

I know that there are dangers of participating with social media these days, but I also know that there can be some benefits. ... Earlier this week... I came across a post by Katherine Mackenett... which a Facebook friend of mine had reposted. ... It encouraged me... and I thought that it might encourage others... so I reposted it. Here is her simple and yet very insightful statement:

Now every time I witness a strong person, I want to know: what darkness did you conquer in your story? Mountains do not rise without earthquakes. [PAUSE]

Mountains do not rise without earthquakes. That is profound... isn't it?

The times of greatest spiritual growth in my life... (and maybe this is true of you... as well)... have come from situations where I felt completely helpless... and God had to step in with one of His acts of mercy. When a crisis hits yours or my life... and there is nothing we can do in (and of) ourselves... when all we can do is sit back and wait for God to work... and He does... we pass another milestone in our lives as we journey toward Christlikeness. (Our trust in the Lord expands by leaps and bounds.)

A recent example of having my trust in the Lord enlarged... has happened in recent months. At our church annual meeting this past January... our financial report was not good. For several months our expenditures had been exceeding our income by at least \$6,000 every month. Our reserves were getting very low. By the time of our quarterly business meeting in July... the outflow in order to meet our monthly commitments was still \$6,000 in the red... with our reserve (now) falling much lower. By the end of August there did not look to be any change... and our reserve was down

to around \$14,000. That was when we found out that our water well had run dry. What would it cost to drill a deeper well...? Our estimates were as high as \$20,000... which... of course would wipe out every penny of our finances. But even if we knew that we had the money... the well drillers were booked out for months. We were out of water... which is very bad news when you have a public auditorium (like a church) and we faced the impossibility of having a new well drilled... for many weeks. Our circumstances were very dark. “O.K. Lord... *what is it that You want us to do...?*” Could we realistically survive... as a church... through the month of September...?

But God did intervene. The well drillers juggled their schedule and made our job their priority. And not only that... they also gave us many price reductions and discounts. ... Then... through several different circumstances... that we could not foresee... in September... we were able to pay for a new water well... pay all our monthly commitments... and have a surplus. Today... our reserve is back to levels... where it was... when we first got concerned about the months and months of paying out \$6,000 more than we brought-in.

God is here... Folks! And He wants to make mountains out of you and I. What we just went through was not just to tickle our fancy... or give us goose-bumps when we re-tell what we just experienced. The elders and I want to encourage you to be praying with us... about God’s next steps for us... as a church. He wants to do something for His glory through us... and we are asking Him what that is. ... I can strongly identify with Katherine Mackenett’s statement:

Now every time I witness a strong person, I want to know: what darkness did you conquer in your story? Mountains do not rise without earthquakes. [PAUSE]

As we follow the story of Jacob... in the book of Genesis... we can see that there were at least three earth-shaking experiences for Jacob... that seemed to boost his level of Spiritual maturity... because God was going to use Jacob... in a great way... for God's glory. One of those experiences we will find in our passage this morning.

The first enlargement to Jacob's Spiritual maturity came after he fled from his brother Esau... He had absolutely nothing... was on the run... startled by every crunch of a twig on the ground... and tremendously lonely. But God came to him... and met him in a dream. God affirmed him in so many ways and told him that he would carry the blessing of Abraham and have many children. Jacob worshiped God and made a vow to Him. The next verse informs us that from there Jacob continued his journey with a spring in his step. But he still had some growing to do...

Then we have the next spiritual "earthquake" for Jacob (which we will get to in a moment) in today's verses. The third spiritual earthquake we will see in a week or two. It happened on the night before Jacob saw his brother Esau again... after 20 years. The Angel of the Lord wrestled with Jacob... and that wrestling match changed Jacob's life forever... producing the highest level of spiritual maturity Jacob ever experienced.

As we look today at Jacob's second spiritual earthquake... I hope that you can look back in your own life... and see certain momentous events that God took you through... which have escalated your level of trust and maturity in Him. ... We all need to see definite spiritual progress in our

life... and one way to notice it... is by looking at the momentous events that increased it.

