

Learning Through Hard Knocks

Genesis 29:1-30

“One of the great classics of English devotional literature is Andrew Murray’s “With Christ in the School of Prayer.” The title is a good one, for it accurately reflects the message of the book: Prayer is the school in which a believer is taught by Jesus Christ and grows to spiritual maturity in and through him. Unfortunately, Jacob was not very much a man of prayer. So he had to learn from God in another school, one many of us are also quite familiar with: the school of hard knocks. It is a difficult academy.

It took Jacob twenty years to graduate from the school of hard knocks, all the time he was away from home. But it was not all bad. When God met with him at Bethel, God promised to bless him and watch over him wherever he would go. This, God did. God enabled him to find his mother’s family without difficulty. He gave him his wife—in fact two wives. He blessed him with twelve sons and prospered him materially. Then, when it was time for Jacob to go home, God gave him a peaceful parting from Laban and a charitable reconciliation with Esau. One commentator says that the years in Haran ‘were for the most part very happy and prosperous years, with no more troubles and problems than are normally encountered by a believer seeking to follow the Lord.’

Still, Jacob was a rather worldly believer, and it was probably the case that his ‘hard knocks’ were a bit above normal. He was tricked regarding his marriage, cheated in his wages, and forced at last to slip off for home in the night, like a fugitive, in that respect leaving just as he had arrived two decades earlier. If this is a ‘normal pattern, it is a sad commentary on many Christians’ lives.” Boice

- I. God never hands His children over to be ruled by their own wants and desires without Him intervening at some point to bring them back onto His path of righteousness (Prov. 3:5-6). He never abandons them, the Holy Spirit never leaves them, and Jesus is always interceding for them to keep their souls secure in Him. That does not mean however, that he will spare wayward believers from reaping the consequences of living life apart from dependence upon Him through prayer and obedience to His Word. Jacob is a perfect example of a man who was a slow learner when it came to trusting God to direct the course of his life. What we learn from his waywardness, should warn us that living independently and apart from a heartfelt relationship with Christ is just not worth the loss of the wisdom God desires to give to help us navigate through life and its many challenges.

Gen. 29:1-13

Col. 1:15-17

Gen. 28:15

Num. 6:24-26

Hos. 10:12

Matt. 8:11

“Providence means that the hand of God is in the glove of human events.” J. Vernon McGee

- II. Some might say, it doesn't matter what we do, God will fulfill his will on earth as it is in heaven anyway so why bother with the details. At first glance, it might have seemed that way with Jacob. God's covenant promises to Abraham were still fulfilled through him despite his lack of dependence on the Lord to direct his every step. Unfortunately, what Jacob initially missed out on, was the joy of being God's friend. God still worked through him and his circumstances, but in many ways, he was on his own and at the mercy of his own wisdom, wants and desires. I wonder how different his life could have been if he had just humbled himself before the Lord and prayed, *thy will be done Lord, I'm willing to live life your way because your ways are the best* ((Prov. 3:5-6).

Gen. 29:14-20

Gen. 24:12-14,26

Rom. 8:28

Matt. 6:9-10

Gal. 6:7-8

When we pray, “Thy will be done,” we acknowledge God’s right to rule. We do not pray, “My will be done”; we pray, “Thy will be done.” Asking that God’s will be done is a demonstration of our trust that He knows what is best. It is a statement of submission to God’s ways and His plans. We ask for our will to be conformed to His. gotquestions.org

Phil. 2:12-13 *12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

- III. Whether Jacob realized it or not, God was using his circumstances to change him into the man of God he needed to be. He was in the schoolhouse of faith, and the Lord was bringing into his life exactly what was needed for him to understand the responsibilities that come from being His bondservant. He had to learn to serve others with a servant's heart, he had to learn to respect others above his own wants and desires, and he had to understand how his sin affected others. God used Laban as His instrument to discipline Jacob for his good so that could produce a harvest of righteousness for the sake of the nation of Israel and for the sake of the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Gen. 29:21-30

Heb. 12:4-11

Matt. 20:26-28

Phil. 2:3-8

Lev. 19:11