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Let's resume our study now in Genesis chapter 35. We've seen Jacob in something of a transition. We know that he has made progress in coming to understand things that God needed to teach him, things that he needed to learn with regard to personal integrity and walking in faith.

At the same time, we've seen that his progress is not unmixed. He does have areas of failure. And he, here toward the end of chapter 34, has fallen back into the same sort of fear that plagued him when he was returning to meet his brother Esau.

And God preserved him through that, and he doesn't seem to really be able to grasp and lay hold of the evidence of God's faithfulness that was manifested when he met Esau. And his brother Esau didn't wipe him out and didn't slay the mother with the child and all of the things that Jacob feared. Here Jacob is in a very similar situation where now he realizes that he is very unpopular, to put it mildly, in Canaan.

And he's back in that same sort of abject fear. They're going to amass themselves against me and slay me. We know that this is going to be the experience of Jacob's descendants and his namesake nation a few hundred years in the future.

When they depart the land of Egypt and get out in the wilderness, God demonstrates his faithfulness again and again. And yet when the next trial comes along, it seems as though their short-term memory has been erased. And even if it's just been days before where God has miraculously provided water or provided food, the next crisis, they seem unable to pull the experience of God's faithfulness forward and use it as the basis for new faith and a new circumstance.

This is something, obviously, we want to try to cultivate in our lives. As we face the challenges of life, and not all of the challenges are negative, sometimes we have a positive challenge. We have a period of prosperity.

We come into a great circumstance. And this is also a test of our faith and our faithfulness because how quickly do we forget who we are and why we're here? Do we get our eyes on the gift instead of the giver? This can happen in the area of family. God blesses us with the stewardship or custodianship of children, and we get focused on them and their benefit and so forth.

It can be material prosperity. We can get a raise or get a job or wind up having material things. We can have a change of geographic location or a change of job, and there's all kinds of new opportunities and new experiences.

We can move into a different phase of life where maybe we've been a student and now we're out in the professional world, or maybe we were single and now we're married, or

moving from work days to retirement days, or whatever it may be. Do we remember the faithfulness of God, and do we continue to seek God, the mercy of God, the grace of God, the provision of God, the protection of God, and do we make it our goal each day to please God, not only in the large things but also in the small things, and the small things are the ones that trip us up, and sooner or later those small things will become big things because it will establish a pattern. There will be a weakness there, and it's just like the first spot of decay in a tooth.

I know Dan will appreciate this, but once you get a small spot of decay, it doesn't just sort of heal itself. It doesn't reverse itself. The old adage about keeping bad company, they say if you put a good apple in a barrel of bad apples, the good one doesn't turn all the bad ones good, does it? It's the other way around.

And if we allow an area in our lives to go untransformed, unaddressed, we don't identify it as a weak area, we don't bring it before the Lord, we don't seek to apply the promises and the principles and the doctrines of the Word of God in that area because we're just ignoring it. We're not even identifying it as a problem. It is going to fester, it's going to grow, and bad things will follow.

God is so gracious and so patient with us, and His faithfulness is a model for us to look at and follow because He doesn't rebuke. Remember we saw Friday night over in James chapter 1 where it says if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach, without rebuke. When we come to God, He knows that we've failed, He knows the areas where we have fallen short and where we've made mistakes and have been in some cases just outright foolish, in other cases we've been ignorant or we've overlooked or we've been apathetic.

There's 16 different ways we can fail. But when we return to God, that's what He's looking for, is the change of mind. When we recognize that there's an area, we recognize that there's a problem.

This is the whole wonderful thing about confession. It doesn't say anything about the magnitude or the nature of the sins that we confess in 1 John 1.9. It's the fact that we come to God. When we come to God and ask for His forgiveness, ask for His cleansing, ask for His restoring grace and His strength to return us to that place of light and fellowship that we have willingly departed, it's an admission of our lack of wisdom.

If we had wisdom, if we were hitting on all eight cylinders of the faithful Christian life, we wouldn't be in that situation. So anytime we're returning to God, it's obvious that we have left in some fashion. And we lack what we need.

