

## CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

MARCH 23 2019

# struggle by a stream

**Scripture Story:** Genesis 28–33.

**Commentary:** *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapters 17 and 18.

## PREPARING TO TEACH

### I. SYNOPSIS

The story of salvation is deeply embedded in the life of Jacob. Overwhelmed with guilt and running for his life, Jacob encounters God on his way to Haran. He dreams of a ladder stretching to heaven. “The ladder represents Jesus,” Ellen White tells us. “Christ connects man in his weakness and helplessness with the source of infinite power” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 184). The story of Jacob showcases God’s unconditional acceptance and grace.

There are several other themes that emerge from this season of Jacob’s life. For example, the story underscores the grisly consequences of sin. For more than 20 years Jacob suffered in fear and shame as a result of his deception. Every day Jacob worried that Esau’s hit man would come knocking on his door, reminding us of how sin robs us of the daily joy and freedom we can experience in Christ. Another theme that could be explored in this lesson is the virtue of perseverance. When Jacob found himself on the receiving end of Laban’s trickery, he forged ahead and worked another seven years in order to marry Rachel. We also find the theme of reconciliation in this story. In time, Jacob was reconciled to God and to his estranged brother. And finally, the idea of God using our weaknesses to make us strong is a prevalent theme in Jacob’s life. The flaws and failures in Jacob’s life are easy to find; nevertheless, he soared above his mistakes and emerged a spiritual giant. In the end, Jacob prevailed because of his unyielding faith. God transformed Jacob’s weakness into strength.

### II. TARGET

The students will:

- Learn of the unconditional acceptance of God. (*Know*)
- Be asked to experience the joy of persevering through problems. (*Feel*)
- Be challenged to commit every aspect of life to God. (*Respond*)

### III. EXPLORE

- Forgiveness from God
- Learning from failure/mistakes
- Faith

## TEACHING

### I. GETTING STARTED

#### **Activity**

*Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of the student lesson.*

As an alternative, ask the students to offer advice on how to remedy the following family situations similar to Jacob’s experience:

A son lies to his parents and steals from them. The parents wonder what they should do with this son.

A young man has been ripped off by his brother. His brother is so angry that this young man fears for his life. How can he find reconciliation with the offended brother?

A businessman signs a contract with his future father-in-law, but when the time comes for the father-in-law to make good on his commitment, he refuses

to pay up. Instead, he demands that the businessman continue to work for another seven years. Should this father-in-law be trusted? What advice would you have for the son-in-law?

### **Illustration**

*Share this illustration in your own words:*

Todd Huston is a remarkable young man. Todd set the world record for climbing the highest peak in all 50 of the United States. The previous record was 101 days. Todd shattered that record single-handedly by completing his 50 climbs in 66 days, 22 hours, and 47 minutes.

His toughest climb was Mount McKinley in Alaska. Mount McKinley rises out of the Alaskan range to a majestic elevation of more than 20,000 feet, the highest point in North America. Its jagged peak lies just 3.5 degrees south of the Arctic Circle. The mountain is perpetually covered in a shroud of snow and ice. Climbers who have attempted the ascent know that the mountain's moods are capricious and unforgiving.

One of Todd's biggest tests came when he met a group of climbers on their way down from Mount Kinley. "What's it like up there today?" Todd asked. One of the men shook his head. "Bad storms and high winds. We were locked in at Denali Pass for three days."

Todd Huston had to make a choice. Was he going to try it? Was he going to take on this tremendous obstacle with only one leg? You see, Todd had lost his leg in a waterskiing accident when he was only 14 years old.

Todd's faith and courage led him on.

When asked how he was able to climb mountains not just physically but also the mountains of discouragement and disillusionment Todd said "If you are going to look at your affliction, injury, fear, or how others treat you and focus on that, you are going to live around it. But, if you focus on the Lord and his promises, He will get you through it."—Adapted from Mark Finley, *Solid Ground*, p. 214.

## **II. TEACHING THE STORY**

### **Bridge to the Story**

*Share the following in your own words:*

Just as Todd persevered and overcame his obstacles, Jacob when faced with Laban's trickery was faithful and worked additional years to marry Rachel and in time he reconciled with God and his brother. God transformed Jacob's weaknesses into strengths

and He can do the same for us. Like Jacob in the Bible, you're a perfect collage of strengths and weaknesses. Embrace them both. For God can work through you even when you feel inadequate; or better yet, *especially* when you feel inadequate. That's what we see in the story of Jacob.

