and finishes with, “because he/she is *your* friend, or offspring?” It’s easy to imagine God saying that of Abraham, but what about you?
4. It seems as though God is particularly sensitive to our cries. See Num. 20:16, where the same word is used as in Gen. 20:17. Dt. 33:7, I Kings 17:22, and Ps. 130:2,6 all use the same Hebrew word. What similarities do you see?
5. Ishmael probably grew to like his name. God hears Ishmael, Ishmael hears God. The Scriptures tell us that God hears Ishmael, hears him crying, hears his needs, hears his heart. And “Do not be afraid.” Because why? Because “God has heard.” (Gen. 21:17). Where do you go with this truth? How does this comfort you, or how doesn’t it?
6. In what ways can the wilderness bring out your gifts? (Gen. 21:20) When has this happened for you? How might you, in your current wilderness, expand your giftings or your talents or your knowledge base, like Ishmael, who became an archer?
7. Consider the cultural and political context of Paul’s instruction to Timothy, to “Fan into flames the gift God has given you.” (See 2 Tim. 1:1-6) For many, saying yes to following Jesus the Messiah in those days was the equivalent of saying yes to a death sentence, and developing individual giftings during times of persecution even more so.

Week Three
Readings: June 15-June 21
Genesis 21:20-24:15

Digging In

1. What's your take on time? On timeliness? Are you panting to beat the clock, do you care if you're late? How did you grow up? Personally, I feel safe if everything runs on time, and if not, then, I want to take over and force some efficiency. I want to be ten minutes earlier than the earliest possible need. Arrive early, end early if possible but never later than the appointed ending. How do you feel about God's timeline, and timeliness?
2. Ishmael and Hagar were ready to give up, but hope waited around the bend. When have you nearly quit too soon? Or when *did* you quit too soon, in what ways, and what regrets did you or do you have?
3. Who would guess how often abandonment issues are possible? Abandonment issues begin at birth, when babies are forced from the warm and only home they've ever known, and expected to function well in the cold, to learn to cry themselves to sleep and wait to be fed. Review the passages this week. Where are there abandonment situations?
4. What's the biggest sacrifice you've made for someone? Or someone has made for you? How was that, what was it like, how did you feel then? Now? How have you understood the sacrifice of Isaac, by his father Abraham, in the past? How does this apply to you personally?
5. What is God asking you to break with, when you consider the Hebrew word *lekh lekha*? Break with your past, in what ways? Break with your hopes for the future, in what ways? How is that a sacrifice for you?

Digging Deeper

1. Compare Ishmael's time under the bush with that of Elijah in I Kings 19:1-9. What parallels do you find? Dissimilarities? Encouragement?
2. Jewish rabbis make note of God's words to Abraham, to take his son. We tend to hear this as though Abraham had only one son, Isaac. But Abraham had two sons, clearly, and when God tells Abraham to put his son on the altar, the man isn't sure which son. "The one you love." Well, which one is that? He loves them both. "Your only son." But he had *two* sons. What do you think about God, in this context? About Abraham? And how is this relevant to you?
3. Look up the hymn, "Here I am, Lord" in a recent hymnal or online. Sing through the words as a group or individually, then ask: How do I answer? How has God called me? What is the invitation, and how do I respond? "Here I am": ready, whatever you want, at your service, present, God—is how the original word could be translated.
4. When God called Abraham in the night, Abraham answered, "Here I am." I know of no other way, for a living sacrifice, a still-living offering, takes place moment by moment. Perhaps we can present ourselves and say, for this moment, "Here I am, Lord." When has this been asked of you? How do you respond?
5. The binding of Isaac, called the "Akedah," is a sacred moment and highly revered by Jews. I'm not sure Christians know what to do with it, really. But years later, when the sacrificial offerings were instituted by God, the binding of the sacrifice brought to mind the great sacrifice Abraham—and Isaac—were willing to make, and gratitude for the substitutionary offering on the altar before them. How does this translate for you, today, in application or reverence?