Wisdom is the application of the truth that we know. And if we lack wisdom, we may know the truth, but we're having trouble putting it into practice. Jacob knows the promise of God, but he's having trouble applying it in his daily circumstances.

If any of you lack wisdom, James says in 1.5, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach. That's a wonderful phrase. God doesn't rebuke.

He doesn't say, let me just rub in a little bit this failure that you're recovering from here. Let me remind you just how egregious and how bad. God never does that.

He gives to us generously without reproach. It will be given to us when we come and ask. But, in verse 6, James goes on to say, let him ask in faith with no doubting.

For he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. And we have to recognize that the surety of God's mercy, the surety of God's forgiveness, the surety of cleansing and the giving of wisdom depends on God and not on us. Why would we be doubting? Why would we be like a wave tossed craft on the sea? We generally aren't doubting God so much as ourselves.

We think, oh, I just don't know if God can do anything with me. It's almost a blasphemy to say, I don't know if God can really fix this problem. And we unconsciously begin to imply that our ability to mess things up is greater than God's ability to fix.

That's why we have to come to God in faith, doubting nothing, because it is God that is at work in us to will and to do His good pleasure. The promises of God are absolute. The faithfulness of God is without equal.

His mercies are renewed every morning. His faithfulness is great. And to doubt and to get into fear and to get into a troubled state of mind is to have our eyes on ourselves rather than God.

The wonderful song, Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. The things of earth will go strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

And to the extent that we find ourselves doubting and troubled, when we return to God and we recognize, it's embarrassing. Especially when we do something and we know better. And we've just been tripped up for the umpteenth time in some area of failure.

Coming back to God and saying, Well, God, it's me again. It's that same thing I mentioned yesterday and the day before and the day before. I did it again.

And we sort of shuffle into God's presence feeling a sense of shame. And there's nothing intrinsically wrong with that, but that is not a place to dwell. And that's not a place to remain.

Because the thing to focus on is the positive side. God is faithful. God is gracious.

God gives liberally. And God can enable us. And God can strengthen us.

And we have to put our eyes on the Lord. That's where objectivity is. And the whole

reason we are here, God's strength is made manifest in our weakness.

We don't want to tolerate or grow complacent with our weaknesses. But neither do we want to wallow in them and not give place for the grace of God to do its work. And we're going to see here as we move into chapter 35 that Jacob is in a struggle.

We saw him wrestling with the man a chapter or so ago. Now he's wrestling with his own character, his own failures. After this episode, God says to Jacob in 35.1 of Genesis, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there, and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother.

So this harks us back to his initial exit from the land. He was fleeing with basically just the robe on his back. He was by himself.

He stacked the rocks up around his head there and went to sleep and had the vision of the ladder, the angels ascending and descending, and God spoke to him and spoke promises to him. I will be with you. I will be your God.

I will be with you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land and to this place. God reminds him of that promise and of that occasion.

Why does God have to speak here? Jacob was on his way to Bethel when he left Paddan Aram and when he came down and was crossing the Jabbok and when he encountered his brother Esau. But what happened? He kind of stalled out when he got to Shechem. And he was kind of mired down with his status there.

He's got good relations with the people in Shechem and it takes this bad episode and it takes the sinful revenge episode of Simeon and Levi and the rest of the brothers. You notice that not only do they go in and kill all those people, but then the brothers swoop in and plunder and take all of their goods. What kind of goods are these going to be? What are the valuables going to be of the Canaanites? Well, some of their biggest valuables are their idols, their teraphim, and the accouterments of their pagan worship.

These are the things of gold and silver and precious stones that they have in their homes. And so when the brothers swoop in there and plunder these fallen Shechemites, a lot of what they take belongs to that pagan lifestyle. It's going to be these little... Today we would think, well, they're little Buddhas and little images of whatever it is pagans look at these days.

That's what they've got in their household. Because you'll notice when God says to Jacob, Arise, go to Bethel and dwell there, this is a prod from God. Jacob already was supposed to return to Bethel.

That's where he was supposed to go. And he stalled out here for a period of months, apparently. So God gives him kind of a shake and says, Hey, you remember, you're

supposed to be going to Bethel.

