

Luis Urzua checked the time. ... It was about 1:40 p.m. ... The Chilean copper mine shift leader had just felt a rumble in the Earth... and over the clanging and clamoring of mining equipment... Urzua heard a noise.

Despite the unnerving rumble... he continued working at the San José Mine in Chile's Atacama Desert. ... He and a group of men were working to extract gold and copper nearly a half-mile below ground... in the 100-plus-year-old mine.

But five minutes later... Urzua felt the mountain rumble again... and he knew something was wrong.

*"The mountain always gives you a warning. The mountain doesn't collapse on its own. This is something we know as miners -- there is always something,"* said Urzua, who had been a miner for 31 years.

The mine collapsed August 5, 2010... trapping Urzua and 32 other miners... and it quickly became international news. ... More than 2,300 feet below ground... they had to live for 69 days in the dark... with almost no food... cut off from the rest of the world. ... They didn't know if they would ever see daylight again. Many of the miners... face-to-face with imminent death... took stock of their lives and realized they had a lot of regrets. Somebody asked Jose Henriquez (a Christian)... if he would pray for everyone.

As he got down on his knees... some of the other men joined him... and he began to talk to God: *"We aren't the best men, Lord, but have pity on us."* He actually got more specific: *"Victor Segovia knows that he drinks too much. Victor Zamora is too quick to anger. Pedro Cortez thinks about the poor father he's been to his young daughter ..."*

Nobody objected. It was the beginning of something special. In the deep down dark... buried under the earth... with death staring them in the face... the men got real before God and each other. ... They met every day to eat a meager meal... hear a short sermon... and then get on their knees and pray: "*God, forgive me for the violence of my voice before my wife and my son.*" ... Or "*God, forgive me for abusing the temple of my body with drugs.*" ... They confessed to each other too: "*I'm sorry I raised my voice.*" Or "*I'm sorry I didn't help get the water.*"

Meanwhile, above the surface a rescue effort had begun. People from all over the world began trying to help... or give... or pray for the men to be saved.

Unfortunately... the happiest part of the story is also the saddest. A drill finally cut a narrow hole through the rock. ... The miners could now get food and supplies and iPads. They knew that eventually they would be rescued. ... But as they waited... they also learned something else. They found out that they were becoming famous... and they would probably get rich.

That is when the confessing stopped. ... The praying stopped. ... The lure of money and fame had undone the transformative community that had developed in their shared suffering.

They were at their best when life was at its worst. ... "The Deep Down Dark"... is the place where you know you can't make it on your own. "The Deep Down Dark"... is the place where you realize you need God.

Many of us have had our own Deep Down Dark moments in our life... where we came to a similar realization... that we could not make it on our own... we need God. ... And (although I will not ask for a show of hands)... I am willing to bet that in many cases... after our emergence from our Deep Down Dark moments... we have not always remained strong with our commitments that we made... when things looked dismal.

Why is this...? Why do we abandon our godly devotions (so easily)... once things get better for us...? ... Because our emotions... and our volition (our willful deciding)... are not the same. Our emotions wear off... or they change.

D.A Carson... who I had a class with in my doctoral studies... once put it this way:

*People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord.*

*We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.*

I think (to a certain extent) that drift explains much of what we are about to see in our passage in Genesis this morning... (especially AFTER the meeting between Jacob and Esau goes well.) Jacob had his own Deep Down Dark moment... through which God changed him. He saw that he could not make it on his own... that he needed God. ... But we are going to

see Jacob drift... even after the dramatic and impacting lesson... that we covered in last week's passage.

You know... in the Bible narratives... such as what we come to this morning... the Holy Spirit... paints human nature in the colors of truth. ... An uninspired writer would have followed Jacob's wondrous experience at Peniel... by a walk which was always (thereafter) flawless. ... But not so the Holy Spirit. He has recorded just what did happen... and shows us Jacob distrusting God... and yielding to the fear of man... and resorting back to his scheming.

As Genesis chapter 32 closed... we acknowledged that Jacob was a changed man. This was one of the results of his wrestling match with God at Peniel. Recall please from last week... how God changed Jacob's name (which means "deceiver") to Israel (which means "God commands.") As we concluded our study last week... I indicated that (now) Jacob would not trust in himself... that he has (now) learned to lean on God... and follow His commands. But folks... there is no such thing as instant spirituality. (No one becomes a spiritual giant overnight.)