6. In some way, Isaac's heart became an altar, an offering place, where he willingly gave himself up to his father. How is that a possibility for you? In what ways have you experienced being a "living sacrifice" (See Romans 12:1-2).
7. The Scriptures invite us into inscrutable events and hard-to-explain circumstances and expectations. Whether or not we understand the sacrifice God asked Abraham to make, and that Abraham was willing to make, we still have to decide: will we follow God, even if we don't understand? Consider closing this time with the hymn, "Spirit of God" (1854, George Croly).

Week Four
Readings: June 22-June 28
Genesis 24:15-58

Digging In

1. Did you have a list for the “perfect mate”? Traits you were looking for in another that would create absolute perfection in a relationship? What were they? (Don’t tell us how far your mate is from that original list. Think positive. ☺)
2. Eliezer created quite a list for God, in order to know for certain that the woman he would find for Isaac was The Woman chosen by God. And the specific ways God answered those prayers blows my mind. It also bugs me. God isn’t always that clear in answering my requests or requirements. How about yours? How do you best hear from God?
3. What’s the funniest host or hostess gift you’ve ever received? Or given? Do you think they are important, or was that part of your growing-up tradition? Why was it important for Eliezer to bring gifts to Laban? How do you feel about hospitality, vs. entertaining, and what do you love or dread or both about them? What’s an unusual hospitality opportunity you’ve had (like, being hospitable to the woman with the screaming children in the grocery store)?
4. How do you wait? Patiently, impatiently, irritated, no big deal? How do you wait on God? What spiritual practices help you to wait?
5. What’s the most amazing interruption-turned-interception you can remember?

Digging Deeper

1. Eliezer’s reaction to God’s faithfulness models immediate praise. But that’s not always my habit, although if I recognize God’s faithfulness there’s a good chance I will praise God quickly. At least, I hope so. How do you watch for God’s faithfulness, and what about if that faithfulness doesn’t look like immediate answer to prayer?
2. It wasn’t a dark place for Eliezer—after all, God answered all his prayers very clearly and specifically. In the places of non-answer and the ensuing dark it’s harder. Focusing on God in dark places, trusting God’s leading in spite of the dark (or in light of the dark), even finding that leading: how do you do these?
3. In what ways do you isolate, when you land in darkness? What puts you into the isolation ward, and how do you handle that? When has someone reached into your aloneness and accompanied you? What has prepared you to do the same for another? His son’s death prepared one man to notice and respond sensitively to losses in others, and when his friend’s child died, he stopped by his work to check on him. Later, he learned that the man had intended to leave work and commit suicide, but that kind attention saved his life.
4. Our world and culture value comfort and pleasure above many other elements—and those two values have never defined Christianity. When do trappings distract you? When, and how, can you reroute? What trappings have you relinquished in order to follow and live tighter with God?
5. Eliezer knew that God had granted success, because of the to-the-letter answers. How would you define success? What about failure? When has failure actually been successful, so to speak? How do you think God defines success? And why? What is the point of *your* journey?
6. How do you respond to the stranger at the riverside, or the door, or on the subway? What does Jesus say about strangers? Might his words be related to the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in terms of taking care of them? How do you rethink and reconsider interruptions? When has God interrupted you in surprising ways, turning them into intersections?

Week Five

Readings: June 29 – July 6
Genesis 24:58 – 24:63

Digging In

1. What's the craziest invitation you've received, the most unlikely? What happened as a result of your "yes"? When my high school buddies convinced me to audition for community theatre when we returned for summer break from college, I thought I was far off-base. But these were my friends, and we would have a blast together. Turns out that I got a principle part in that musical, ended up roommates with the female lead, and because we were friends, ended up in the right place at the right time for me to meet the man of my dreams. So, knock, knock? Hello!
2. What YES have you said, that changed your life? How about someone else's life? Is it far-fetched to imagine that your yes could change the world?
3. Rebekah had a pretty enticing possibility come knocking. All those gifts, the luxury-camels (only wealthy people tended to have camels in those days, or perhaps in these days, as well), evidence of riches. We can rationalize that it was easy to say, "I am ready to go." But was it easy? And is it easy today? What stops you from saying "Bon voyage"? And in what ways might "bon voyage" be an invitation to a different life, even if you never have to pack a single box for a move?
4. When has fear answered the door for you? How do you work around fear?
5. What temptations lure you to stay, to say no, or to say yes to the wrong invitation? How do you know which invite needs a yes and which needs a no?