Make an altar there to God who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother. This, by the way, is the first time that God has explicitly commanded someone to make an altar if you're keeping track of Bible trivia. This is the first case.

You have many cases where the patriarchs built altars to the Lord, but this is the first time God tells someone, build an altar there. So look at what Jacob says in verse 2. Jacob said to his household and to all who are with him, Put away the foreign gods that are among you. Purify yourselves and change your garments.

So this kind of reminds Jacob of who he is and why he's here. Oh yeah, the God of my fathers. Bethel, the ladder, the promises of God.

Not only has Jacob been imbalanced in the treatment of his wives and his offspring, but what has he allowed? All of this plunder that came back in. Whatever happened to the terraphine that Rachel stole from her father Laban? She's still got them. She's got these household idols.

Remember, she sat on the camel saddle and had those underneath and when her father Laban came in looking for the idols, she said, Well, the way of women is upon me. I'm sorry I can't rise in your presence. He says, Well, that's okay.

He doesn't find the terraphine. Well, they've still got them. She may be still holding out some hope that these are going to be the royal signet ring, as it were, in the family so that her son Joseph can kind of start his own line and be sort of a firstborn as far as she's concerned.

This possession of these terraphine marked inheritance. That's why the sons of Laban are so incensed that the terraphine go missing. And they accompany Laban down to try to get this stuff back because when you possess the terraphine, that's the leadership of the household.

Go to those for guidance. It's kind of your urim and thummim if you're a pagan. And so when Rachel takes these, what is she thinking? Well, she's got this one son Joseph and he's the eleventh son.

Wouldn't it be great if he had some terraphine? He can kind of set up shop, start his own line. Doesn't have to be beholden to the ten brothers that are ahead of him. And so there's method in her madness of taking and hiding these terraphine.

Well, Jacob says, you bring all this stuff out, we're going to get rid of this. We're going to purge out this stuff. Because the brothers now have also brought back all these gold and silver idols and other accoutrements of worship from Shechem when they plundered up there in verse 28 and 29.

So Jacob says, put away the foreign gods. Now you can imagine this probably wasn't too popular. It's not easy carrying all these heavy gold and silver things around.

And it's valuable. There's wealth involved. Solid gold things.

They think, well, can't we hammer them down into something else? Can't we melt them in the furnace and make a wonderful icon to God or something? And Jacob says, no. We're going to purge them out. We're going to get rid of them entirely.

Three things. Put away the foreign gods. Purify yourselves.

And change your garments. The idea of purification. Even the idea of going up to Bethel.

When he says, go up, this is the Hebrew word, Allah. A-L-A-H. This is the same verb that's used of the smoke of the sacrifice that ascends to heaven.

To go up. It has ritual and religious overtones. And it's the verb that's used later on when Jerusalem is the capital city.

And they say, let us go up to Jerusalem and celebrate the feast. This is not the same one that was used before when, for example, Rebecca told Jacob, get up and go to your uncle Laban to escape the wrath of your brother. It's a different verb.

God uses a word here that implies a pilgrimage. This has a religious significance for him to go to Bethel. So he says, put away the foreign gods.

Purify yourselves. And change your garments. He, Bethel, this is house of God.

This is the place where he encountered God. And he knows that they've got to be ready. And in Israel, people typically did these things before a big feast, before a sacrifice, before some momentous change.

You can think of Leviticus chapter 14 with the cleansing of the leper. When a leper was healed, he went through this ritual. And you have all of these things involved where he does the washing, the ritual washing, and the changing of his garments to be renewed.

The purification of the body speaks of inner renewal. The changing of the garments speaks of outer renewal. And they both go hand in hand.

We sometimes try to think, well, if we can get people to change their garments, change their behavior, it will work its way in. We know this even in our own experience. If you're going to put on a fresh change of clothes, you usually take a shower.

You don't go out and bale hay all day and then in the evening say, well, I'm going to put on a fresh shirt and a fresh pair of jeans and not wash your body first. But oddly enough, in the church and in religious circles, we often do this. We have people that have obvious

signs of not having a relationship with God.

