

Reconciled  
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Genesis 33:1-15

Ever seen a forest area that has been devastated by a wildfire? As you look at the scorched and smoldering ground and the scraggly remnants of once green trees, it's hard to imagine it could ever be green, lush, and healthy again.

That's a pretty fair description of a relationship that has been broken; burned to the ground by deceit, dishonesty, and dysfunction. Sinful and selfish actions have turned the relationship to a smoldering heap of devastation.

**What obstacles can get in the way of reconciling a broken relationship?**

Big Idea: Just as only God can restore a burned out forest, only God can reconcile and restore a broken relationship. That reconciliation with others comes from first being reconciled to God.

- That's what God did for scheming Jacob and his vengeful brother Esau.
- There had been twenty years of separation since Jacob fled home as Esau vowed to kill him.
- Jacob had been deceitful in stealing the birthright and the blessing. Esau had been careless and sinful too. The parents hadn't helped the situation.
- Now, two decades later Jacob was a changed man. His pride had been broken by a taste of his own medicine as his father-in-law (and uncle) Laban tricked him into paying for two wives through years of hard labor.
- In the meantime God blessed Jacob with children and livestock.
- Jacob was ready to escape his unpleasant father-in-law and God told him to go back to the land He had been promised (31:3.)
- Jacob packed up his wives, children, and livestock; but what about Esau?
- It had been a long time but Esau's vendetta was still hanging out there.
- Jacob prayed to God: "I'm not worthy of how you've blessed me, but I'm afraid Esau will kill us all. Please deliver me from my brother's revenge."
- God would take care of the Esau situation, but first He needed to do some more work on Jacob. Remember, Jacob had encountered God's presence and power back in chapter 28 (angels on the ladder, God's promise.)
- On the way back home there was another angelic host to remind Jacob that God was working to prepare the way for his meeting with Esau.
- Then in the middle of the night Jacob got into a wrestling match with a "Man" (capital M in the NKJV.) Jacob knew it was God and refused to let go without God's blessing. [a theophany – a pre-incarnate "personal manifestation of a god to a person."]

- God gave Jacob a permanent reminder by changing Jacob’s name (Israel meaning “he strives with God”) and his walk (a limp.) Jacob’s limp would forever be a reminder that had seen the face of God and lived to tell it.
- What was this wrestling match with God all about? Here’s how one commentator describes it: *“Here is a reminder that undergoing the great change—becoming a Christian—is not always quick and easy. It is not just a matter of repeating a prayer, making a decision, or filling out a card. True conversion often comes only after intense wrestling with God. A new identity in Jesus often comes only after a period of persistently praying like Jacob, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”<sup>ii</sup>*
- We said only God can reconcile and restore a broken relationship. That reconciliation with others comes from first being reconciled to God.
- Though Jacob had been broken down and changed by God, still he feared facing the wrath of his brother Esau. He sent messengers ahead with 550 livestock as a present to try to soften up Esau. The word came back that Esau is coming to meet them and he had a security force of 400 men.

Genesis 33:1–15 (ESV)

**33** And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. <sup>2</sup> And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all.

- Here we see some of the “old” Jacob. He arranged his wives and children in order of their expendability! The old favoritism wasn’t totally gone.
- To his credit Jacob put himself in front:

<sup>3</sup> He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

- **What does this say about the new Jacob compared to the old Jacob?**
- Though Jacob was technically the heir to the family fortune, he was bowing humbly to Esau as if to a king and he was bracing for impact!

<sup>4</sup> But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

- You have to imagine at this moment Jacob is thinking, “God who is this man hugging me and what did you do with my hairy, scary brother?”

<sup>5</sup> And when Esau lifted up his eyes and saw the women and children, he said, “Who are these with you?” Jacob said, “The children whom God has graciously given your servant.” <sup>6</sup> Then the servants drew near, they and their children, and bowed down. <sup>7</sup> Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down. And last Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. <sup>8</sup> Esau said, “What do

you mean by all this company that I met?” **[the 550 animals Jacob had sent ahead]** Jacob answered, “To find favor in the sight of my lord.”

- Call it a bribe or a present (blessing) the livestock was a peace offering.
- Now, watch how different things are between the brothers:

<sup>9</sup> But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.”

<sup>10</sup> Jacob said, “No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand. For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me. <sup>11</sup> Please accept my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.” Thus he urged him, and he took it.

- The old Jacob and Esau used to fight to take from each other. Now they debate about a gift between them. “In that culture, one never accepted a gift from an enemy, only from a friend. To accept the gift was to accept the friendship.”<sup>iii</sup>
- Only God can reconcile and restore a broken relationship like that.