Digging Deeper

1. Talk about the circle of hope that looks like a blessing. When has someone surprised you with a blessing, in an unexpected way, an unexpected source? And when have you done the same? What stops you from blessing another, in the way of officially praying over them aloud?
2. What's your own personal Negev? How did you end up there? And in what ways did it, too, turn out to be "Beer Lahai Roi" for you? Well of the living one who sees you?
3. A watering hole is essential if you land in a desert. Essential for you, and for anyone traveling with you. Not to mention your camels and livestock. What are your watering holes, spiritually speaking? And when does a watering hole become a stumbling block?
4. Who mentors you in desert wisdom? How can you find some tutors?
5. Deserts are inevitable, some because of our choices and some because we live in a world that is a huge percent of desert brokenness. Predators are inevitable, as well. How do you recognize the enemy's face? Or enemies'? And how do you combat the enemy? When does shame, or blame, keep you from maximizing the desert journey?
6. Isaac had many reasons for blame, and likely for shame as well, but he still chose to find God. Keeping track of our grievances gives all our power to the past—how do you avoid that trap? And if life is like a constant rush hour, how do you dwell, meditate, well? Compare your possibilities with Psalm 37.

Week Six

Readings: July 7 – July 13
Genesis 24:63 - 26:2

Digging In

1. What's your birth order and how has it been significant for you? Where do you (or don't you) fit into some of the stereotypes (some might be: firstborn = responsible one, middle child = lost child, lastborn = clown, funny one, spoiled brat)?
2. What's your most recent invitation into "the new"? Into an unknown land or destination or occupation or relationship? What resistances did you experience, considering that "new"?
3. Abraham's legacy and obituary are detailed in fairly significant length in Genesis 25:1-18. What do you learn here about him, in terms of his taking care of business, his personal relationships?
4. The Jews believe that his third wife, Keturah (Hagar was his legal wife, making her #2) is actually Hagar. We have no real evidence for this, but how interesting is it that perhaps Abraham, after Sarah's death, remarried his second wife? At any rate, the way Abraham handled his children with this woman indicates that Abraham's true heir is Isaac. With so many blended families in our world today, how does this feel to you, to single out one heir?
5. We only learn in Gen. 24:67 how brokenhearted Isaac was about his mother Sarah's death. Some Jewish tradition suggests that Abraham loved Ishmael (his firstborn son, after all) and Sarah loved Isaac (her firstborn and only son, after all)—which makes sense. What do you make of the statement that Isaac found comfort in his grief once he married Rebekah? And how have you handled grief? Where do you seek comfort in places and times of loss?
6. The obit for Abraham is wedged in just before Isaac and his boys take over the storyline. This doesn't actually mean that Abraham died that minute. It rather signifies that Abraham handed over the leadership reigns to his son at that point. Abraham actually lived another 35 years, and died when Isaac's twins, Abraham's grandsons, were fifteen. What handing-over of the reigns have you experienced in your life? Or instituted? How hard is it, to relinquish control?

Digging Deeper

1. It's difficult to pass along an inheritance in standard fashion when barrenness again presents itself. Rebekah is childless (Gen. 25:21)—like her mother-in-law, Sarah. (This will continue into the next generation.) What significance do you see to this barrenness?
2. When Rebekah finally conceived after twenty years, there was war within her womb (Gen. 25:23). How do you see the outworking of this prophecy in her life? Are you more of an Esau, or a Jacob, and why?
3. The story of Esau and Jacob is one of the most famous in the Scriptures. Who do you make out to be the principle antagonist in the story? Why?
4. Sibling rivalry is as old as Eden, or at least, Eden's gate, and anyone growing up with siblings likely experienced it. In what ways might this be your story, especially if our family is the Family of God? And what about the parental favoritism? How do you handle this part of the story? I feel disgusted and judgmental, initially, and then I have to see where I find myself there, or where/if I have experienced that as one of three kids in our family. And what do you know to be true about God, based on the Scriptures?
5. When have you been truly hungry? How do you empathize with the hungry, and how do you come alongside them? A woman I met this week escaped from the sex trafficking industry three

different times, and wept when she told me that she experienced God's presence every time she ate a meal, because she'd known such hunger, and her family left behind still went hungry. She has found a craft and livelihood with a non-profit that trains and employs refugees. Her story is a miracle, and because of people who refused to allow hunger and sin to win, she found a home in the United States.