And of course, it's always somebody over there. We want to get the moat out of their eye. So we say, well, why don't you come down to church with me? Let's come participate.

There are even people who will put them on committees and assign them leadership roles in ministries in the church because they think, you know, if we can just get them involved in the life of the church, well, it will strengthen their relationship with God. Let's bring them along on our door-to-door evangelism and so forth. And it will work its way from the outside in.

But that's never the biblical pattern. We have to purify ourselves first. Then we put on the outer garments.

Jesus said, you know, you wash the outside of the cup and inside it's defiled. You whitewash the outside of the tomb and inside are dead men's bones. We've got to be renewed on the inside.

And we can't renew ourselves. We have to go to God and ask for His renewal. But that's symbolized here in the purification of self.

Of course, purification is done with water. We have scriptures in the New Testament that we'll see a little bit later. Purified by the washing of water, by the Word is what happens in our souls.

Then Jacob says in verse 3, let us arise and go up to Bethel. And I will make an altar there to God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone. So Jacob does finally belatedly remember, oh yes, God, the things of God, the promise of God.

I've got to go to Bethel. And to his credit, he picks up and goes immediately. He is just as responsive as Abraham when God said, get thee up and go to the land that I will show you.

So Jacob needed this reminder. And in the wake of what is a pretty great failure on his part, when God speaks, he responds. So they gave Jacob, in verse 4, all the foreign gods which were in their hands and the earrings which were in their ears.

And Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem. So they're going to bury those in Shechem. I always think about archaeology.

Wouldn't it be great if you could get out there with a metal detector or something and figure out where that terebinth tree was. There should be a big pile of metal buried beneath the ground there. Gold and silver idols and all these earrings.

It's interesting about the earrings and the idea of putting away idols. You can turn, for example, over to Joshua 24, verse 14. We would expect to find many references to this in God's instructions to Israel.

But in Joshua 24, after they've been engaged in the early days of the conquest of the land, you might notice in chapter 24 the location of this event. This is 24-1 of Joshua. Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel.

Where? To Shechem. They called for the elders of Israel, for their heads, their judges, and their officers. They presented themselves before God.

He's going to charge them. He's going to remind them of their history. Just as the Lord God of Israel, your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the river in olden times, and they served other gods.

Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the river, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, multiplied his descendants, and gave him Isaac. To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. To Esau I gave the mountains of Seir to possess.

But Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. I sent Moses and Aaron. I plagued Egypt according to what I did among them.

Afterward I brought you out. Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea. The Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea.

So they cried out to the Lord, and He put darkness between you and the Egyptians. He rehearses all of this history all the way down to verse 13. He says in verse 13, Joshua 24, I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them.

You eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant. Now, therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the river and in Egypt. Serve the Lord.

If it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. These are the very gods that are buried not far from where these words are being spoken. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

This is before the act of worship. This is before building the altar. Three steps.

Put away the distractions. Put away the idols. Put away the things that are considered valuable for whatever reason.

Do they think that these are a method of divining the substance of how to make a

decision? Are they going to go to these like a good luck charm and figure out how to make decisions? Why would somebody keep these teraphim? Is it a good luck charm or a means of determining? They used to use these to make decisions. Should I buy so much barley and so much wheat and plant them, or should I wait? Should I stay or should I go? Kind of like Urim and Thummim. They had intrinsic value because of what they were made of.

And they also had value because you could impress your friends. When they came into your tent, the bigger and more expensive the idols were. It's kind of like having cars in this day and age.

Or how expensive is your suit? I didn't really realize this. I was somewhat ignorant because I had mostly been wearing uniforms. But when I went out into the civilian world and I would be working in an office, there were these partitions and things.

And you could hear people on the other side of the partition. I would hear these ladies talking about some salesman that had come to call or some businessman. And they would say, Oh, did you see his suit? That's got to be a \$600 or \$700 suit.

And those shoes, I bet those were Gucci shoes. And I thought, boy, they really pay attention to what people wear. Hi.