If you are not growing stronger... then you are growing weaker. For the believer this will always be the case: either you are maturing... or your faith is diminishing. No one stands still.

Last week we saw this in Rachael and Leah's struggle to outdo each other in producing sons for Jacob... remember...? We saw it in the names that they gave to their sons... whenever one of them was born... and the names they used for God. Leah started off expressing maturity while Rachael showed immaturity. But by the end of the passage last week... it was Rachael who had matured... and Leah had gone the other way.

No one stands still. Which way are you going...? Are you progressing toward new heights of spiritual maturity... or are you less mature today than you were 5...? 10...? or 20 years ago...?

The effects of Jacob's second spiritual earthquake... will be seen in the way he handles his need to provide for his family. This may very well be a way for us to measure our own maturity. Whether you are retired or still working... whether you are the primary wage earner in your family... or have responsibility in running the home... most of us are concerned about the simple matter of earning a living.

Economic recessions and depressions... inflation... interest rates... the cost of living... jobs — all that affect our lives — are a concern to us. ... How do we ensure that we have enough... to take care of our needs... like just the basic needs of food... clothing... shelter... transportation... health... recreation... old age... retirement... education...?

This is the subject of the present passage. It tells us how Jacob worked to take care of his family and their needs. His experience is a great lesson for us as we deal with similar concerns about meeting all our needs. ... So let's get started...

I will begin by reading our passage in it's entirety. You will see that the very end contains a very strange section... describing something that is bound to raise some questions. "*Huh... That is odd. ...What does this mean...?*"

OK... I will confess. ... My wanting to read all the verses **right now**... is... (in part)... my shameless pastor's strategy... to try to motivate you... to stay with me... until we work our way to them... so you can find out what is being said at the end... and why it is included in the narrative. ... So... lets read it... and then... please stay tuned.

Genesis 30:25-43

Well... that all seems straight-forward... doesn't it...? There certainly **can't** be any questions about what our passage means... can there...? Well yes. What is all this about... when Jacob makes the livestock drink water and breed in front of the striped and spotted sticks of wood...? This is the shameless teaser that I spoke of... just before we read the passage. So... please stay tuned... and we will get to it.

Our opening verse today... shows us the second spiritual earthquake for Jacob. This is what expanded his spiritual maturity. What was it...? ... It was the birth of Joseph.

Genesis 30:25

Do you remember how passive Jacob had been? He had easily given in to his mother's plan to deceive his father. He gave in to Laban's cultural solution to take two wives. And several times last week we saw Jacob exercise a very passive leadership role in his home... while his two wives competed with each other for his love.

But after Joseph was born... something happened to Jacob. We certainly see him act different. He emerged as a bold character. ... It took the miracle of God opening the closed womb of Rachael... for Jacob to be transformed from a prayerless schemer... into a man who depends on God.

Joseph's birth convinced Jacob that Yahweh is the God of the impossible! Sons being born to his other three wives didn't seem too difficult. But a child being born to Rachael was JUST NOT POSSIBLE! And yet it happened. So Jacob... in these verses that we just read... recognized and allowed God to place him in a situation that was beyond his own ability to control. He had to completely trust God – and Jacob would have had to understand this... in making his deal with Laban.

It also became apparent that God is the source of Jacob's wealth (a large number of sons was seen as great wealth)... and that no amount of deception or trickery by Laban... can hinder God's blessing of Jacob. ... In fact... Laban also recognized that he is blessed because of his association with Jacob. Once-barren Rachael giving birth to Joseph was a spiritual earthquake for Jacob.

The time had come for Jacob to move his large family to his own homeland and be on his own. Jacob had fulfilled his contract with Laban to work for

14 years. He now had eleven sons and one daughter, and he had more than fulfilled his part of the bargain. He had earned the right to freedom. It was time to stop working for Laban and start building his own future security.