6. Birthrights are not common in our culture, where we laud fairness and equitability. But in the era of Esau and Jacob, once the patriarch died, the matriarch was destitute because she wasn't able to own property. The birthright, also called the primogeniture, allocated a double portion of the material inheritance to the firstborn, in order to assure the care of the widow, and any unmarried women in the family. God continues to instruct the Israelites throughout the Scriptures to tend to the orphans and the widows, clear into the New Testament. Where is this a challenge for you, and how do you and your church care for those who are without provision? See Matt. 15:3-6. Consider also the Greatest Commandment and the next greatest commandment (Matt. 22:34-40). What is the birthright for us in this era and culture, considering the Scriptures?

Week Seven
Readings: July 14 – July 20
Genesis 26:2 - 27:1

Digging In

1. What's your go-to, beat-the-blues-or-boredom food? Are you a stress eater, or non-eater?
2. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a fairly recent diagnosis. At least, they've begun to name it only recently; the disorder has probably been around since the beginning of time. Looking at Isaac's life, what evidence do you see that Isaac might have suffered from PTSD?
3. Rebekah had to feel pretty abandoned and betrayed by her husband, in the Abimelek encounter (Gen. 26:7-11). How might this event have laid the groundwork for the upcoming blessing fiasco? When have you felt absolutely betrayed or abandoned by another? How did you respond or react? What did it do to your relationship with that person? With God?
4. Pain can lead to passivity or to passion. How have you directed the pain in your life? God told Isaac to stay in the land, not run to satisfy his hunger elsewhere. Where do you run with your fear? Your hunger? What are you really hungering for? How do you see God's faithfulness (Isaac's hundredfold crops, Gen. 26:8-12) in your life when you stay? How *do* you stay?
5. How does drought look, in your life?

Digging Deeper

1. Jacob name means the deceiver, a moniker given at birth and one that he lived into for years. As you consider your own life, what names have been forced upon you, and what ones have you taken upon yourself that haven't been positive? And how have you chosen to rise above your name into a new inheritance?
2. Isaac's only recorded words from God were in Gen. 26:2-5; 26:24. Which means that he lived for long stretches of his 180 years hearing very seldom from God. He exemplifies for us what it is to live by faith, to live with the assurance that God promised and God will see to it, God will put the amen on the promise. At some point, he must have relinquished his own timetable, putting aside his questions: "Is this it? Now do we go to the bank and buy this property? When do we stake our claim?" Who have you known who has lived in this uncertainty well? How? How do *you* live believing and never seeing?
3. Famine isn't a popular spiritual discipline. (*Really?*) Large sections of our world live in famine, and while many organizations exist to help feed the hungry, how does your famine show up in your own life? And how do you cultivate a God-focused approach to the many social problems (including hunger) that riddle the world?
4. Talk about Isaac creating space for God, when he trusted God's words in 26:2-5, 24. How does this appear in the text? And how did God honor Isaac's intent? How do you see this in your own life? How do you create space to experience God, create space for God to act in unexpected ways?
5. How much space does fear occupy for you? How do you combat that fear? What scriptures do you pull to mind? Where is fear operating Abraham, Isaac, and companions? And how do you complete this sentence, "Do not be afraid, because _____"? (Don't cheat, but one answer is in Gen. 26:24)
6. Isaac began to lose his sight, some Jewish tradition believes, when the angel's tears fell in his eye at the altar. What are your blindsides? What were Isaac's? He lived many more years after this moment of I'm-dying. And how did communication, or the lack thereof, play into the drama that unfolded at this sudden desperate blessing moment? Into your moments of desperation?
7. In what ways do your actions reveal your longing for a blessing? Where have, or haven't, you experienced blessing? How might you begin living into God's blessing? What is that blessing?

