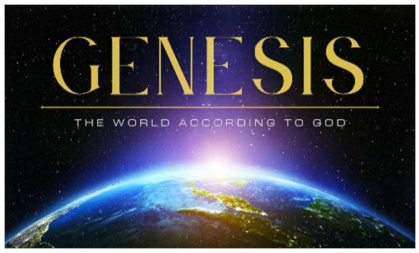

Genesis 29:31-30:24

DYSFUNCTION ACCORDING TO GOD

The sorry tale of Jacob's wilderness years and domestic infighting point us back to what is central in the life of Jacob. If Abraham was the man who exemplified faith, Jacob exemplifies grace. In Jacob, God's love was extended to the unlovely sinner, promising great things to him at Bethel—not because of the kind of person he was but in spite of it. This same love was then gradually working in his heart through many painful experiences to make him more than he once was. Jacob is no hero, and his family dynamics do not provide models to be copied. Yet he provides a classic study of the way in which our God specializes in rescuing losers and in redeeming hopeless cases. The ultimate solution for all of us is not found among any of Leah's or Rachel's sons. It is to be found in another name, the ultimate offspring of Jacob, the true Israelite, Jesus… He is the One who brings hope to the hopeless, rest to the weary, and new life to the lost. —Iain M. Duguid, *Living in the Grip of Relentless Grace*

A Rebekah struggles in childbirth—Jacob named (25:19-34)
- **B** *Interlude: Danger in a foreign place (26:1-35)*
  - **C** Jacob's conflict with Esau intensified (27:1-28:9)
    - **D** Jacob encounters Yahweh and His angels (28:10-22)
      - **E** Jacob's arrival in Haran—Laban's deception (29:1-30)
        - **F** Jacob's children are multiplied (29:31-30:24)
          - **G** God remembers Rachel—Joseph's birth (30:25-26)
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    - **D** Jacob encounters Yahweh and His angels (32:1-32)
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A Rachel struggles in childbirth—Jacob renamed (35:1-29)

SEVEN CHARACTERS IN THE NARRATIVE OF LIFE

1. The _____ man.

Jacob fades into the background of this story. He has sex and fathers children but he appears to have no further involvement in the family. He is a defeated, discouraged man who has "checked out" from life.

2. The _____ man.

Jacob's only words in this story are aroused out of a seething anger and frustration—*Do you think I'm God?! Don't blame me! Blame Him!*

Am I strong?

A dysfunctional family is any family with more than one person in it.
—Mary Karr

I think every family is dysfunctional and some manage to control it better than others.
—Viggo Mortensen

The sisters rival one another for the affections of their husband. Every stratagem is undertaken to gain the upper hand, including prayer, substitute wives, badgering, bartering, and superstition… The household by virtue of the children's names will always bear witness to the struggle that Jacob could not escape.
—Kenneth A. Mathews

Tragically, in this important phase of his life, Jacob continues prayerless. The narrator reflects Jacob's impoverished state in the minimal dialogue assigned to him. He is addressed once by Rachel, "Give me children!" and once by Leah, "I have hired you." Both statements reveal a dysfunctional home without a spiritual leader.
—Bruce K. Waltke

3. The _____ woman.

Leah is a tragic figure, deeply in love with a man who is detached and distant from her (cf. Prov. 30:21-23). The stages of her emotional struggle are depicted in the names of her children.

- She longs to be _____.
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- She grows increasingly _____ toward her sister.

4. The _____ woman.

Rachel seemingly has everything a woman would want—incredible beauty and an adoring husband—but her eyes are fixated on her barrenness and her fear of losing face before Jacob, Leah, and others.

- She _____ to Jacob.
- She _____ with Leah and with God.
- She _____ the situation.

Am I beautiful?

5. The _____ person.

Though the story does not focus on Bilhah and Zilpah, they are the collateral damage in this dysfunctional mess. They are used as tools for the desires of others and robbed of their dignity, value, and love.

6. The _____ child.

There are twelve children in this family but none seem to be cared for by their father or truly loved by their mothers. They apparently grow up on their own, fighting for affection and to be noticed.

7. The _____ Father!

God is present within this crazy, dysfunctional mess—hearing half-hearted prayers, loving the unloved, humbling the proud, healing the brokenhearted, and blessing those who deserve it less and less. Out of sheer grace, God shines His beauty in the ugliest of situations.

Leah's (and Zilpah's) Children

- Reuben. "Look! A son!"
- Simeon. "Hearing"
- Levi. "Attached"
- Judah. "Praise"
- Gad. "Good luck"
- Asher. "Happy"
- Issachar. "Wages, reward"
- Zebulun. "Honor, exalt"
- Dinah. "Vindicated"

Rachel's (and Bilhah's) Children

- Dan. "Vindicated"
- Naphtali. "Wrestling"
- Joseph. "May He add"

Finally Leah had taken her heart's deepest hopes off her husband and her children, and had put them on the Lord. Jacob and Laban had stolen Leah's life, but when she gave her heart finally to the Lord, she got her life back.
—Timothy Keller

Men tend to define success by the level of their income and achievements whereas women generally place more emphasis on the quality of their family and relationships.
—Vanderbilt Univ. Research News

Most of our addictions as women flare up when we feel that we are not loved or sought after. At some core place, maybe deep within, perhaps hidden or buried in her heart, every woman wants to be seen, wanted, and pursued.
—Staci Eldredge

The apex of shame is when there is a fusion of harm and pleasure.
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On the human plane this story demonstrates the craving of human beings for love and recognition… On the divine level it shows once again the grace of God choosing difficult and unpromising material.
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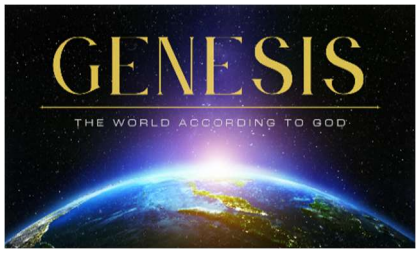

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