



SERMON SERIES DISCUSSION & STUDY GUIDE

Sermon Schedule

Date	Series	Key Event	Scripture
8/5/2010 8/8/2010	Family, Marriage, Parenting	Keeping the Spark Alive	Genesis 29
8/12/2010 8/15/2010	Family, Marriage, Parenting	God's Way, Not Man's Way	1 Kings 16-22
8/19/2010 8/22/2010	Family, Marriage, Parenting	Salvaging a Train Wreck	Hosea
8/26/2010 8/29/2010	Family, Marriage, Parenting	The Results of Loving Work more than Family	1 Samuel 2:12-26
9/2/2010 9/5/2010	Family, Marriage, Parenting	Legacy of Obedience	Ruth

Family, Marriage, Parenting

Week 1: Jacob & Rachel

Genesis 29

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Dr. Tony Evans, Senior Pastor, Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship and President of The Urban Alternative, believes that God has provided an example or illustration in our daily life for every theological principle in the Bible. Family, marriage, and parenting are the most critical examples God gives us to illustrate our relationship with Him. John The Baptist describes our relationship to Christ in John 3:29, "The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete." We are the bride of Christ, adopted sons and daughters to the Father (Rom. 8:15), and reborn into the family of God upon accepting the gift of grace!

This week we are going to look at our relationship with God through Jacob and Rachel in Genesis 29.

CONNECTING AS A GROUP:

Share with your group a time in your life where you have experienced with your spouse and then with the entire family a period where "time just flew by." What made it special & timeless (think about individuals' (particularly your own) attitudes, motivations, and goals/outcomes)?

STUDYING GOD'S WORD:

Read Genesis 29. To truly appreciate Jacob and Rachel's relationship we must first look at the whole story. Jacob, after receiving his father's blessing, set out to marry one of his uncle Laban's daughters. Jacob reaches Paddan Aram where he first encounters Rachel by the well (Gen 29:9). It was love at first sight! Laban receives Jacob into his household and offers him work. In exchange of seven years of work, Jacob would have Rachel (Gen 29:18). But Laban tricks Jacob and gives him Leah instead (Gen 29:23). So Jacob, who is madly in love with Rachel, agrees to work another seven years to have Rachel (Gen. 29:20). The story of Jacob and Rachel illustrate a special love expressed in various ways which kept their spark alive despite all the setbacks! Let's study the word love and ways of expressing and feeling loved.

The word **love** in Genesis 29:20 is a verb from the Hebrew **Ahab**. This is the same love that God shows us in the New Testament. The Greek were clever because they have 4 different words for love while we use one in English. We say, "I love you" and at the same time can say I love hot dogs! Is it the same love? I hope not! In Greek, love can be:

Phileo: brotherly love

Eros: erotic or passionate love

Storge: affection or parental love

Agape: unconditional love

God's love for us is agape love which is unconditional. It is also a verb indicating sacrificial action! This was the love Jacob demonstrated by his willingness to work another seven years. This is the love God is wanting from us as seen in John 21:15. Jesus asks Peter do you truly love (agape) me? And Peter responds, Lord you know I love (phileo) you. Dr. Gary Chapman, known for his book, *The Five Love Languages*, states this love (agape) is "...based on reason, will, and discipline" for your partner's emotional well-being. Note the focus of this action is outward and NOT about self! Dr. Chapman defines the five love languages as: words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch.

MAKING APPLICATION:

This week's study illustrates how God is intentional and persistent with His love for us through the relationship of Jacob and Rachel. Are you just as intentional and persistent with Him? How about your love towards your spouse and/or family? How are you loving (agape vs phileo) God and your family? Dr. Chapman uses the analogy of a car's gas tank to illustrate our perception of being loved. How full is your partner's or children's love tank?

30 Day Challenge: Express your love to your partner and/or children through all 5 love languages each week.

60 Day Challenge: Express your love to your partner and/or children through all 5 love languages each day.

PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER:

- Pray for God's agape love to fill your tank that you may fill your partner's and children.
- Pray that you may pursue God with the same reason, will, and discipline that HE does for you!