Week Eight

Readings: July 21 – July 27
Genesis 27:8 – 28:2

Digging In

1. People give children names and nicknames for many reasons. The name rhymes, it sounds good with their last name, it reminds them of someone they love. Some families have a long tradition of repeating names for generations, each son carrying a Jr. or III or IV after their name, to distinguish them from their fathers. Two girls in one family were named after their father's favorite beverages: Brandy and Sherry. Other parents named their daughter after an intersection of streets near her folks' chosen sports' team. In the South, daughters will sometimes be given their mother's maiden name as their first name, so when I got an email from someone named Kent, I was surprised to learn Kent was a woman. ☺
What's the story behind your name, and/or nickname?
2. Having perfectly pure motives is pretty tricky, at least for me. Where do you see mixed motives in Gen. 27? And in your own life? If you return to God's promise to Abraham in Gen. 12:1-4, in what ways does that help with your motives, or challenge you?
3. Where do you hear the hope in Isaac's blessing of Esau, in Gen. 27: 39-40?
4. Esau's anger seems justified, on many levels. In fact, anger is frequently justified. In what cases IS it? And when isn't it? Once I heard a professional who is a Christian say that anger is always wrong—and Christians shouldn't get angry—and boy, was I angry about that. Seriously, though, what is beneath anger, so much of the time? What did you learn about anger growing up, or as an adult? How do you feel around someone who is angry? When you are angry?
5. What does the Bible actually say about anger, in terms of managing it? (You can look up anger or angry on biblegateway.com to see all the uses, and then study them.)
6. Jacob had to leave for Harran lickety-split. What regrets have you had over abrupt leavings? Even temporary partings, not necessarily enormous uprootings?

Digging Deeper

1. In Gen. 27:7, Isaac asks Esau to prepare the game so that "I can bless you in the presence of the Lord." In the Hebrew, this literally reads, "so that my soul may bless you." It draws up this wealth, this deep sense of vitality and love in Isaac rising up and pouring over his firstborn son. It's truly beautiful and rich in the original language. How might you bless another in this manner?
2. Note that Jacob repeats this language to his father, in 27:19. Do you think Jacob knew more than Rebekah thought? Because according to the Bible, she didn't tell Jacob the original words. See how tricky deceit becomes...when have you experienced this sort of contamination?
3. There are so many questions without answers in this family saga. Why did Jacob cooperate with Rebekah and lie? Why did Isaac cooperate with the trickery, when he knew and even stated that the voice was the voice of Jacob? What for you is the saddest takeaway from this sad story? And where does your sense of justice rise up?
4. Esau's heartbreak breaks my heart (Gen. 27:34-38). Of course, he was quite an adult by now, this isn't a child being sad his toy has been given away. It is a deep cry, echoed in our souls for all of history, this plaintive wail for blessing. For our significant others—parents, family, friends, grandparents—to convey over us a blessing. How would that blessing sound, for you? What blessing—or curse—have you experienced in your own life?

5. What elements of blessing in Gen. 27:27-29 speak to you? How might you translate them for your own life, or for people you love, in today's context and culture? And how might the blessing you long for, be spoken over you in legitimate ways? Or by God?
6. What do you need to hear, deep in your soul, in terms of who you are, how God feels about you? Where is there Scripture to back that? Take some time, now, to formulate that blessing.