The apostle Paul once wrote this: "I quit focusing on [my] handicap. . . . Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become" (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10, *The Message*).

### **Out of the Story for Teachers**

*After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

Invite the students to line up and represent how Jacob felt during the different seasons of his life. As you read the list of Jacob's experiences below, have students lie on the floor if they think Jacob felt very low and stand straight up if they believe Jacob felt especially strong at that time. Bending at the waist indicates a neutral feeling on Jacob's part.

Experiences of Jacob:

- Receiving the birthright from Esau for a bowl of stew
- Tricking his father into giving him the birthright
- Running away in fear that Esau would murder him
- Meeting Rachel
- Getting duped (in a similar fashion to how he had tricked his dad) and having to work seven more years in order to marry Rachel
- Sleeping with the maidservant, Bilhah, thanks to the conniving ways of Rachel
- Leaving Laban
- Reconciling with Esau after 20 years

There are four primary stories included in this biblical passage. Divide students into small groups and have them decide on the central life lessons that emerge from the following stories.

1. Jacob's dream of the ladder and angels ascending and descending to heaven
2. Jacob working for Laban in return for his wives, Leah and Rachel
3. Jacob wrestling with the angel
4. Jacob meeting Esau

## Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share in your own words.

There are many nuances in this story that offer rich spiritual insight. Here are a few suggestions for further study:

- 1. The Spiritual Highs and Lows of Jacob—**Jacob’s spiritual journey was punctuated with extreme highs and lows. He seemed to have hit bottom when he cried out, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear . . . , then the Lord will be my God” (Genesis 28:20, 21, NIV). Here’s a man whose unbridled greed compelled him to use the most despicable means imaginable to secure the meatier share of the inheritance now humbly begging for the basic necessities of life. His story offers a valuable lesson in humility.
- 2. The Meaning Behind the Names—**In the ancient world great significance was given to names. Each of the sons of Jacob and Leah got names that disclosed the mother’s thoughts at the time of the birth. All the names reflect the tension between the two sisters. The name “Reuben” means “behold a son.” Leah was extolling the compassion of God, who noticed her affliction and showed her mercy. “Simeon” meant “answer.” She trusted God and He answered. “Levi” meant “attachment.”

Her desire with this son was that her husband would at last feel attached to her. “Judah” was an expression of praise to Jehovah. With this son, Leah’s joy was complete. Similarly, further study shows that all of Jacob’s sons had names that were significant.

- 3. The Contrast Between the Sisters—**It is noteworthy that this “second-class wife,” Leah, became the mother of the seed in whom all nations would be blessed. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, volume 1, offers this contrast between the sisters: “Leah must have been a pious woman, a devoted wife, and a faithful mother. According to the Sacred Record she mentioned the name of Jehovah in connection with the birth of three of her first four sons. Although from an idolatrous family, she must have accepted the religion of her husband and become a sincere believer in Jehovah. In contrast, Rachel’s conversion seems at first to have accomplished little more than a superficial change. While outwardly she too had accepted her husband’s religion, her heart remained attached to the old family idols, or she may have taken them in an attempt to secure the family inheritance (ch. 31:19)” (p. 389). Rachel seems much more self-centered (see Genesis 30:1-3, 8, 15). Moreover, time seemed to soften Jacob’s attitude toward Leah (see Genesis 31:4, 14; 49:31).
- 4. The Wrestling Match as a Foreshadowing of the Last Days—**Ellen White goes into some

## Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson. Invite students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Key Text**

Invite the students to share the Key Text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Flashlight**

Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from *Out of the Story*.

- **Punch Lines**

Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.

Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.



detail to connect Jacob's wrestling match with the scenario to be played out at the end of time. It might be helpful for students to explore statements such as these: "Jacob's experience during that night of wrestling and anguish represents the trial through which the people of God must pass just before Christ's second coming" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 201). "Such will be the experience of God's people in their final struggle with the powers of evil. God will test their faith, their perseverance, their confidence in His power to deliver them" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 202).

