**Lesson 9**

**15-16 November 2021**

**A picture containing silhouette

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***Another Perspective*:**

*This week I want to share several insights from Lessons 17 and 18 of the Bible Study Fellowship course on Genesis. I will intersperse my own comments periodically in blue italics.*

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***Bible Study Fellowship’s Perspective:***

**A Dysfunctional Family** – Chapter 27 can be divided into two parts:

* Dysfunction and Deception Within the Family – Gen. 27:1-29
* Distress and Division Within the Family – Gen. 27:30-46

This week’s lesson reveals a profoundly dysfunctional family at the center of God’s plan to save the world. **Does that surprise you?** **What do you expect from the people and plans of God?** Lesson 17, page 1

*I thought that these two questions were worth pondering. Isn’t it somewhat surprising—and disappointing—to read about Isaac and Rebekah’s family life when they started out so well? The story of how Abraham’s servant found a bride for Isaac was thrilling. Just think how pleased and grateful the servant was about how God had answered his prayer. Imagine the excitement as he reported to Abraham the outcome of his search. Think how thrilled Abraham must have been. Think of the outpouring of praise to God for His great faithfulness. And it is so touching to read at the end of chapter 24 that “Isaac loved (Rebekah), and he was comforted after his mother’s death.” It was also encouraging to read about how both Isaac and Rebekah sought the Lord about her infertility and then her problem pregnancy.*

*So it is disappointing to say the least to read just halfway through chapter 25 that “Isaac loved Esau because he had a taste for wild game, but Rebekah loved Jacob,” and then to read of the troubling outcomes of that favoritism for each member of their family. As I thought about the two questions at the end of the BSF commentary, my mind went to* ***1 Corinthians 1:26-31.*** *Paul rather bluntly tells the people in the church at Corinth that not many of them are wise; in fact, most of them are weak and foolish and insignificant—yet ALL of them had been chosen by God to carry out His purposes, and the reason for Him choosing such people is so that “no one can boast in His presence.”* ***When God uses such frail creatures as we are to accomplish something amazingly good, then all the glory goes to Him.*** *Paul says something similar in his second letter to the Corinthians, “For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Now we have this treasure in clay jars (earthen vessels) so that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us.” (2 Corinthians 4:6-7) I can think of at least two “take-aways” we gain from this truth.*

1. *It is sobering to think that our being genuinely born again believers is no guarantee that we won’t make major errors in judgment. Both Peter and Paul urge us over and over again to be sober or serious minded. As Peter said, “Be serious! Be alert! Your adversary the Devil is prowling around…looking for anyone he can devour.”*
2. *But it is also comforting to remember that our human frailty cannot thwart the purposes of God. His good purposes will be fulfilled, both in the world at large and in our individual lives.*

**A Father’s Blessing** – The Nuzi tablets, a collection of more than 5,000 legal and business documents from the second millennium B.C., show that a father’s blessing was recognized culturally as a form of a last will and testament. Even though blessings were spoken and not written, they were legally binding. The blessings of the patriarchs were also prophetic…God the Holy Spirit spoke through the patriarchs and foretold future blessings. **At times, the Holy Spirit overturned natural desires and customs to extend the patriarchal blessing as God ordained. Although a prophet personally wished to bless one person or nation, God’s will prevailed.** [For example] Isaac urgently sought to secure Esau as heir that day “before he died”… His methods in this exchange raise questions. In that culture and time, fathers normally blessed their heirs with joyful, *public* celebrations such as Abraham held for Isaac. **Instead, Isaac *privately* called on Esau** to provide him a tasty meal of game, his favorite and Esau’s specialty, as a condition to receiving his blessing. Isaac’s motives and understanding are not clearly stated, but certainly questionable. Lesson 17, pages 1-2

***Isaac’s decision to ignore what God had told Rebekah about “the elder shall serve the younger” and to make Esau his heir created a situation that revealed major flaws in each of their lives.*** *As the BSF comment pointed out,* ***ISAAC*** *tried to give the blessing to Esau privately. That suggests that he meant to hide what he was doing from his wife and that he knew that he was going against God’s revealed will. Otherwise why not throw a big party as was normally done on these occasions?* ***REBEKAH*** *resorted to deception and trickery in order to get her own way. She might have soothed her conscience by saying, “God wants Jacob to be the heir,” but she was clearly doing the “right thing” for all the wrong reasons and in wrong ways: disrespecting her husband, leading her son into a dangerous situation, and ultimately dishonoring God Himself. The account of* ***JACOB’s*** *deception of his father is actually painful to read as he lied again and again—even invoking the name of God to do so! It is one thing to lie, but to glibly claim God’s blessing in the hunt is horrifying. And* ***ESAU*** *just revealed yet again how little he understands about the Lord and His blessing. As the BSF pointed out,* ***“At this point, the four family members had this in common—they each valued their own will more than God’s righteous character. None were afraid to sin in the presence of the Lord to get what they wanted.”***