Jacob was... indeed changed. But in many ways he was still unchanged. Just like us... our race is not a sprint. It is a marathon that requires time and endurance. We may fall... and some might get tripped up for a while... But spiritual maturity is a long process.

In Jacob's case... it is significant that we notice... from here on...throughout the rest of the book of Genesis... the inspired author of this book does not always use Jacob's new name. In fact... the old name ("Jacob") will still be used TWICE as often as his new name ("Israel." ) ...

We will see “Jacob” **45** more times and “Israel” will only be used **23** times. ... (Now this might not seem like any big deal... until you stop and consider the name change of Abram to **Abraham**.) ... “Abram” was NEVER used again. Thereafter it was always (100% of the time) “Abraham.” ... But (for some reason) “Jacob” will be used about twice as much as his new name.

God was still working on changing Jacob’s character... and we see evidence of this in our chapter before us today. ... Jacob pitifully grovels before Esau... he will continue to scheme (rather than trust God)... and we will see him out-right lie to his brother.

Jacob was trying to be both Jacob and Israel... at the same time. ... (And Folks!) ultimately this is impossible to do. From this we need to see how slow we are to appropriate and live in the blessedness of the meaning of the new names which God has given us. As believers... here are our new names: "Saint!" ... "Son!" ... "Heir!" ... How little we live our daily lives under the comfort... the inspiration... the strength... the elevation... which such titles ought to bring to us and produce from us.

We want to be a saint... but we also want to feel every sensation experienced by sinners. ... We want to be innocent and pure... but we also want to be experienced and taste all of life. ... We want to serve the poor and have a simple lifestyle... but we also want all the comforts of the rich. ... We want to have the depth afforded by solitude... but we also do not want to miss anything. ... We want to pray... but we also want to watch television... check our Facebook page... talk to friends... and go out.

So... let us mark for our instruction... how Jacob failed... and apply a grace-driven effort in our lives toward holiness... instead the natural drift toward ungodliness.

### **Genesis 33:1**

The sighting of Esau came following Jacob's high spiritual experience of wrestling all night with the angel of God. Trial often comes following triumph. Battle often follows blessing. ... When he saw Esau and his four hundred men, he seemed to lose everything he had gained in his struggle with himself and with the Lord. 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. ... Seeing Esau prompted him to further separate his family into three groups for their protection.

### **Genesis 33:2**

He lined up his family and his possessions in order of their importance to him, with the slave wives and their children out front (to be killed first), Leah's group behind them, and Rachel and Joseph in the back where they would be the safest. One can only imagine what was running through the minds of the family members as they watched Jacob line them up.

By putting Rachel (his favorite wife) and Joseph (his favorite son) behind the other family members, he created a new problem in the home; and it's no wonder **Joseph's brothers** hated him a few years later. You certainly knew where you stood in Jacob's household!

### Genesis 33:3

The best thing that can be said about Jacob in this encounter... is that he himself went on ahead to meet Esau. ... This shows some real change in Jacob. ... Earlier he had sent his possessions ahead (including his wives and children) while he stayed on the far (and safer) side of the Jabbok river. ... But after wrestling with the angel and being subdued... Jacob received new courage... and actually passed in front of his household... when the meeting took place. ... Having been conquered by God... Jacob became strong and went forward in the might of the One Who had conquered him.

When Eastern peoples met in ancient days, they bowed often and exchanged traditional greetings ("Salaam" or "Shalom"); but there was more than tradition involved in the way Jacob and his family greeted Esau.

He would take a few paces and bow... take a few paces more and bow again. ... What a scene it must have been. There was Esau... a wild... hairy man... sitting on his swift Arab horse... gazing down at his brother. There was Esau's escort... a band of unruly ruffians such as Jacob had not seen all his life. ... There was the little cluster of wives and children... still arranged as Jacob had placed them... looking with scared eyes... first at Esau... and then at their father groveling in fear. ... There were Jacob's shepherds... tough customers themselves... but no match for Esau's armed men. ... And there was Jacob... bowing and scraping... bowing and advancing... and bowing again... (bobbing up and down like a cork on the waves.) ... And all about them... stretching far away into the distance to the Jabbok... were Jacob's flocks and herds. Thus Esau found Jacob.

Jacob was now a "prince with God," but he wasn't acting like it.

God said that Jacob was to be Esau's lord... and that Esau was to bow down to Jacob. But before that happened... Jacob bowed low before his brother seven times... exclaiming... "my Lord, Esau..."