But crafty Laban wasn't about to lose his son-in-law... especially when he knew that Jacob's presence had brought to him the blessing of God. ... Laban wasn't interested in Jacob's God. ... He was interested only in the **blessings** he received... because of Jacob's God. ... Laban surely knew of the promises God had made to Abraham and his descendants... and he wanted to get the most out of them. ... But Jacob was emboldened to stand up to Laban.

But there was something else that gave Jacob the confidence. ... Jacob was prepared for his father-in-law... because the Lord had talked to Jacob in a dream and told him exactly what to do.

Genesis 31:4-13

Before Jacob spoke to Laban about leaving... God prepared Jacob by coming to him in a dream. ... And I would like for you to remember these dream when we get to the end of our passage today... because it provides... what I think is the key... to our understanding it.

This dream gave Jacob another boost to his confidence... in asking for his freedom from Laban. After 14 years of working for him... Jacob knew Laban's corrupt character. He (no doubt) knew that Laban would balk at the request. Laban had been quite a scoundrel. In chapter 31 Jacob tells his wives how Laban had changed his wages 10 times... to Laban's own

advantage. And after 14 years... Jacob still has the same material possessions that he had... when he first arrived – NOTHING!

Jacob needed freedom from Laban before he could adequately provide for his family. This is what he was asking Laban: let him and his family go. Give them their freedom so he could go where he could best provide for them.

Jacob's demand caught Laban flat-footed. Nevertheless... he was instinctively superficial in his response (though perhaps more revealing than he would have liked to be).

Genesis 30:27-28

Laban momentarily groveled before Jacob as he sought a toehold. "*If I have found favor in your sight*" is a fawning way of addressing a superior. What was Laban doing? He was engaging in flattery. ... Flattery was probably second nature to Laban.

We see here... also... that Laban is very much a pagan. He used divination (which God is opposed to)... and later we will see that Rachael will steal his most precious household idols... called "teraphim."

But even a pagan can recognize the hand of God on a person. ... Jacob's faith... combined with his business sense... had made its impact. However... Laban knew only too well... it was not just Jacob's skill as a business man that made him such a valuable employee... it was his relationship with the Lord. ... (Do you suppose the pagans in your life... can distinguish the hand of God on your life?)

You may recall that Abimelech, king of Gerar, found that he was blessed when Isaac was in his midst. Now Uncle Laban has discovered that God is with Jacob and has blessed him for Jacob's sake. So Uncle Laban says, "My boy, don't rush off; don't leave me. I've been blessed, and I want to raise your wages."

Laban was trying to keep Jacob. He had not treated Jacob fairly; he had never paid Jacob anywhere close to what he should have. But now his eyes had been opened; he saw that he needed to pay Jacob more.

The fact that Jacob is just as poor now as when he first came (he owns nothing... except for his family)... gives Laban opportunity to persuade him to stay. ... Grandpa apparently has no care for his daughters and grandkids. Since the debt for his wives is now properly paid... Laban says to Jacob: "*Lets draw up another contract... You will never make it all the way back to Canaan as poor as you are!*"

"*Name your wages, and I will give it.*" This is "Vintage Laban." ... Uncle Scrooge had his wits about him here! ... Jacob had asked Laban for his wives and children... and Laban responded by talking about money.

Laban knew the price of everything and the value of nothing. Sly Laban knew that he owed Jacob nothing more... because those were the terms of their 14 year contract that was now up. Jacob had received his two wives. ... Obviously... if Jacob wanted even a penny more for travel expenses... he would have to indenture himself to more labor. (Nice.)

Laban tries to flatter Jacob some more... using the truth that Laban's wealth had greatly increased because of Jacob. And Jacob's response is very interesting. He credits the Lord in verse 30. Yes... Laban's wealth

had greatly increased... but it was all due to the LORD. God was the One who had blessed his hard work and long hours.