### III. CLOSING

#### Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Have students confess specific struggles and weaknesses to God by writing Him a letter. Then remind them of the story of Jacob that showcases God's willingness to forgive every fallen sinner. Perhaps, like Jacob, they have messed up and find themselves in the gutter of life. Infuse each student with an extra portion of hope. Emphasize God's amazing grace. Remember that God specializes in bringing saints out of wells of weakness. Conclude by burning the letters so students can revel in the complete forgiveness of God.

#### Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Jacob's story is punctuated with the gritty gravel of real life. He lies. He cheats. He manipulates. His family redefines "dysfunctional." He needs Dr. Laura, Dr. Phil, and Dr. Seuss! Jacob messes up on a grand scale. Ah, but this inevitably prepares the platform for our God to showcase His grace.

In spite of Jacob's failures, God's character ultimately prevailed in his life. It was not an easy journey. It was strewn with lots of potholes along the way. But in the end, Jacob manifested the character of Christ. He grew to love the woman who deceitfully became his wife. He was reconciled to his estranged brother. And he developed into a fully devoted follower of God.

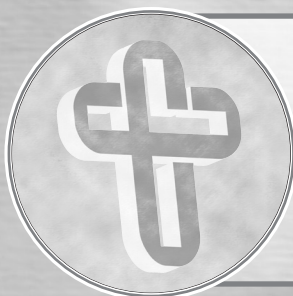


#### Tips for Top-notch Teaching

##### *A Story With Skin on It*

A very effective form of teaching comes by way of a testimony. For example, to teach this lesson find someone in the church who has a compelling story of triumphing over a weakness. You can share the concept of God making us strong out of our weakness all you want, but students will remember the idea much longer if they connect a face and a story to it. Put skin on concepts by utilizing the testimony approach to teaching.

RABBI 101



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapters 17 and 18. A special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets* has been created by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at [www.cornerstoneconnections.net](http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net).



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## STUDENT LESSON

**Scripture Story:** Genesis 28–33.

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### struggle by a stream



Photo by Luis Guerra, Jr.

### flashlight

“Up to the time of man’s rebellion against the government of God, there had been free communion between God and man. But the sin of Adam and Eve separated earth from heaven, so that man could not have communion with his Maker. Yet the world was not left in solitary hopelessness. The ladder represents Jesus, the appointed medium of communication. Had He not with His own merits bridged the gulf that sin had made, the ministering angels could have held no communion with fallen man. Christ connects man in his weakness and helplessness with the source of infinite power” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 184).

### keytext

“I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.

. . . I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

**(Genesis 28:13-15, NIV)**



# what do you think?

Rank the following situations in order from the one that makes you feel the worst (number 1) to the one that makes you feel the least upset (number 10).

- Arguing with a parent
- Breaking up with a boyfriend/girlfriend
- Disobeying God
- Failing a class
- Being rejected for a sports team
- Having a conflict with a teacher
- Not spending time with God
- Wasting a whole day just watching TV
- Sleeping through church
- Compromising your standards

Have you ever wrestled with God over one of these issues? What did you sense God trying to say to you? Have you grown as a person through any of these experiences? If so, how?

## did you know?

**T**he place where Jacob had his dream of the ladder with angels descending and ascending to heaven was named Bethel (see Genesis 28:19). It means “house of God.” Later, the name was also applied to the nearby city of Luz. Originally, the name applied only to the location where Jacob stood and not to Luz (see Joshua 16:2). In other references in Scripture, however, Bethel is used as the modern name of the ancient city of Luz (see Genesis 35:6; Joshua 18:13; Judges 1:23). Still today it retains the Arabic form of its name, *Beitîn*.

## INTO THE STORY

“Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. . . . He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: ‘I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. . . . I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.’”

“Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. . . . 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 that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me.’ So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel. . . .

“But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her. . . .

“When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, ‘What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn’t I? Why have you deceived me?’

“Laban replied, ‘It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. Finish this daughter’s bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work.’

“And Jacob did so.”

“So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, ‘Let me go, for it is daybreak.’

“But Jacob replied, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’ . . .

“So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, ‘It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.’”