Week Nine

Readings: July 28 – August 3
Genesis 28:1 – 28:10

Digging In

1. What's the most memorable moment of forgiveness you've experienced?
2. If you could plan a Going-Away Party, what would you do? What food, festivities, memory-devices, party favors? When have you done something like that? And when do you wish you'd taken a little more time to savor someone's pre-departure time? How about at church? How does the church honor people who move away, pastors included? How could the church strengthen that into a rich blessing?
3. Jacob's leave-taking is moving and beautiful, redolent with forgiveness and blessing, with a complete absence of bitterness evident on Isaac's part. This alone seems miraculous, given the acrimony simmering in that house, with murderous Esau and scheming Rebekah and deceiving Jacob and Isaac the blind (physically, yes, but also emotionally perhaps). Talk about what it takes to overcome such dynamics and offer a profound blessing, or even a blessing at all.
4. When it comes to traveling, what things have you hauled with you that you could have left behind, if you'd been able to detach from them? This could be physical or emotional stuff.
5. Hopefully, since Abraham lived until the twins were 15, he helped lay a moral and spiritual foundation under those boys. (Even though there seemed to be a seismic shift in the building blocks sometime later.) Who has done this for you? Put down a good and godly foundation for you to build your life upon? And if you can't think of anyone, in what ways do you see God preparing that foundation for you to begin to build?

Digging Deeper

1. Blame is partly about control. What are some crazy control issues, some things you've ludicrously tried to control? What do you really have control over?
2. How does blaming impede growth? When do you blame? Why? When do you choose growth, and what makes the difference in choosing, for you?
3. Learn to bless in spite of the mess, could be our motto. How do you do that?
4. Why do you think God permitted Jacob to leave, when God forbade Isaac to leave during the famine? (Isaac never even left the country, so for him to send his son off to Harran seems far-fetched.) There was currently no famine; in fact, life seemed to be fairly profitable for the family.
5. Before Jacob left, his father reminded him in the blessing of the temporariness of his present residence. (28:4). In what ways is this comforting? And how does this make sense, before Jacob leaves, to talk about temporary? How does the blessing in 28:3-4 speak to you, personally? What application do you make? (Imagine these words being said over you.)
6. For Jacob, his best chance for perspective occurred after he left the red-hot embers of his household's emotions. How do you gain perspective? How long does it take for you to recognize that imperfect is the best word to describe everyone, and helps to resize our expectations of them?
7. In commemoration of the travels of Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob, all of them trusting God (either initially or eventually) to lead them, what are some of your favorite "following" or "guidance" hymns or worship songs? Consider closing with one of those, in anticipation that the journey you will make as you leave this time, will be covered by God's presence and kindness. Maybe you'll even meet up with an angel or two. (Wait, that's next week.)

Week Ten

Readings: August 4 – August 10
Genesis 28:11 – 30:33

Digging In

1. Running unwisely in the wilderness could kill you. Desert marathons are extremely dangerous for anyone not used to the daytime heat and nighttime cold. When have you found yourself pooped from trying to run in the desert? Maybe literally, if you're a runner, but at times we're all runners given the way we live our lives. When do you experience the dangers of running too long and too far without rest and sustenance? What are those dangers?
2. In what places—"certain places" Gen. 28:11—do you experience God's presence? How often do you get to that place?
3. What are some of your recurring dreams? Nightmares? Night predators? And how do those impact your daytime hours, your work ethic, your balance between sleep and wake and work and rest?
4. Talk about the "stairway to heaven." Remember the song from the seventies? It was of course the theme of one of our major milestone dances, a dreadful prom or homecoming event I believe. What longings about heaven does the stairway/ladder represent for you? What do you believe about accessing heaven? What efforts have you seen in the Scriptures or in your surroundings, of people trying to reach heaven on their own? How did that work? How do you attempt it?
5. When I was writing about the angels our forbearers met up with in the Genesis accounts, I queried Facebook friends about angel encounters. Amazing stories returned to me. What is an angel story that you know, or have experienced? And what do you believe about them, really?

Digging Deeper

1. What is your head-on-a-rock story? Could you share a dark night of the soul? What was going on for you, where was it painful, how did you hear God's voice in the middle of that night? Or did you?
2. Whose voices do you hear in your dreams? Shaming voices, or voices that call you upward?
3. The author writes, "God has never been afraid to enter human history and human misery with heavenly mystery." Talk about your experience of that truth. Or do you find it to be true?
4. Consider the promise God made to Jacob: I will not leave you until I have done what I promised (Gen. 28:15). What does mean for you? What did it mean for Jacob? Would God leave Jacob after fulfilling those promises?
5. Think about Jacob's ancestors. How might he have felt, looking back, and then in context with his own behavior? He had this giant grandfather, a practically mythical man of faith, and his own father with his heroic stories of the altar and of following after God in spite of that hard-to-explain event. Where do you fit into the faith (or non-faith, or hypocritical faith) lineage in your family, and how does that impact you? What do God's words to Jacob in Gen. 28: 13-15 have to say to you? How has God found you? How have you tried to hide or run away?
6. What is your real heritage from God? Your legacy to others? How is Isaac's blessing in 28:3-4 a surprise? And how is God's blessing to Jacob also a surprise? What do these speak into you? What will you carry with you? What is your long-term plan?