<sup>12</sup> Then Esau said, “Let us journey on our way, and I will go ahead of you.”

- The security force was to offer protection for Jacob and family.

<sup>13</sup> But Jacob said to him, “My lord knows that the children are frail, and that the nursing flocks and herds are a care to me. If they are driven hard for one day, all the flocks will die. <sup>14</sup> Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, at the pace of the livestock that are ahead of me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.”

<sup>15</sup> So Esau said, “Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me.” But he said, “What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord.”

- Though Jacob said he was following Esau to Seir, he turned aside and stopped in a place called Succoth and later moved to Shechem.
- Jacob was grateful to be reconciled with Esau, but he had no intention of moving back to live next door to each other. Perhaps Jacob had read the book “Boundaries.” He knew little distance from Esau would be smart.
- Let’s see what we can learn from this story of reconciliation.
- In order to put the finishing touches on the “new” Jacob, God put Jacob “in a jam.” He couldn’t go back to the land God promised without facing Esau.
- **How was Jacob different because of the “jam” he was in? What’s the lesson for us when we find God has allowed a crisis in our lives?**
- One commentator writes: “*What a mercy times of crisis can be! Perhaps you have witnessed how sickness, the loss of a loved one, a national emergency, or a public embarrassment can be used of God to humble our hearts and to call upon his name. Sometimes God’s appointed means of grace is getting us stuck and afraid.*”<sup>iv</sup> “Up until this point, Jacob had been

*prideful and arrogant. But not until he was in trouble was he willing and able to say, "I am unworthy" (32:10). It is the specific conviction "I am unworthy,"...that drives individuals to Jesus, the Savior.<sup>v</sup>*

- We don't read in scripture that Esau had any personal encounters with God, but we can clearly see God had been at work on Esau too.
- In 33:10 Jacob compared seeing Esau's face to seeing the face of God.
- John MacArthur writes: "*Jacob acknowledged how God had so obviously changed Esau, as indicated by his facial expression which was not one of sullen hate but of brotherly love divinely wrought and restored.*"<sup>vi</sup>
- God had replaced Esau's bitterness with forgiveness.
- That's a reminder: Though we may fear what we face in reconciling with someone, God is already there ahead of us preparing the way.
- Humility is an important part of reconciliation and Jacob was sure humble, but Warren Wiersbe in his commentary is a little tough on Jacob:

*"It's one thing to be blessed on the mountaintop with God and quite something else to carry that blessing down into the valley. Jacob failed himself, his family, and his God in several ways." [1] "By scheming instead of trusting (vv. 1–2)." [He arranged the family] [2] "By bowing instead of limping (vv. 3–7). Jacob's strength was in his limp, for it was a constant reminder that God had conquered him and he could trust the Lord to see him through. Had Jacob limped, his brother would have noticed it and asked the cause, and that would have been Jacob's golden opportunity to tell him what God had done for him." [3] By pleading instead of witnessing (vv. 8–15). The fact that Esau ran to his brother, embraced him, kissed him, and wept is evidence that a change had taken place in his heart. Jacob was given an open door to talk with Esau about the past and get family matters straightened out, for, after all, God's army was hovering near and Jacob didn't have to be afraid. But instead of confessing his sins and giving witness to God's grace in his life, Jacob spent the time begging Esau to accept the gifts he had sent."<sup>vii</sup>*

- I guess you could say Wiersbe feels Jacob not only limped out, but he sort of wimped out. Either way, God accomplished the reconciliation!
- **Any other thoughts?**

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Only God can restore a burned out forest; only God can reconcile and restore a broken relationship.
- That reconciliation with others comes from first being reconciled to God.
- Is there a broken relationship in your life? Is there "scorched earth" that you fear can never again bloom with the new growth of a restored relationship? When the other person sees your "limp" from being touched by God, it will prove to them you are a changed person.
- Ask God to prepare the way and give you the courage to make the first move. Is there a guarantee that there will be instant healing? No, but leave that part to God because the only way reconciliation can blossom is through His touch.

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<sup>i</sup> Feinberg, C. L. (2003). [Theophany](#). In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 1586). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

<sup>ii</sup> Strassner, K. (2009). [Opening up Genesis](#) (pp. 131–132). Leominster: Day One Publications.

<sup>iii</sup> Dave Guzik - <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/genesis-33/>

<sup>iv</sup> Strassner, K. (2009). [Opening up Genesis](#) (p. 130).

<sup>v</sup> *ibid*

<sup>vi</sup> MacArthur Study Bible p. 64

<sup>vii</sup> THE WIERSBE BIBLE COMMENTARY: OLD TESTAMENT © 2007 Warren W. Wiersbe