

Life Group Topic #29
Jacob's Dysfunctional Family:
Genesis 29:31-30:24

WELCOME: (15 minutes)

What has been the highlight of your summer thus far?

WORSHIP: (15 minutes)

Use whatever means possible to turn the group's attention to the wonder and majesty of our God- including music, prayer, meditation on the Psalms, and other art forms.

WORD APPLICATION: (45 minutes)

Read Genesis 29:31-30:24

Here we have the story of the birth of Jacob's children. But more than that it is the account of the origins of the twelve tribes of Israel. This is the very genesis of the nation that God chose above all others to bless and to be a blessing to the world. From these 12 sons would come Yahweh's chosen people, the eventual Messiah, and the multi-ethnic eternal Bride of Christ.

Yet having said all of that, this isn't exactly the beginning we might have expected. Instead of finding a model family of faith, we find instead quite the opposite.

The story reveals a dysfunctional home without a spiritual leader. The atmosphere in the household is electric with tension and jealousy. Rachel is jealous of a sister who has been pawned off to a husband who does not love her. (The Hebrew literally reads "hated.") Each woman wants what the other has, and neither treasures what she has been given for its own value.

Rachel, as Jacob's favorite wife, had the questionable privilege of deciding which of Jacob's wives or concubines would sleep with him on any given night. This arrangement disintegrates into the dehumanizing atmosphere of exchanging a husband as "sex-for-hire."

Rachel is not free from her pagan background. The mandrake plants were an aphrodisiac in the ancient world, reputed to have narcotic qualities, with magical powers in procreation. Rachel is caught up in this superstition.

Throughout the account we see the sisters selfish struggle to gain supremacy in their husband's affections and in their social status through bearing children. This competition destroys the home and sows seeds of the future destructive tribalism that will ruin the sons of Israel.

And yet it is this very family that introduces hope into the world. God includes the most fallible and fallen people into his gracious plans. His grace is greater than our sins, and his purposes will not be thwarted by them.

It is interesting to note that God responds with grace both to Leah, who is longing to be loved (29:31) and to Rachel, who is barren and without children (30:22). God remembers them and comes to their aid. Leah wants a true husband, but finds God's mercy in bearing six of the 12 tribes of Israel, including the priestly line (Levi), and the messianic line (Judah) from whom will come the savior of the world. Once again, it is divine grace and mercy, and NOT human merit, that establishes God's kingdom.

Word Application Questions:

Please keep in mind that these questions are meant as catalysts designed to get the group talking about life application.

1. Why do you think God allowed his chosen people to originate in such a dysfunctional family? Why is the Bible so brutally honest with what happened?
2. In what ways can you identify with any of the characters in this story?
3. Read again 29:31-32/ 30:22. How has God responded to you in times of barrenness or rejection?
4. What does this story teach you about God's grace?
5. Do you tend towards receiving and extending God's grace to others, or a critical condemning spirit? How might this text speak to that?
6. In what ways are you seeing God use you for His purposes despite your failures?

WITNESS: (15 minutes)

This section is a vision-casting time designed to get the group strategizing and making concrete plans towards reaching outward to a lost world. Relational outreach always has the goal of ultimately enfolding those we reach into the Life Group.