Week Eleven

Readings: August 11 – August 17
Genesis 28:15 - 30:33

Digging In

1. When does your past wake you up, or give you nightmares, or keep you from moving forward? What do you do in those times?
2. Regrets surely hounded Jacob. And regrets turns to shame in the blink of an eye unless we deal with them. How do you deal with your regret? You're under no pressure to talk about your regrets, but if you feel free to do so, others might realize they are not alone in their own regrets.
3. In Gen. 28, what do Jacob's tears when he meets Laban tell you about the state of his soul?
4. Jacob longed for home, it would appear, from his tears when he met his mother's family. How do you experience home? Is it wherever God dwells? If so, how do you pay attention, wherever you are, to Home?
5. Laban's assessment of Jacob's situation is evident from the fact that he puts Jacob to work. Jacob brought no riches from the birthright he stole, and would not be able to offer a bride price. In what ways does Laban take advantage of the situation?
6. Who do you most relate to in the interactions between Jacob and Laban, through Gen. 30:33? Between the two sisters and Jacob? Why? And, whether in positive or negative ways, how are you like any of these characters?

Digging Deeper

1. God said, "I am with you." (Gen. 28:15) Not I will be or I might be or I was but then you blew it. I AM, the God who is called I AM is with Jacob. With you. When is it easy for you to believe this, and when is it hard?
2. In what ways was the angel intersection, the stone pillow place, the dream, a turning point for Jacob? What is a turning point for you, and what changed after that? Where do your encounters with God offer you "fresh legs" of faith to propel you on your journey?
3. A small nearby Messianic church bought its own building, at last, five years ago. Last month, in spite of enormous redesign costs en route, they announced the burning of their mortgage! So when I read about Jacob's vow of a tenth of all that God blessed him with, I am challenged. What is your position on tithing, on offerings? Are they same to you? Where have you experienced God's blessing you as you tithed?
4. Laban proves to be a rather bad sort, but then again, Jacob didn't have a real strong resume' either. How do you handle the Labans in your life, the people who make promises and then deliver only what they see fit, in the middle of the night when no one knows the difference?
5. Names in the Scriptures are significant, and often convey the circumstances surrounding the child's birth. What do you learn of importance about Leah based on her children's names? And how might you live into, for instance, Judah's name, "God be praised"? And if you trace Judah's line of descendants, what do you find remarkable, especially considering that his mother was the unloved wife? All the names Rachel chose for her children (and her maidservant's) strike me as sad. Talk about that, and why?
6. "God sets the lonely in families," the psalmist declares in Psalm 68:6. Where do you find this to be true, and where does it set off a longing for you? How do you relate to the dysfunction of Jacob's family, both present and past? How do you live into Romans 12:10, in spite of family dynamics?
7. About Jacob's assertion in Gen. 30:33: In what ways does Jacob's honesty testify for him, or does it? What about "in the future"? Why does he add that?