MEMORIZE THIS VERSE: "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." John 7:38



WHITE RIVER CHRISTIAN CHURCH

LOVE GOD AND LOVE OTHERS

Family, Marriage, Parenting

Week 2: God's Way, Not Man's Way

1 Kings 16-22

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Every one of us chooses a path to go down every day with different results in mind. We could be striving for comfort, appreciation, money, possessions, love, peace, and much more depending what our ultimate goals in life are. The critical question, however, is whether or not we are living life God's way or according to our own set of rules.

In the second half of 1 Kings, the account of Ahab and Jezebel's choices in how they led the nation of Israel is an amazing reflection of life lived against God's laws and the resulting outcome.

CONNECTING AS A GROUP:

Discuss some of the issues surrounding following your own rules rather than God's and vice versa. There are many schools of thought that encourage us to be true to ourselves and to follow our own instinct, but the only correct way of living life, is God's way, by following Him and the direction He gives us in Scripture.

- How do things in your life feel when you are following your own path as opposed to God's?
- Do you feel that living life "God's way" means merely not breaking his laws, or is there more to it?
- Do you believe we can completely live life God's way in a fallen world?

STUDYING GOD'S WORD:

Read **1 Kings 18:36-39**.

- How did Elijah's faithfulness in living with God as his leader affect the outcome of this situation?

Read **1 Kings 21**.

- What can we learn here from surrounding ourselves with others who are not living life for God?

Read **1 Kings 22:4-8**

- How does Jehoshaphat differ from Ahab in his approach to making decisions for the nation he leads?
- How do these differences factor in to the ultimate outcome for each king?

MAKING APPLICATION:

Ahab and Jezebel lived lives honoring themselves and ignoring God's laws altogether, thus dragging an entire nation with them deeper into sinful living. Even after humbling himself before God in repentance for his actions and experiencing God's mercy, Ahab turned his back on God again. This wicked lifestyle ultimately led to his demise.

- What steps can you take today to live your life more by God's rules and not your own?
- How can you better surround yourself with others who are living to fulfill God's purpose for themselves?
- If you have children, how can you better lead them into living their lives God's way?

PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER:

- Pray for guidance and wisdom in living your life according to God's plan.
- Pray you are able to find ways to surround yourself more with others who see God as their leader first and foremost.
- Pray for the members of your group to help hold one another accountable in the daily quest to keep God's leadership above all else.

MEMORIZE THIS VERSE:

"Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the LORD told him. And as Elijah stood there, the LORD passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. "

1 Kings 19:11-12



Family, Marriage, Parenting

Week 3: Salvaging a Train Wreck

Hosea

DISCUSSION GUIDE

This week we are continuing to study an Old Testament account of a powerful marriage example. This one might strike you a bit odd as to the instruction and actions taken by those involved. But we must remember... God's ways are not always our ways; He specializes in redeeming our circumstances as powerful lessons of a godly life and often blessings in the end.

CONNECTING AS A GROUP:

Experiencing a fulfilling marriage requires time, energy, and effort, much like growing a plant.

- Describe what elements contribute to a great marriage.
- What do you think are some major causes for husbands and wives drifting apart?
- What interests do you share with your spouse? What else do you do together to strengthen your bond of oneness?

STUDYING GOD'S WORD:

Read the book of Hosea. The story of Hosea and Gomer takes place around 760 years before Jesus was born. Israel was enjoying a period of unprecedented prosperity. As is often the case, with prosperity came moral and spiritual degeneration. Secularism and materialism captured the hearts of the people and sin was rampant. Sound a little like America today? The thing that grieved God more than anything else was the sin of idolatry (Hosea 4:12, 13, 13:2). Since God viewed Israel as His wife, He viewed her worship of other gods as spiritual adultery.

- What was God's initial instruction to Hosea? How would you describe the relationship between Hosea and Gomer?
- What happened that created distance and heartbreak in Hosea and Gomer's marriage?
- How was Gomer's sin realized?

Gomer's first child, a daughter, is named Loruhamah, which means "unpitied or unloved", implying she would not enjoy her true father's love. Again, the name was symbolic of Israel's wandering from God's love. Not long afterwards Gomer conceived again - another boy called Lo-ammi, which meant "not my people" or "no kin of mine".

- How did Hosea respond to Gomer following her unfaithfulness? How could he have had the courage and faith to do so?

MAKING APPLICATION:

This beautiful love story is a powerful parallel to our love relationship with God. We can begin to see how God used the love He has for us through a sinful person and a sinful nation.