I believe that the author of Genesis wants us to know that Jacob was thinking back to God's promise to Jacob at his first spiritual earthquake back at Bethel... when Jacob saw in a dream angels ascending and descending a stair case from heaven to earth. A unique Hebrew word was used twice in the description of that event... when God promised Jacob a "teeming growth" of possessions. ... And now here... this unique expression is used again... "*You had little before I came and now it is "teeming growth."*" Jacob quite possibly was thinking about his first spiritual earthquake... and received a spiritual boost from it. "*God said that He would bring increase... and He has!*"

Genesis 30:31

"*You shall not give me anything...*" I want you to notice this part of the plan. "*You shall not give me anything...*" Because if you remember this... it will make (what follows)... less confusing. (WATCH THIS) ... All of Laban's current flock would remain Laban's. "*You shall not give me anything...*"

Genesis 30:32

Jacob was to receive only the speckled and spotted animals that would be born thereafter. ... And notice even further... that he was to receive only the speckled and spotted born - to the pure or solid colored stock. ... That happens... very rarely! Speckled and spotted animals are more likely to be born to parents that are already spotted and speckled. ... They are rare to begin with... but without God's intervention... they would be MUCH FEWER... when the parents were both solid in color.

Jacob knew this. ... He had lived on a ranch and worked around sheep and goats and other animals all his life... for decades. ... Jacob knew genetic tendencies. ... Why then would he propose such a plan? For two reasons:

First... Jacob needed to give Laban the advantage. ... After all... Laban owned the stock. What's more... Laban had taken advantage of Jacob... never paying him a just and fair wage. Laban was focused only on advancing himself: his own profits, his own property, his own position.

Jacob knew that Laban would never agree to a **fair** and **equal** agreement. He was wise enough to know that he needed to make the best deal he could... and to make one where his wages could not be any more obvious. It would decrease the chances of Laban swindling him. ... So the agreement was to Laban's advantage - greatly so.

Second... Jacob knew that he was a hard worker... but even more importantly... he knew that his heart was with God... and God's heart was with him. Jacob was going to trust that God would bless and take care of him. He believed with all his heart that God would bless his hard work and give him whatever prosperity God wanted him to have.

He now had a unique opportunity to secure enough stock to eventually go into the ranching business on his own... so he was planning to work hard and trust God. ... Jacob was going to be an honest businessman (giving himself and Laban no opportunity to cheat)... and he would be a testimony to God.

Laban must have thought Jacob was crazy. So he agreed right away... and demonstrated his eagerness. ... Even though part of the plan was for

Jacob to remove all the spotted animals... Laban jumped ahead of Jacob... and did it himself... that very day. He probably didn't trust Jacob. So he did it... and he took them as far away as possible.

.....

Now we are ready for the puzzling part of the passage. We have come to THAT section. So let's read it again.

Genesis 30:37-43

The explanation of this does not find agreement among Bible scholars. Even those... who I hold a great deal of respect disagree with one another. One explanation is that this was apparently the latest breeding science of that day. The belief was apparently that when the animals were in heat and saw the striped branches and drank the chemicals in the water... they were more likely to mate and to bear spotted offspring.

Was this true? Was this belief of scientific breeding valid? Some commentators think that it may be. Henry Morris is an example. He says this:

"It is...true that certain chemicals can and do have a significant prenatal influence if they can reach the embryo or, prior to conception, the DNA in the germ cells. It is possible that certain chemicals in the wood of these trees—peeled rods of which were actually in the water which the flocks came to drink—were capable somehow of affecting the animals. If nothing else, water treated thus may have served as an aphrodisiac and fertility promoter among the cattle. At least one such chemical substance found in these trees has been used for such a purpose in both ancient and modern times" (The Genesis Record, p.476).

The explanation goes on to say that Jacob separated the newly born spotted animals from the pure, solid color flock off in a nearby pasture or pen by themselves. He then took the pure, solid color flock and placed them so that they would face and see the newly born spotted animals. It was felt that the constant sense of sight affected the breeding, that an animal would tend to bear whatever color animal it was constantly looking upon.

