

Lessons We Can Learn From The Life of Jacob

[The man who wrestled with God and lost the conflict]

The lessons taught us from the life of Jacob show us how the Holy Spirit disciplines us as Christians.

The result of such discipline is that we make room for Jesus Christ in our lives.

For us to understand how and why this discipline works we need to look to our original creation and realise we are dual in personality.

Before Adam and Eve sinned they had only natural human personality or natures.

After sinning an additional personality or nature was added.

Paul calls this additional nature our “old self”.

Romans 6:6-7 [NIV] *“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”*

This “old self” has to be put to death, this sinful nature has to be crucified and buried.

Paul draws parallels between ourselves and Jesus Christ but there is one great difference, Christ was without an “old self”, He never sinned.

Hebrews 4:14-15 [NIV] *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.”*

Christ did have “self” natural human nature. Christ did possess natural strength, personality and individualism and freedom of choice.

The difference is that Jesus Christ chose not to live by His own natural strength, personality and intellect.

John 5:30 [NIV] *“By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.”*

This is Christ’s chosen estimate of His natural strength and intellect. To Him it was worthless apart from God.

What Christ then said about our natural abilities makes sense.

John 15:5 [NIV] *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*

Our spiritual fruitfulness is totally dependent on what Christ does in and through us.

Coming back to ourselves. God deals with our “old self” of sin by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as our Creator and Saviour.

Colossians 1:15-16 [NIV] *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.”*

Christ as the Creator of all things is of greater worth than all who will ever live.

Isaiah 64:8 [NIV] *“Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.”*

This shows the comparison, the value of the potter over a lump of clay.

Thus the sacrifice of Christ’s life can cover all past, present and future sins of all humanity.

John 3:16-17 [NIV] *“For God so loved **the world** that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

God saves the whole world, all humanity, from the death penalty that sins brings by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is only the beginning of the problem that God has with humanity, there is still our natural man to deal with.

In addition to our sins we, using our natural abilities, do a lot of things, with the very best intention of pleasing God, which are **not** acceptable to God and fail to please or satisfy Him.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 [NIV] *“For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”*

On our foundational knowledge and belief is what God has done for us through our Saviour Jesus Christ we can build quite an impressive edifice.

Nevertheless, God calls it a building made of wood, hay and straw.

Such materials have value but represent what we create with our own strength and intellect.

It is not a question of whether the workmanship is good or bad, but a question of who is doing the work.

We accept Jesus Christ as our Saviour and realise our old sinful nature has to die.

Galatians 4:19 [NIV] *“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,”*

Our new life with the presence of the Holy Spirit is one of Christ being formed in us.

But along with this new life of Christ maturing in us, there remains within us our natural intellect and nature.

This is now a good, honest, worthy human nature that wants to please God.

God not only hates our sin but He has no room in His plan for our natural nature, our using our natural intellect and strength to fulfil His work, what He has called us to perform.

God's encounter with Jacob shows us this to be true.

Genesis 25:23 [NIV] *"The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and **the older will serve the younger.**"*

Jacob knew that this had been prophesied of his older brother Esau.

Accordingly Jacob set out to achieve this using his own human intellect, wisdom and strength.

Matthew 28:18-20 [NIV] *"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And **surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**"*

Likewise we know that we have been called to fulfil a job of work as Christians.

So too often we dedicatedly set out to do the job in our own way using our own natural skills.

The problem with this is that we are **not** following the example of Jesus Christ whose work it now is.

John 5:19, 30 [NIV] *"Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, **the Son can do nothing by himself**; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." ... "**By myself I can do nothing**; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."*

Jesus the Son of Man and the Son of God did nothing of Himself only what pleased the Father who sent Him.

John 8:28 [NIV] *"So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [the one I claim to be] and that **I do nothing on my own** but speak just what the Father has taught me."*

Repeated just in case we didn't get the point the first time.

God's dealing with our natural nature and personal abilities has the goal of bringing us to this same position of total reliance on God.

Step by step the Holy Spirit weakens our natural life until at length we are as dead people before Him.

Why does the Holy Spirit do this?