I thought, well, I'm sure when I'm gone, they'll be talking about my Sears special sport coat, my \$19, you know, shoes are us, shoes. But people pay attention to these things. There's a lot of status symbols involved.

And people will judge by the car you pull up in and so forth. And terraphine, that was sort of the status symbol. You kind of set them up on the mantelpiece there.

So we have analogies. This is the point. There are things that are analogous in our lives.

Do we get concerned about what people are going to think? Do we hang on to symbols of status? Are we worried about what the perception is going to be, what the opinion is going to be? Do we hang on to things because they give us a sense of security, because they have intrinsic value and we don't want to lose them? Without this, we have fears of the future. Are these the trophies of a conquest? I went down and won a darts competition down in a bar when I was at the artillery school at Port Sill. And we went down and they had a darts tournament and my partner and I won.

I think I still got that darts trophy. Why do we hang on to these things? What possible use do I have for a thing that was... But it's the pride of conquest. It was a tough competition.

I've got volleyball trophies. Port Sill had an intramural sort of a volleyball thing and they had like 75 teams. It was a big deal.

There were hundreds of people involved and our team did well. You hang on to these things and think, well, when they defeated the Shechemites, these are the trophies of conquest. Oh, we went in there and laid them waste.

Those pagans defiled our sister. We showed them. Jacob is saying, you've got to scoop all that up and bury it.

We're leaving it behind. We're going to bury it in Shechem and we're leaving. This is going to create some turmoil, but this is an exercise of leadership on Jacob's part and it's a good thing.

And that has to take place first. We have to identify those things and put them away before we can purify ourselves. You can't purify yourself in a room where the terrafemers are still sitting on the mantelpiece.

There's a sequence. We have to identify these things that hold us back, lay aside the weight and the sin that besets us before we can purify ourselves on the inside and that's going to result in the ability to put on the garments that are visible on the outside. So there's a sequence.

You can see this in the conquest of the land. God sent the Israelites in to drive the enemies out of the land. David says, Lord, I want to build a temple for you.

Here I am in a temple and you're still dwelling in a tent. Let me build you a temple. And God says, No.

Your job is to go finish driving the plague, driving the pagan Canaanites out of the land. You go be the man of war that I commissioned you to be. You drive out the enemies.

Your son will build the temple when there is peace on every side. And so once Israel had driven the pagans and driven the idolatry and the enemies out of the land, then God says, Now you can build a temple for my name. And that was the cleansing that needed to take place in Israel.

And then they purified themselves and then the glory of the Lord descended and the presence of God was manifested in Israel. Same thing here. Jacob understands this.

Get rid of the idols. Get rid of the terrafemers. And the earrings.

You'll notice the one thing that's mentioned by way of jewelry. They gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands and the earrings which were in their ears. Now wearing of earrings, we know that the servant of Abraham took some jewelry up there to give to Rebecca.

And it isn't just that there's jewelry that they shouldn't have, but this is jewelry that came from the Shechemites. They plundered their material goods and they plundered

their idols and all of that stuff. It was just an earring.

What's the harm? Where did it come from? It's a remnant. It's a vestige. You're still going to look at that earring and say, Oh yeah, that's when we beat up the Shechemites.

That's when we went in there and revenged ourselves. Jacob says, You take all that stuff. We're going to bury it under the tree.

Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem. Why under a tree? Did he want to know where it was in case they came back and needed it? I don't know. I don't know why it's under the terebinth tree.

These trees seem to be landmarks and markers in many different places. The Oaks of Mamre and all of these others that we've seen. Well this tree is a marker.

It's the tombstone of this stuff that they purge out. And of course you have many other references to purifying. In Leviticus 14.8-9 you have the purification ritual of a cleansed leper.

In Numbers 8.7 you have the purification of Israel. Same thing in Exodus 19.10-15. Remember when they were approaching Mount Sinai and God says, Take these three days. Purify yourselves before you approach the mountain.

This precedes the presence of God. In the New Testament we have a perfect analogy to this in 1 John 1.7. If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we keep on having fellowship with him and he with us. And the blood of Jesus Christ keeps on cleansing us from sin.