Was this method a valid scientific method? Again, Henry Morris thinks that it could be.

"Further, whether or not the sense of sight can actually 'mark' the embryo in some way, there is no doubt that what one sees may have a strong effect on certain physiologic mechanisms in his body. The phenomenon of blushing, the nauseous reactions produced by viewing gruesome sights, and the effect of pornographic pictures in stimulating the sexual apparatus are typical cases in point. The mere sight of the striped rods may have served simply as an aphrodisiac to the cattle when they came to drink....In some way not understood (but apparently confirmed by many practical animal raisers since), the sight of white-streaked rods seems to stimulate these animals to sexual activity" (The Genesis Record, p.476).

So then... Jacob did what breeders do today: he mated the strong with the strong. This, of course, was a proven scientific method of breeding.

The point to see is this: Jacob was using the latest methods of breeding that he knew and believed... the latest scientific methods and beliefs of that day. Even if some of the scientific methods and beliefs were invalid (and some are within every generation)... Jacob had no way to know that they would not work. He was a hard and diligent worker... a rancher who no

doubt stayed on top of the latest methods of ranching. He would naturally follow the science of breeding believed in that day and time.

Maybe our science of today has some catching up to do with the science knowledge of Jacob's day. Maybe there are some things to be re-discovered.

Another explanation of this section... is that it was common belief of Jacob's day. Hard-working Jacob diligently applied it... and even though it was junk science (or mere superstition) – God blessed Jacob anyway.

There is a third explanation... however... and this is the one that I lean toward. I became aware of it through James Montgomery Boice's commentary as he reiterated the position of John Calvin on this passage. He wrote:

"I prefer...the view of Calvin. God commanded Jacob to set up the striped branches, which he did, not as a physical means to the end of producing striped or spotted offspring, but as a symbol of Jacob's faith and obedience, much as God later caused Moses to set up a bronze snake in the wilderness when the people had been bitten by serpents. The people were not healed by the snake. They were healed by God through faith expressed in their obedience in looking to the snake. In a parallel, but not identical way, Jacob's trust in God would have been similarly rewarded. Indeed, in the next chapter Jacob speaks of having had a dream about streaked, speckled, and spotted cattle, in which God spoke to him. It may be that God told him what to do on that occasion."

The point is that Jacob trusted God and that we are to do that too, especially in regard to material possessions"

Jacob's great faith was rewarded. God blessed him and made him very prosperous. Notice: Jacob was trusting God to honor his hard work...

trusting God to bless and give him whatever prosperity God wanted him to have. ... And this is exactly what God did. ... God worked all things out for Jacob. ... And please don't miss... just how miraculously God worked for Jacob. ... Laban changed the terms of the agreement **ten times**... trying to cheat Jacob (according to Genesis 31:7-8). ... There is a great lesson in this for us: **God can overrule the most unfair acts of any boss or source of our income.** ... God looks after us even when others abuse and cheat us.

God wants us to trust Him. Because Jacob learned how to lean on God... Jacob could put Laban's success above his own. At the end of 14 years of service to Laban... Jacob was as poor as when he first began. Do you think that Jacob did not have any occasions to better his circumstances by taking advantage of unscrupulous opportunities... (laying up something for himself... a little here and a little there...)...? How easily he would have been justified to do so... to a boss that was so unfair. ... But Jacob acted otherwise. He placed the success of his boss above his own... so that when he came to ask for his freedom... Jacob had nothing from all his hard work... but Uncle Laban was far wealthier.

Then (later) when Jacob offered his one-sided deal to Laban... his faith was so strong that he believed God was going to bless him... in spite of the cards not being stacked (at all) in his favor.

(LISTEN!) Jacob trusted that God would take care of him... and we are too!

Matthew 6:25-33 (ESV)

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put

on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,

²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.