

## READ

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Genesis 28:10 - 29:30

## REFLECT

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What is commonly referred to as “Jacob’s ladder” is really an amazing story of God’s grace. Jacob was on the run after stealing Esau’s blessing, thus securing a better future for himself at the expense of his own brother. He was on his way to seek refuge with his mom’s family when he stopped to rest for the night and had an incredible dream. In his dream he saw a giant staircase filled with messengers of God going up and down. It was there that he met God, who, without mentioning Jacob’s previous sins, blessed Jacob with the same blessings given to Abraham - land, abundant offspring, and God’s eternal companionship. Jacob had done nothing to deserve this blessing, in fact, he was exceedingly unworthy of any kind of gift. But God had made a promise to Jacob’s grandfather and God wasn’t going to take that promise away even if Jacob acted unkindly. Through God’s blessing and guidance, Jacob could do and be better, developing the ability to notice God and God’s aims and aligning his life with those aims. Jacob memorialized the space and God’s actions with an altar, though he did it with condition – he didn’t trust that God’s blessing would be true, so he’d only give his tithe if and when it was proven to be true. Clearly Jacob still had a lot of growing to do.

After his encounter with God, Jacob finally made it to the safety of his relative Laban. He was invited to live and work with Laban, and also given an opportunity to name his own price for that work. Jacob chose Rachel, Laban’s youngest daughter, as his price and promised to work 7 years for her hand in marriage. Laban agreed and when the work was completed a wedding was planned. But when it came to consummate the marriage Jacob discovered he'd been duped – it was Leah, not Rachel! The trickster found himself tricked. Furious at Laban’s deceit, Jacob was told that their custom was to not allow a younger sister the opportunity to marry before the older. So, Jacob agreed to work another seven years to also get Rachel’s hand in marriage. When that marriage was finalized, we read, “and [Jacob] loved Rachel more than Leah.” It’s hard not to feel broken hearted for Leah, who asked for none of this, and

was left in a loveless marriage. Even years after his dream, Jacob had growing to do.

## REACT

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- Throughout scriptures, dreams are frequently conduits for the Holy, places where God finds us even when we aren't looking to be found. Have you ever had particularly impactful dreams? Maybe it was one where you received clarity over an issue that had been bothering you, or maybe you had a dream of something beautiful and it gave you solace. How do you understand such dreams?
- Jacob wasn't a great person, yet God blessed him without condition. How do you feel when people undeservingly win awards or get recognition? While there are frequently serious justice issues at the heart of these experiences in our lives, God's willingness to meet us with grace despite our undeserving it is amazing. When others receive grace, and you don't think they deserve it, can you remember your own undeserved grace?
- Jacob had two wives and, unsurprisingly, it was a contentious arrangement. How do you feel when our ancestors in faith had multiple spouses, or when those relationships were unhealthy?

## RESPOND

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*Cultivating Grace: Jacob was certainly undeserving of God's blessing on his life, a reminder of how free and powerful God's grace is. We, too, should be as gracious as God. Try to cultivate your ability to offer grace to others:*

- Practice confession – acknowledge the ways in which you have fallen short (“All have sinned and fall short of God's glory,” Romans 3:23).
- Be reminded of God's forgiveness – know that you have received God's forgiveness for all you have done and left undone (“but all are treated as righteous freely by his grace because of a ransom that was paid by Christ Jesus,” Romans 3:24)
- Use the grace you've received – show the same grace you have received in every interaction you have, especially in those moments you may be angry (“This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters,” 1 John 3:16)