But we have to be in the light. How do we get into the light? We have to leave the darkness. We acknowledge our sins and we abandon the patterns of life and the sins that beset us and move into the light.

Then when we are in the light we have fellowship. So we have to do the same thing. We don't have literal idols.

I doubt that anybody has a tiki doll or something up on their mantle that they treat with religious significance. But we have things in which we place our faith. Sometimes it's our bank accounts.

Sometimes it's our investments. Sometimes it's people that we know we can turn to in a time of crisis. Maybe it's a talent or an ability that we have that we know we can fall back on for income or for establishing ourselves.

Or we think about something that people hold us in esteem for, whatever it may be. And when we think, well, I may be slipping in the esteem of people, but surely they'll remember this about me or that about me. These are the small things.

These are the cracks in our armor that are going to lead to worse things if we don't identify them and purge them out. Our self-worth. There's a lot of talk about self-esteem and a lot of bad things have happened in schools because people are worried about damaging the self-esteem of a child.

Self-esteem is not our problem. Arrogance is our problem. We have a super abundance of self-esteem.

And to be knocking ourselves out and saying, oh, well, I want to build up their self-esteem. No, people don't have a problem with self-esteem. It's trimming that down and putting it down into its place and making the basis of our self-esteem what God has done for us in Christ.

That's the issue. It makes me, I don't know whether to laugh or cry when I hear all this about, oh, you're going to wound their self-image if you spank or discipline or point out something that's wrong. Don't point out what they're doing wrong.

Just keep encouraging them. Try to put something else in front of them. When they're starting to do a wrong thing, run over there and put something better in front of them and divert them away from the... It is a complete lack of understanding of the fact that our self-esteem is our whole problem.

We need to rebuild the image of ourselves in God's image. Recognize that what we are and what we can become is through God's power and God's strength. Well, Jacob is trying to do this in sort of a symbolic fashion by purging out these idols.

He's reminded now, but he let this stuff go on. He let them bring this stuff back and let them set it up in their tents. And it isn't until God speaks that Jacob sort of wakes up and says, oh yes, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac.

That's what's supposed to characterize us. So they purge these things out. But this covenant at Shechem in Joshua 24, choose you this day whom you will serve.

And sometimes we inadvertently, we think, well, it's just an earring. It's not an idol. But it's a vestige.

It's a remnant. It's a leftover from these things that belong to the world and don't belong to God. And we need to go into our jewelry box and sort out.

What are we keeping and what are we throwing away? Are we hanging on to things that are part of a human viewpoint of life? It's important that we stop and think. This is why in a lot of our traditions, especially some that us here are familiar with, there's a strong emphasis on the teaching of the Word of God and taking in the Word of God and learning Bible doctrine and so forth. And taking nothing away from that, but adding balance to it, it is our meditation on the Word of God and spending time in seeing the application of it

to our daily life.

That takes time. We have to sit down in quiet and think about what we're doing. Think about those things that have become routine and have become a daily pattern.

And shine the light of the Word of God on those. Because it's one thing to have the light. My word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

But if you don't shine the light on the path and look at the path and see the rocks and see the holes and see the sheer drop on one side of the path, if you don't use the light to illuminate your path, you've just got a light that's not accomplishing its purpose. We're supposed to look at the path in the light of the Word of God. And that's what we need.

We need to take time. What is the balance of time between intake and meditation? It's going to be different for different ones of us. But I can say with certainty that to spend all of our time in intake and to think that that is our spiritual life isn't going to work.

It would be better to take in less and apply more than vice versa. Because we run the risk of puffing up with knowledge and not having the Word of God work itself out in love. So, Jacob, to his credit, identifies what's wrong here in 35.4. They give him all these things and he buries them.

Verse 5, And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. What a wonderful example of the faithfulness of God. Jacob has made some big mistakes here.

God spoke to Jacob. Did he rebuke him? Did he say, Jacob, you know, the way you're treating Leah, the way you treated Dinah, your complete lack of action there, your fear over the people, God doesn't rebuke him, does he? When God speaks, he reminds him of what he's already said. He repeats a promise that Jacob already knows.