**Genesis 25:23 (ESV)**

*And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger."*

Later... when Isaac was deceived into blessing Jacob... rather than Esau... he prophesied with this blessing:

**Genesis 27:29 (ESV)**

*Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!"*

**Genesis 33:4**

Whaaaaaat...? Could this have really happened...? Jacob had stolen Esau's blessing from their father. The last time they had seen each other... Esau was consoling himself by plotting to kill Jacob. What Jacob did was infuriatingly wrong! Esau being happy to see his brother... is totally unexpected... and quite frankly – unrealistic! ... If I were watching this as a Hollywood movie... my family (who is used to it) would hear me loudly complain about how unrealistic this is. "Yeah... riiiiight. I don't think so!" The events of a story have to be reasonable... in order for me to enjoy it. But Esau's change of heart is not really unrealistic. It was an answer to prayer! ... Jacob had prayed earnestly to God and had pleaded His



promise. And now... He... in Whose hands... is the king's heart... and Who "turns it wherever He will" (Proverbs 21:1)... has motivated the fierce and envious heart of Esau... to deal kindly with Jacob. Mark it! ... God answers prayer. That is not unrealistic.

The fact that Esau ran to his brother... embraced him... kissed him... and wept... is evidence that a change had taken place in Esau's heart. ... God's army was hovering near... and Jacob REALLY didn't have to be afraid. ... God so changed the heart of Esau... that he was eager to be reconciled with his brother. ... Do you remember how earlier Esau had cared little about the family and his birthright...? ... That was Esau—he lived for the moment! ... Well... now he cared little for old grudges.

Jacob had devoted much thought to the problem how *he* could best soothe the brother whose anger he feared... and had gone to much expense and trouble to this end. ... But notice how it accomplished nothing! ... It was all labor lost. ... *God* had "appeased" Esau... just as (before) *He* had calmed Laban! ... How much better then... it would have been... if Jacob had just been "still"... and trusted in the Lord to act for him. ... Let us seek grace to learn this important lesson... that not only are all our fleshly plannings and efforts dishonoring to God... they are quite uncalled for and unnecessary. ... In the end... God sets them aside... because they accomplish NOTHING.

### **Genesis 33:5-11**

What can we say about this persistence...? Was Jacob being completely noble...? ... Probably not. ... He was likely trying to seal up Esau's favor. (YOU SEE) accepting a gift from Jacob would be an

acknowledgment that the feud was over. ... By refusing Jacob's gift... Esau would indirectly be saying to Jacob '*You still owe me, the account is not settled.*' The minute Esau accepts, he says, '*The account is settled.* ... The receiving of a present at the hands of another has always been regarded as a pledge of harmony and good-will. ... None will receive a present from the hand of an enemy. ... So Jacob is seeking proof that his brother no longer bore him any ill-will.

We would probably be right to assume that Jacob was not fully confident that God would protect him. ... Jacob was still trusting in his own plans and resourcefulness. ... If there can be any question raised as to Jacob's secret fears when he met his brother... what we are about to read... sure settles the point. ... The old Jacob is (here) very evident. ... And now that his brother had accepted his present... (now that Jacob is no longer in his "Deep Down Dark")... we will also see Jacob engage in some serious backsliding.

### **Genesis 33:12-16**

Esau suggests they resume the journey in each other's company. But this was not what Jacob wanted. ... Why...? ... He had (at least) three reasons. One – Seir was Esau's conquered land. He was the big sultan there. If Esau's raw feelings toward Jacob were to return... Jacob would be trapped in the land controlled by Esau. (Jacob is still leery of his brother.) Second – because by Esau saying "*I will go before you...*" he was stating "*I will be your leader...*" The covenant promise given to Jacob by God... was that Jacob would be the leader... not the follower. ... Third – Seir is not the land flowing with milk and honey. It was barren and desolate wilderness.

So Jacob had good reason NOT to follow Esau to Seir. But he did not have good reason for his falling back into deception. ... His courage... which had been so strong earlier... was now diminished... and he cowardly did not tell the truth. ... Jacob had no intention of going with Esau to Seir... and he should have told Esau the truth... namely... that God sent him to Canaan and not Seir.

He promised to follow Esau to Seir down south... but instead he headed in the **opposite** direction to Succoth... east of the Jordan River and north of the Jabbok.

### **Genesis 33:17**

Back in Genesis 28 (verse 22)... we saw Jacob make a vow to God. He promised that he would return to Bethel when he returned to Canaan. God wanted Jacob to locate in Bethel... and Jacob vowed that he would. ... Esau is gone. His dangerous threats are over. Jacob is out of his "Deep Down Dark"... and he is backsliding.