Week Twelve
Readings: August 18 – August 31
Genesis 31:12 – 35:29

Digging In

1. When you consider going home, where is home? Childhood, your first adult living place, the place you live right now? What feelings arise when you think about going home? Why?
2. When have you left home? And what does that mean, spiritually, for you? Did you grow up in a household of faith, or non faith, or “do as I say not as I do” faith? When have you left your home in God’s heart, and why? (Most people do leave and return, likely numerous times, so feel no shame about that. The importance is the return journey. ☺)
3. What’s your version of Rachel’s household gods? How does it look like “ancestor worship”? What do you need to give away? In what ways is your life overstuffed?
4. Scanning the Scriptures for unity problems, what surfaces for you? When have you seen a miraculous display of unity? (Consider the journey of the founders of our faith, search backward to Cain and Abel and to the tower of Babel.) What did Jesus say about unity? How can you foster unity, and what is at stake?
5. What childhood nickname follows you? Who calls you that, and how do you feel about that nickname? Was it positive or negative? In what ways did you live into that name, and how have you chosen to outgrow it?
6. Think over your family lineage. What kind of family reunion would you love to have? Who would come? And who wouldn’t? Why? We used to have a sprawling family reunion near my grandparents’ birthplace, a tiny little pass-through village in southern Indiana. I was young and anxious and with far more energy than most seemingly-ancient people would appreciate, so I remember those reunions with a mixture of fondness and angst and a considerable amount of loss: who *were* those people really, and what parts of their stories and personalities have I missed? And what about the legacy of faith around the picnic tables in your would-be reunion?

Digging Deeper

1. When Rachel stole the household gods and her father tore after the fleeing family to reclaim the statues, Jacob promised that if the idols were found in anyone’s possession, that person would die. No one found them under Rachel, so we heave a sigh of relief. But elsewhere in Scripture God says not to make a vow to another and fail to uphold it...and some time after Jacob’s vow, we learn that Rachel dies in childbirth. Jews believe that Jacob’s pledge and Rachel’s death are linked. What do you think about that?
2. Jacob’s re-encounter with God in Gen. 32 is one of the longest in the family history. This meeting is moving on many levels. In what ways are Jacob’s past, present, and future all on the altar before him? His faith in the God who has called his family for three generations. What happens in this time for Jacob, regarding his identity? How do you enter into the story? And what about his limp? What about yours?
3. What is significant about God asking Jacob his name, in 32:27? How is this important, as he moves forward? If your whole life flashes before you, past, present, future, what does your name mean for you? If God were say, You are no longer _____, you are _____, how would you fill in the blanks?
4. Jacob’s terror at meeting Esau does him credit. His conscience has at last activated, it would seem, as he realizes the cost of his actions so many years ago (Jacob is nearing 90, and was 40 at the blessing switcheroo). What events from your past continue to hold you captive, and would even

inspire fear in you if you were to meet someone again after a passage of time? What does the biblical account of reconciliation here do for you? How does Esau's reception speak to you? And Jacob's words in 33:10? Anger, bitterness, hatred...these are indeed a yoke. When have you cast them from your neck?

5. What did Jacob promise Esau? (Gen 33:13-19) What do you make of the revised itinerary, when Jacob rerouted and moved toward Shechem, where he bought property? In the tragedy and ensuing revenge in Jacob's family (Gen. 34), what part does silence play? And given the history of insecurity in the family, where does Jacob live into his inheritance? How about his sons?
6. God again intervened and rerouted Jacob's life and the lives of his family members, when calling the family forward. (Gen. 35:1-5) These pivot opportunities are many for most of us: what are some of yours? How did you release the past and move forward? The oak at Shechem becomes a burial place in what ways? What value is there in attaching a physical spot to a place of divine encounter and rebooting and restarting? Consider Bethel as well (35:10f).
7. Many people live with the accumulated griefs of a lifetime. How about you? What are those, how can you be relieved of them? Jacob, and Isaac before him, would have a long list of griefs and grievances, but their record of faith is their great legacy. What does it take, to live without regrets? Compare Laban's prayer in Gen. 24:60 to other promises of God (for instance, Eph. 3:20). Where have you seen the multiplication of God's kindness, blessing upon blessing, as you consider your journey from insecurity to inheritance? What are your greatest insecurities? What do you hold as your greatest inheritances?

A Note from Jane Rubietta

Thank you for sharing this journey with me through the lives of Isaac and Jacob and their family members. I would love to hear from you, about the voyage you've made as an individual or as a group. Please feel free to get in touch with me at Jane@JaneRubietta.com. And if you'd like to schedule a SKYPE conversation, it would be a privilege to meet you. Besides, it's not good to travel alone.

Next Stop! Egypt! Join Joseph (and Jane) on a journey to Egypt and an unexpected way to find, and live into, your dreams.

