

For the next three weeks, I will be working with the story of Jacob, but not exactly in the order and format as in the Gospel Project. If you have any questions about the outline material below, feel free to email me at benjamin.j.williams@gmail.com

Series Outline

- 11/17 – **Wrestling with God**: God’s grace is received, not taken. Are we repeating Jacob’s folly?
- 11/24 -- **Sowing & Reaping**: Jacob the trickster inherits a life of deceit and betrayal in his years with Laban (Genesis 28-31). What if other people treated us the way we treat them?
- 12/1 -- **Prodigal Jacob**: After past misdeeds, Jacob takes the long road home. Nevertheless, Esau receives him with love and affection. How will we go home, and how will we receive prodigals?

Sermon Outline

1. Overview of Jacob’s Life
 - a. Heel-Grabber, GENESIS 25:21-26
 - i. Jacob means, “he takes by the heel” or “he cheats.”
 - ii. This foreshadows Jacob’s desire for the birthright of his brother.
 - b. Deal-Maker, GENESIS 25:29-34
 - i. Esau is looked down on for under-valuing this birthright (Hebrews 12:16). Jacob wanted the right thing, but we do not like how he got it.
 - ii. And yet ... Does Jacob actually have the birthright?
 - c. Trickster, GENESIS 27
 - i. Do you have to swindle someone out of what you have already bought? The blessing was not exactly Esau’s to give.
 - ii. And yet ... Does Jacob actually have the birthright even now?
 - d. Wrestler, GENESIS 32:22-32
 - i. Why does Jacob feel compelled to fight for a blessing he already had (twice)?
 - ii. Jacob recognized that he never really had it. The blessing could not be **taken**.
2. Making Sense of a Non-Sense Story: Jacob the Beggar
 - a. GENESIS 32:25, 28
 - i. “he touched his hip socket, and Jacob’s hip was put out of joint”
 - ii. “you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed”
 - iii. Why is Jacob declared the winner if he clearly lost?
 - b. GENESIS 32:24, 26
 - i. “a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day”
 - ii. “I will not let you go unless you bless me”
 - iii. Jacob won when he begged. Jacob had power through his humiliation.
 - c. HOSEA 12:3-4, “he wept and sought his favor.”
3. Grace Is Not Taken
 - a. But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (JAMES 4:6)
 - b. You will never steal, barter, or earn the favor of God. But it is yours for the asking.

Bible Class Outline

Note: Allow room for good discussion wherever it arises and do not feel compelled to cover all of the thoughts below. Think of these as discussion starters rather than lesson plans.

Key Thought: "Grace is received, not taken."

1. Grace Is a Gift (Romans 4)

- a. Paul emphasizes that Abraham did not receive his blessing by works (v. 1-5).
- b. What are "works"?
 - i. Contextually, it probably references the works of the Law of Moses, which helped create and shape Jewish identity (circumcision for example, v. 9-12).
 - ii. During the Reformation, Martin Luther applied this to the sale of indulgences and other practices of Medieval Christianity.
 - iii. In what ways are we tempted to treat grace as a wage rather than as a gift? How do we, like Jacob, try to take rather than receive God's blessings?

2. Grace Is By Christ (Romans 5)

- a. The chief example of God offering us unmerited, unearned grace is in the story of the gospel of Jesus Christ (v. 6-11).
- b. Paul further elaborates that humanity did earn something once. We earned death because of sin (v. 12-14).
- c. In contrast, in Jesus we are offered grace as a free gift (v. 15-21).

3. We Respond to Grace, but We Do Not Earn It (Romans 6)

- a. Does that mean we should sit back and allow our sins to provoke even more grace from God? Absolutely not (v. 1-2).
- b. The Christian life is a response to grace, not a solicitation of grace. Baptism is a reenactment of the gospel, not a meriting of the gospel (v. 3-4).
- c. Even morally upright behavior is a response to grace, not a solicitation of grace. Because of what he has already done, we can consider ourselves "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (v. 5-11).
- d. In the end, grace remains a gift (v. 22-23).