Building a house in Succoth was an obvious act of disobedience. Succoth was on the east side of the Jordan. It was not even in Canaan. God had called Jacob to return to Canaan on the west side.

One of the most vulnerable times for a Christian to backslide... is right after God has provided blessing. ... Maybe a great financial crisis ends by getting a new job... and the promise made to him is forgotten. ... A period of great trial is past. ... An ordeal has ended... and the feeling about life is now good. ... We praise God... but we forget to follow through on our commitment to him. ... Jacob had just taken a great step in his life. ... He

follows with a backward step. ... He does not continue his journey to Bethel to fulfil his vow. No one would know he is a backslider.

Jacob was close to his God-appointed destiny but was not there yet. So many Christians live this way. They do not follow the Lord completely. They stop short of full commitment.

Eventually Jacob must have felt guilty about not living in Canaan... so he moved across the river. Finally he returns to Canaan. But it is still not Bethel. His obedience is still only partial obedience.

### **Genesis 33:18-19**

The cost of the land where Jacob pitched his tent speaks of some of the cost of disobedience. ... (YOU SEE)... later... Jacob's partial obedience of living in Shechem... will cost him dearly. When we resume our study of Genesis (in the very next chapter) it gets pretty ugly for Jacob and his family. Next week I will spare you of the scene... because it might not make a very nice Christmas message... but when we do return to Genesis 34... we'll see that if Jacob had gone where God told him to go... the cost would have been much less. ... Disobedience is a costly experience in life. (LISTEN!) it costs more to disobey than it does to obey. And make no mistake: to partially obey is to disobey!

### **Genesis 33:20**

This looks good on the surface. ... But it was not a noble act by Jacob. (YOU SEE)... the altar was built in the place of disobedience. ... Worship and piety will have a hollow ring to them... if the worshiper is outside the

will of God. ... We cannot truly worship and be disobedient at the same time!

But sometimes when we are walking disobediently... we try to calm our conscience by religious activity. ... However... worldliness in the week days... is not excused by taking communion on Sunday.

All the religious zeal in the world... will not compensate for disobedience to God's will. ... King Saul was reminded of this truth when he sought to cover up his disobedience... by an abundance of sacrifices. ... Samuel told him:

**1 Samuel 15:22 (ESV)**

*And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.*

So it was with Jacob's altar in Shechem—it had a noble name meaning, "God, the God of Israel"—but religious names and altars are all a sham when done in the place of disobedience and to cover up disobedience.

What was Jacob doing settling down at Shechem... and raising an altar... when he should have been continuing on to Bethel... to raise the altar there...? Did Jacob think that Shechem was a better site for trade and for his flocks? ... Perhaps he thought it didn't matter. ... After all... Bethel was now a mere twenty miles or so away. He could go there whenever it suited him... once he got settled. ... Why be so precise in these things? Shechem or Bethel—it's really all the same... isn't it? ... Indeed, it is not.

It is always a delusion to imagine that we have obeyed when we have partially obeyed. ... And this is eternally true when dealing with God. If God has called you to leave a relationship... or a plan... or a pursuit... or a

habit... do not imagine that you have obeyed... by partial disengagement. Likewise... understand that if God has called you to a specific obedience... anything less than what he has directed is disobedience. ... Partial obedience is always disobedience... no matter what our rationalizations are. ... God will not be fooled or mocked. ... And His sweet grace can be brutal. (When we get to Genesis 34... we will see the truth of this.) ... ..  
... ..[PAUSE]

NBC's Dateline did a story that happened on February 24, 2001. ... A one-year old Canadian girl named Erika somehow wandered out of her mother's bed and house and spent the entire night in the Edmonton winter. ... When her mother, Leyla Nordby, found her, Erika appeared to be totally frozen. Her legs were stiff, her body frozen, and all signs of life appeared to be gone.

Erika was treated at Edmonton's Stollery Children's Health Center, and God used doctors and rescue workers to bring her back to life. To the amazement of all, there appeared to be no sign of brain damage, and doctors gave Erika a clear prognosis—she would soon be able to hop and skip and play like other girls her age.

Some of us have wandered away from our Father's house, and it has brought us near the point of death. Our hearts have hardened, and our spiritual bodies look as lifeless as the little girl in the snow.

But our Father noticed we were missing and is searching for us. He can take our lifeless spirits and restore us to health. Let the Father pick you up and take you back to his house. ... Love Him! And obey Him fully!