Read Exodus 20:3 - The first commandment describes how God wants us to know Him, love Him and know that nothing can or should take His place in our hearts.

- What things in your life are taking the place of God?
- How have you wandered away from Him to satisfy your needs, wants or desires?
- What can you change in your life to replace those distractions and re-commit to Him?

After reading the story of Hosea and Gomer, we see that if God becomes the center of our desires we can have healthy and growing relationships. Are you holding onto any resentments with anyone? If so seek God's wisdom and find a way to offer forgiveness. **Read Matthew 18:21.** How many times does Christ tell us to forgive? Remind yourself daily that God loves you as you are. His goal is for us to understand and trust in His unending love for us. He will hold us accountable as a parent does for a child. He wants what is best for us.

- Can you think of wrongs suffered from your mate that have kept you from freely expressing your love? Admit them to your mate and verbalize your full forgiveness.
- How can you keep the wrongs for which you have forgiven others from creeping back into your mind and destroying your peace?
- What positive steps can you and your mate take to keep certain sins from repeating themselves?

PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER:

Pray that we seek God in everything we do and say and that if we hold any resentment towards anyone that we find a way to resolve it. Pray also that we can understand the "undying love" that God holds for us.

MEMORIZE THIS VERSE: *"For I desire loyalty and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."*

Hosea 6:6



WHITE RIVER CHRISTIAN CHURCH

LOVE GOD AND LOVE OTHERS

Family, Marriage, Parenting

Week 4: Loving Work More Than Family

1 Sam. 2:12-26

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Even though the stories in the Bible happened thousands of years ago, it is utterly amazing that the Old Testament characters experienced many of the same challenges that we face today. That seems especially true when it comes to family matters—husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and of course, the in-laws. In the story of Eli the high priest and his two sons, we see what can happen when a father fails to discipline his children.

CONNECTING AS A GROUP:

We've all seen children who are spoiled and undisciplined. We've also seen the kind of adults they can become. Discuss some reasons why these kids don't get the loving attention they need from their parents.

- Why do some parents try to be a "friend" to their young children? Is this a good parenting philosophy? Why or why not?
- How do some parents recoil from the constant hard work (even sometimes drudgery) of parenthood?
- When is it permissible to confront parents who, in your opinion, aren't doing as good a job as parents as they should?

STUDYING GOD'S WORD:

Read 1 Samuel 2:12-26. Consider these questions:

- How do you think Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas became such disobedient adult men, especially considering they had grown up watching their father perform the work of the Lord?
- **Read Numbers 15:22-31**, then **Numbers 18:30-32**. As high priest, what actions did God's law demand that Eli take against his disobedient sons?

Consider this commentary on 1 Sam. 2:13-17 from the *Life Application Study Bible*: "What were Eli's sons doing wrong? They were taking parts of the sacrifices before they were offered to God on the altar. They were also eating meat before the fat was burned off. This was against God's laws (Leviticus 3:3-5). In effect, Eli's sons were treating God's offerings with contempt."

- Are we ever guilty of treating people we consider "lower than us" with contempt and scorn? How?
- Although Eli may have performed his job well as high priest, clearly he did not perform very well as a father, and he and his sons paid for their disobedience with their lives (1 Sam. 4:12-18). Among all the bad news the messenger brought to Eli, what was the news that actually caused him to die? Consider this commentary on the life of Eli from the *Life Application Study Bible*: "Eli responded to situations rather than solving them. But even his responses tended to be weak. God pointed out his sons' errors, but Eli did little to correct them...But Eli had another problem. He was more concerned with the symbols of his religion than with the God they represented. For Eli, the Ark of the Covenant had become a relic to be protected rather than a reminder of the Protector. His faith shifted from the Creator to the created." In other words, he loved his work and position as high priest more than he loved his sons.
- How did God eventually deal with Eli, Hophni and Phinehas's disobedience? How could Eli have prevented this eventual outcome?

MAKING APPLICATION:

Proverbs 22:6 is often quoted as a standard for rearing children, as is Ephesians 6:4. Read these verses, then consider:

- Does "teaching your children to choose the right path" always mean they will make right choices? How should a parent react when a child makes wrong choices?
- What does "teaching your children" mean in terms of time spent with them?
- What are some of the practical differences between discipline and punishment? Do parents need to use one or the other, or both?
- What is one way you can show your child or children more loving discipline this coming week?

PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER:

If being a parent sometimes seems more like being a juggler, you're not alone. In our American culture, we constantly juggle competing opportunities, responsibilities and obligations. Pray that we will learn to focus our priorities on God's priorities. Pray that we will love our children enough to correct and discipline them as they grow. Pray that we will learn to support each other in our parenting, trusting God for the outcome.

MEMORIZE THIS VERSE:

"Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it." **1 Samuel 2:12**



WHITE RIVER CHRISTIAN CHURCH

LOVE GOD AND LOVE OTHERS

Family, Marriage, Parenting

Week 5: Legacy of Obedience

Ruth

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Someone once said that disobedience was a crime against loyalty. That's something to ponder. There are times when obeying is easy, and no sweat off our back. Other times, obeying means refraining from something we'd really like to do. There are times when obedience is downright hard. Obedience to God can cost but should be evidence of our love and loyalty to Him. The motive and attitude in our heart as we obey matters to God.

Ruth loved and was loyal to her mother-in-law, Naomi. What flowed from that was unquestioning obedience. She clung to Naomi and insisted on following and obeying Naomi, and her God. Ruth did this without question, without a poor attitude, and with little regard for herself. What resulted was much blessing poured out not only on Naomi but also Ruth, leaving a legacy of faith running through the lineage of our Savior, Jesus.

CONNECTING AS A GROUP:

After being told repeatedly not to jump on her bed, 4 year old little Grace was made to sit in a time-out. With her arms folded, she told her mom that she was still jumping on her bed in her imagination. There will always be rules, regulations, laws, codes of conduct, and Biblical commandments. Some are easy to follow and others are not. The best case scenario is always to obey God out of love and loyalty to Him.

- What are some rules that you remember from when you were young or that you impose on your children now? Which are easy to follow & which are difficult?
- What are some rules that you have broken? What were the consequences?
- Describe a situation in which you either obeyed or disobeyed and then share the outcome. How would the outcome have been different if you'd obeyed differently?

STUDYING GOD'S WORD:

Read Ruth 1:8-18. Ruth could have left Naomi just as her sister in law had done. She chose adamantly to stay and serve her mother in law and her God instead of returning to her own people.

- Why do you think Ruth made this decision?
- What was Ruth sacrificing to remain loyal to Naomi? Was she aware of giving up these things?

Read Ruth 2 and 3. The way that Boaz loves and provides for Ruth is a foreshadow of how God loves us, how He redeemed us with the death of Jesus, and how He blesses us by providing for us. He claims and loves us as His own children, no matter what.

- How would you describe Ruth's attitude while she follows Naomi's instructions?
- How is she rewarded for her obedience?
- Why do you think Naomi told Ruth not to glean in anyone else's field?

Read 1 Samuel 15:10-23. Like Saul, it is dangerous to think what we want to give God is better than what He asks of us. Saul thought sacrificing the best animals to God would be better than destroying them, but destroying everything was what God told Saul to do.

- Saul thought he was doing something that would be pleasing to God. What did God see in Saul's actions? What was God's main concern and what does He value over our reasoning, and even over our sacrifice?
- Saul reasoned that God would be pleased with his actions. He did sacrifice to God out of what he kept. When was the last time you reasoned yourself out of obedience to God?

MAKING APPLICATION:

As a group, make a list of the areas in your lives God is calling you to obedience. Next to each item, indicate whether you are being obedient God's way, or your way. Also indicate whether or not you are obeying out of loyalty and love for God or for some other reason. Discuss ways to alter your actions, behavior, and heart so that it is right in line with God's will and exactly what God is asking of you. List the people who will be impacted by your obedience to God's ways.

PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER:

- Praise God for loving us and redeeming us as His own, no matter how undeserving we are.
- Ask God to keep your heart and mind open to His will for your life, and to give you the strength to follow Him, no matter what.
- Ask for forgiveness for times when you have not obeyed God to the letter or when your heart has not been in your obedience.
- Pray for a heart that willingly follows God, out of love and loyalty.

MEMORIZE THIS VERSE:

"But Ruth replied, 'Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go: wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.'" ~ Ruth 1:16





For more information and resources visit
<http://www.wrcc.org/connect/smallgroups/index.php>