Jacob responds to that, and God fulfills his promise. God puts the fear into the people, and none of them attack him. All of Jacob's fears are groundless, because God is at work.

And this is the terror of God. This is a fear of Elohim, which is also a great fear. You sometimes say, You remember when Saddam Hussein said, well, this is going to be the mother of all battles? Well, another term to use for magnitude is, of God.

The fear of God means a very, it's as big as God. It's an enormous fear. And so this is sort of a double entendre here.

The terror of God was upon the cities that were all around him. They did not pursue the sons of Jacob. Nobody messed with them.

God is faithful even when we are faithless. He cannot deny himself. And Jacob qualifies for this, because he's obedient, despite his failures.

It's not our failures that count. It's those occasions of faith. It's the occasions of obedience.

That's what God is looking for, and that's what God is encouraging. So Jacob, in verse 6, comes to Luz, that is Bethel, which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. And we already had the story of the renaming of this city, several chapters ago.

Why does it repeat the old name and the new name? Because it's a transition. It was a Canaanite place, now it's an Israelite place. Jacob has been Jacob, but he's going to become Israel.

He's in the process of being transformed. And this place is in the process of being transformed from a Canaanite location to the house of God. And that's our status.

We are in the process of being transformed. And even when we fail, even when we fall short, it's the positive side that we need to focus on, because ultimately, our transformation depends on God. All we have to do is continue to seek it, and continue to choose it, and not let our own failures magnify themselves by stopping our progress.

It's bad enough to fail, but to let our failure impede us, and impede the work of God in transforming us, gives it double power. Don't let it trip us twice. If it's a failure, fine.

The grace of God is greater than all our failures. We've got to pick up and move on from there, and not let it slow us down, not let it bog us down in a quagmire. We look at the faithfulness of God.

And Jacob does this, and he's still got a ways to go. We're going to find that in his treatment of Joseph, his son, as a favorite, he still hasn't learned the lesson of favoritism within the family. But he's going to learn, and he's going to be sustained by God's grace.

God is going to fulfill every one of his promises, because despite his failures, just like David, just like Moses, and many others, God is faithful, and God sees the spark of faith. He sees the glimmer of obedience that keeps returning, even after failures, even after shortcomings, and falling into the pit. So Jacob builds an altar there and called the place El Bethel, the God of Bethel.

Because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother. And this is Jacob's recognition of the fact that God has been faithful. God has brought him back to the land in peace, just as he promised.

And this foreshadows the return of Israel to the land for the millennial kingdom, where purged of their failures, their heart of stone is taken out, their heart of flesh is given to them. They too are going to return to the land and acknowledge God, the God of Israel. This is a good place for us to stop in our study of the life of Jacob.

If there's one thing we can find by way of encouragement in looking at Jacob is there is no failure that is too great for the plan of God. Because what God is looking for... God can deal with any circumstances, any outcome that may result, whether we succeed or fail. What He's looking for is our turning to Him, to be faithful, to claim His grace, to claim His promise.

That's what He's looking for. That's what He's after. He can handle everything else.

The one thing God cannot do is reach in and change our minds for us. That's something we have to do ourselves. Nothing can stop the grace of God.

Nothing can prevent the blessing of God except our failure to claim it. Sometimes it's the little things in our lives that slow us down. If we can identify those and turn them over to the Lord, there's nothing that God cannot do in us, there's nothing that God cannot do through us.

And it's such a wonderful position to be in, we certainly don't want to miss it. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we thank You for Your magnificent grace, the incredible place that You have assigned us in Your plan, the things that You have given us because of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And as we turn our attention now to the Lord's table and the celebration of His victory on the cross, we pray that these things will be a source of motivation and a source of challenge to us. Give us the opportunity and the clarity of sight to see the things in our lives that still need to be rooted out and turned over to You. We pray that we can root out the idols and root out the earrings, the things that slow us down and prevent us from taking full advantage of Your grace and Your faithfulness to us.

We ask that God the Holy Spirit will illuminate our hearts through the truth of Your Word and as He does so, that the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ will shine forth from us each and every day. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.