**God’s Truth Revealed** – As soon as Jacob left Isaac, Esau arrived with tasty game for his father. We cannot estimate the force of God’s sovereignty thundering on Isaac when he heard Esau’s voice…Before God and Esau, Isaac trembled violently. **A blessing once spoken could not be revoked.** Jacob’s deceit did not change the outcome. God overruled human scheming and accomplished His determined will. God is never deceived, nor does He make mistakes or change His mind. Lesson 17, page 4

*Did you wonder why Isaac “trembled violently”? Or why he apparently never rebuked Jacob for what he had done? I think the BSF expressed it very well when they said that* ***the force of God’s sovereignty thundered upon Isaac*** *when he heard Esau’s voice, because Isaac wasn’t hearing just the voice of Esau, he was hearing the voice of God. However much he may have deceived himself previously about God’s intention for his two sons, he now realized that God meant what He said when He told Rebekah that “the elder shall serve the younger”. He recognized God’s will, and he accepted it. That’s why he told Esau that Jacob would “indeed be blessed”. He apparently repented of his own selfish desires and quietly accepted God’s will now, just as he had when he lay quietly on the altar of sacrifice so many years earlier. In fact, Hebrews 11 offers a very interesting commentary on Isaac. Verse 20 says, “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.”*

**A Caring God** – Jacob reaped painful consequences from his deceitful scheme to receive his father’s blessing. He got the blessing he wanted but also a lot of hardship he did not want. Jacob was forced to flee from home because he feared that his brother Esau would pursue and murder him. **However, the One who most intensely pursued Jacob was not Esau, but God.** God did not pull away from Jacob because of his deception. God sought fleeing Jacob; He drew near to the man who found himself far from everything secure.

Sin brings consequences. The good news is that God meets us where we are and calls us forward. God extends grace to the undeserving. **Jacob’s failure was not final.** God sought Jacob in ways that captured his heart…and prepared him to welome and respond to God’s nearness. God appeared to him, renewed His covenant and led him to worship…When you yield to Him, God works good through your difficulties, even messes of your own making. Lesson 18, page 1

**A Growing Jacob** – Jacob made a vow to God in response to his encounter. Some people see Jacob’s vow to God as grasping or bargaining with God, a sort of, “*IF* you will do this for me, then I will do this for you.” Others see a new character of dependence on God forming in Jacob. It is as though Jacob were saying, “*SINCE* God proves Himself faithful to me and has promised to bring me back here, one day I *will* return here. In gratitude, I will make this pillar a sanctuary to worship God, and I will give a tenth of all I possess to Him.”

Only God truly knows the moties within the human heart. Jacob met God and started on a path of growth…Jacob’s natural human tendency was to use self-effort and performance to obtain what God had promised. **His life story reveals God’s continuing discipline and Jacob’s gradual growth.** Children learn to walk by taking wobbly first steps, experiencing new freedom, falling, getting up, trying again and growing stronger. We cannot accurately define the state of Jacob’s heart at this point in his journey. God knew where he was, met him there and Jacob responded.

**For everyone who follows Christ, spiritual growth is a process.** Renewed trust in God exposes deeply embedded patterns of behavior. Even those who strive to believe God struggle with doubt. Those who are accustomed to self-effort struggle with full dependence on God. The path of growth involves God revealing truth about Himself and truth about lingering sin within us. God disciplines believers for their good, and He stimulates growing faith. Maturity does not develop instantly, but over time.

Lesson 18, page 4

***Some Pithy Sayings from BSF*** *– Recall that “pithy sayings” are statements that pack a punch as they make a point. Here are a few that I gleaned from the lessons this week:*

* As always, lies require more lies to stay alive. **Truth does not change; lies must be maintained.**
* **Sin always promises more than it delivers and costs more than we imagine.**
* **God often takes us to places where our only option is to depend on Him.** When you come to the end of yourself, you stand ready to see God work.
* **The journey of faith involves *specific moments* of increasing surrender and growing confidence in God.**

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* **Music Video:** There is a second version of the music video we saw last week, “The God Who Sees” by Kathie Lee Gifford and Nicole C. Mullen. The version we watched last week had one still picture and displayed all the lyrics. In the version we will watch today, Nicole Mullen acts out the lives of the biblical characters she is singing about.