(Genesis 28:10-15; 29:16-28; 32:24-30, NIV)

# OUT OF THE STORY

Chart an emotional time line through these stories in Jacob's life. Graph the times when he was emotionally soaring as well as the times when he was in the dumps.

Find a map of the ancient world and trace Jacob's journey through these stories.

List the people in the stories and reflect on each one in terms of their faithfulness to God.

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There are four primary stories included in this biblical passage. Write the central lesson to be learned from each story:

1. Jacob's dream of the ladder and angels descending from and ascending to heaven

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2. Jacob working for Laban for Leah and Rachel

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3. Jacob wrestling with the angel

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4. Jacob meeting Esau (see chapter 33.)

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What do you think was the primary, overall spiritual lesson that Jacob learned through these experiences?

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## punch lines

**"See what great love** the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him" (1 John 3:1, NIV).

**"I can do all this** through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13, NIV).

**"Not only so, but** we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:3-5, NIV).

**"But he said to me,** 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Corinthians 12:9, NIV).

## further insight

**"Only by faithfulness in the little things can the soul be trained to act with fidelity under larger responsibilities."**

—Ellen G. White, *Christ Objects Lessons*, p. 356.

# connectingtolife

## Sabbath

Read Romans 5:3-5

Complete the exercise in the *What Do You Think?* section. Why do you think you answered as you did? When you run headlong into moments when you are faced with your sin, how do you respond? What part of today's reading speaks to you in your wrestling with God? (*Underline* it.)

## Sunday

Read Genesis 32:30.

Read the Bible story of Jacob's wrestling with God in the *Into the Story* section and study the passage using the *Out of the Story* questions. What do you think is the central issue in Jacob's struggle? Why? What do you think is significant about Jacob's testimony at the end of the struggle when he says, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." If God were trying to give you one message in this story, what would that message be?

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## Monday

Read Genesis 28:13-15.

From today's reading, try to imagine God's voice as He is giving this promise, not just to Jacob, but to you. It is God's voice that claims "I am the Lord" and "I am with you" and "I will watch over you." If it were any human making bold promises it might be somewhat suspicious, but God assures Jacob that He will keep His promises. Count on it. Whom do you know who needs to hear this promise from God this week? You can write a note anonymously, or share in person, or even pray that God will give you the opportunity to offer encouragement to someone whose future is uncertain. Pray today that God will show you the right person with whom to share this promise.

## Tuesday

Read 1 John 3:1.

In the *Flashlight* portion you will notice a quote from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 184. Read this commentary on Jacob's ladder and notice the basic truth it represents. Is there someone in your life who helps you keep the lines of communion open with God? Who encourages you to continue to walk with and talk to the Savior? Let them know this week how they have been a support for you in your relationship with God.

## Wednesday

Read through the various passages offered in the *Punch Lines* section and identify whether the Bible verse offers: (1) encouragement, (2) insight, or (3) challenge. Choose the Bible verse that you think you need the most today and be ready to share it with someone else. There may come a moment today when someone needs a word of encouragement, or insight, or instruction. Pray that the Lord will help you discover which is most needed in your life today, as well as by someone else with whom you may come in contact.

## Thursday

Read Psalm 50:15.

To really dig into this story more fully, read chapters 17 and 18 of *Patriarchs and Prophets* and find the power-packed statements that jump out at you. For example, Ellen White writes: "Jacob prevailed because he was persevering and determined. His experience testifies to the power of importunate prayer. It is now that we are to learn this lesson of prevailing prayer, of unyielding faith" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 203). God wants us to continue to cling to Him relentlessly! In what way is God challenging you to persevere in prayer? Try to make a brief list of five insights you gained from the reading that you hadn't really thought about before:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
5. \_\_\_\_\_

## Friday

Read 2 Corinthians 12:9.

Paul knew what it was like to rest in God's grace when the future was uncertain. In today's reading notice the tender, sustaining power of God's grace. Jacob learned through wrestling with the angel and through the drama with his family about the way God interacts and transforms people. What experience in your life resembles most closely the story of Jacob wrestling with God? Why? How have you been transformed by this experience?

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### this week's reading\*

*Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapters 17 and 18.

\**Beginning of the End* is a special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at [www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rB09s](http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rB09s). By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.