Romans 8:14 [NIV] *"because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."*

So we are led by the Holy Spirit.

John 16:13 [NIV] *"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."*

So we are taught by the Holy Spirit.

John 14:26 [NIV] *"But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."*

Dependent on the Holy Spirit for the very words we utter in all circumstances.

Galatians 2:20 [NIV] *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

In Isaac we have Christ given to us freely, His righteousness credited to us as well as our sins freely atoned for.

Galatians 4:19 [NIV] *“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until **Christ is formed in you,**”*

In Jacob we see Christ being formed in us, the new “born again” child of God. Just like childbirth this process can be painful.

Hebrews 12:2-11 [NIV] *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. **In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.** And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because **the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.**” Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; **but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.** No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*

This is loving chastening of God as He deals with us as His children, with the aim of our being in the end to share in His holiness. This is something constructive producing in us the fruits of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 [NIV] *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”*

These are **not** virtues that are **given to us**, such as listed in **1 Corinthians 12:4-11** and elsewhere.

These virtues are the natural, spontaneous fruit of our new character.

The new character of God in us as a result of our un-grieved relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 4:11 [NIV] *“I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.”*

Paul had learnt this new attitude of mind, for him what this world offered was very unimportant.

Philippians 3:7-11 [NIV] *“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”*

Paul put first in his life the coming to know Christ.

The root of the Greek word translated “knowing” is “*ginoškō*” which indicated far more than knowing about a person. This word indicates an intimate relationship being established between two

people. The verb is also used to convey the thought of connection or union, as between a man and a woman.

This is a matter of quality of life and is expressed in figurative language throughout God's Word.

Genesis 2:12 [King James] *“And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone.”*

Precious stones and gold.

1 Corinthians 3:11-13 [King James] *“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.”*

What we build on the foundation of God's forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice.

Revelation 21:19-24 [King James] *“The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it.”*

Our future home will reflect this quality in us that has been produced in us through our intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ in us.

God's purpose for humanity is not just gold but precious stones.

Gold surely represents that which is of **God the Father**.

Silver stands for the redemption that is in **Christ**, His free gift of grace.

Precious stones are the work of the Holy Spirit.

Precious stones are not elements like gold and silver, they are compounds formed through fire and great pressure and then cut to reflect the light and reveal their true beauty.

This is a figure of the Holy Spirit's discipline, that comes through much suffering, difficulty, sorrow and stress of circumstances and makes us into gem stones.

There is no mention of silver in the New Jerusalem, our future home, for all the silver has become precious stones.

God is looking for people to carry out His wondrous purpose. Such people must know the God of Abraham, the Father and that all life starts with Him. [Gold]

They must know the God of Isaac who is Christ the freely given atoning grace. [Silver]

They must know the God of Jacob, the Holy Spirit who deals with the natural nature they have that turns Christ in us [silver] into precious stones by the discipline of fire and stress.

1 Peter 2:1-5 [NIV] *“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, the living Stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him, you also, like **living stones**, are being*

built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Note that spiritual sacrifices are to be offered, we are to lay down our lives that God through the Holy Spirit may change us into what is acceptable in His presence.

Jacob was disciplined by God until He came to the position of total dependence on his Creator.

As we read the story of Jacob’s life we see four stages that will be paralleled in our lives.

First Jacob as the natural man, self reliant and strong [**Genesis 25-27**].

Secondly Jacob’s testing and discipline through circumstances [**Genesis 28-31**].

Thirdly the dislocation of his natural life [**Genesis 32-36**].

Fourthly the “*peaceable fruits*” that were the end product [**Genesis 37-50**].

Until our natural strength is brought low, God will not be able to use us to fulfil His purpose.

1 Peter 5:5-7, 10-11 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“Humility towards one another must be the garment you all wear constantly, because God opposes the proud but accords His favour to the humble. Bow down then before the power of God now, so that He may raise you up in due time. Unload all your burden on to Him, since He is concerned about you.” ... “You will have to suffer only for a little while: the God of all grace who called you to eternal glory in Christ will restore you. He will confirm, strengthen and support you. His power lasts for ever and ever. Amen.”*