

Time of Grace Ministry
Flawed but Blessed: Why Does God Love Me?
Genesis 25
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I probably don't have to tell you today what the Christian thing to do is but we do have to answer the question how do we get more self-control? Because when we have it, life is so good, isn't it? I mean, there's some stuff we can't control, life's going to be difficult, this world is broken. But if we could say no to that stuff? And have you ever woken up the next morning without that spiritual hangover? Without feeling regret knowing that you made the right decision and everyone else has got a headache but you're feeling great and everyone else is exhausted at work but you're feeling good? And everyone else has put on 10 pounds but you're feeling fit? When people are having to apologize for the things they texted and emailed and said to each other, you're waking up feeling closer to people? It's so good when we exercise self-control! So how do you get it?

So much of the drama that we have in our families, in our spiritual lives, in our workplaces, maybe even at our church, rarely comes down to total ignorance but more of self-control. Most of you aren't clueless that God wants you to be patient and kind and forgiving and selfless and you should serve your husband or your wife and you should be patient with your kids and you should honor your father and mother. Most of that is not shocking news to you. It's just in the moment when you're face to face with temptation, it's so hard to make the right choice.

For some of you, it's a substance - it's drinking, it's pain pills. For some of you, it's going back to drugs, it's crossing lines morally, sexually, financially. I probably don't have to tell you today what the Christian thing to do is but we do have to answer the question, "How do we get more self-control?" Because when we have it, life is so good, isn't it? I mean, there's some stuff that we just can't control. Life's going to be difficult; this world is broken. But if we can say no to that stuff - have you ever woken up the next morning without that spiritual hangover, without feeling regret, knowing that you made the right decision and everyone else has got a headache but you're feeling great?

So how do you get it? The answer to that question is what I want to share with you today because the Bible gives a really, really clear answer where self-control comes from but it's not the place that most self-help books would turn you to. It's not about making a list of pros and cons; it's not about just taking a deep breath or counting back from ten. Those might be helpful tips but the Bible says there is a better way to find self-control. And I want to teach you that lesson as we jump back way early in our Bibles to an early story of a guy who had basically zero self-control. The Bible's going to give us a terrible example of a man named Esau who came face to face with a terrible decision and he gave into it because he was impulsive and he had zero self-control. We're going to learn about him, this kind of warning tale, and at the same time, God's going to teach us a better way to be different than Esau as we look to Jesus for all that we need.

So if you're interested in finding the answer to that question, grab a Bible or just look on the screen with me as we jump into Genesis 25. It says in verse 19: "This is the account of the family line of Abraham's son Isaac. Abraham became the father of Isaac and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean. Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was childless. The Lord answered his prayer and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. The babies jostled each other within her and she said, 'Why is this happening to me?' So she went to inquire of the Lord. 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.'"

We find out later that these are going to become the nations of Israel and Israel's southeastern neighbor, Edom. So two nations but he said - here's the interesting thing - the older will serve the younger. They're jostling, like they're kicking each other with those little legs looking for room in the womb because that's what they're going to do their whole lives. They're going to fight like brothers who don't get along. They're going to fight for position, not just in the womb, but outside of it, too. And Rebekah - here's the crazy part - the older son, the firstborn son, will serve the younger.

Now here, 4,000 years later, we hear that line and it doesn't mean that much to us; the older will serve the younger. But in those days, the news would have been shocking. I mean, when we hear about firstborn children and second born children, what's the first thing that pops into our mind? It's kind of personality stuff, right? That's because about 100 years ago, there was a psychologist named Alfred Adler who came up with this theory that firstborn children tended to have a certain kind of personality and second born children were kind of like this and the babies of the family were kind of like this. I'm curious about his research - how many of you are firstborn kids in your family? Any firstborns here? Dr. Adler said that you're probably a little bit more organized, responsible than your siblings; you get things done. You check the boxes, you get the tasks done. Is that true for some of you? Second born kids, any second borns here like me? Is it true you're a little less responsible than your older brother or sister? A little goofier? You're a little bit more laid back? Sometimes attention seeking, Dr. Adler said about second borns. You know, he thought about it from a psychological personality perspective but in that culture, they wouldn't have thought of that at all. What they would have thought of was two very special gifts that only the firstborn would have: The birthright and the blessing. I need you to remember those two things for this story and in the weeks to come it's going to be important, too. If you're a firstborn in that culture, you would get the birthright and then the blessing. The birthright was just essentially money; that when your parents died, the firstborn would get a double portion of the estate. And the blessing with this special gift is that you would get the power, you get the authority, you would become the new head of the household. You would be served by your brothers and sisters. You get the money, you get the power, if you were born first. But in this story, God says to Rebekah, "Listen, the older is going to serve the younger." The blessing, the authority, the one who will be served, is not the first child that comes out of your womb; but the second.

Now God doesn't say anything about the birthright, so we assume that the older son was going to keep that except we find out in this story that maybe he wouldn't have the self-control to do it.

Let me turn you back to the book of Genesis; here's how the story continues: "When the time came for Rebekah to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau." Oh, my goodness, we've got to stop there and talk about that. His whole body was like a hairy garment and he was - in my deep, intellectual research for this sermon, I googled "hairiest newborn baby," and you're not allowed to do that during church but afterwards, you have to do it because it is simply outstanding. Alright, we continue with the text: "After this, his brother came out with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob." Jacob in Hebrew means heel grabber. "Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them. The boys grew up and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents. Isaac," remember, that's the dad, "who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau but Rebekah loved Jacob."

So apparently, the twins come out and it's not just their look that's different - you know, one's really hairy and one's smooth skinned - apparently, everything about these two brothers, Esau and Jacob, was different. The Scripture says that Esau was a man of the open country, alright? Can you picture someone in your family who's kind of like this? He's a man's man; he's an outdoor kind of guy. He's never used hair product in his life, he drives a F150. He's got some old Field & Stream, you know, in the backseat. Even when he's not chewing, you can see like the little rim of his Skoal tin container on his Fleet Farm jeans like this is Esau; he's all man. He loves to hunt, he loves to kill, he loves to eat, and he's really close to his dad. In fact, in Hebrew the word Esau seems to come from a verb Asa, which means "to do," because Esau was a doer. He wasn't a thinker, he didn't want to brainstorm, he didn't want to pray about it. He just wanted to get stuff done. Esau was that kind of guy.

And Jacob was just the opposite. You know, why sleep out in the wilderness when you have a comfortable tent and a bed at home? He loved to hang out with his mother. He loved to learn how to cook but don't write him off as some like weak momma's boy because Jacob was wicked smart. Esau could out-wrestle him any day of the week but Jacob always knew how to outsmart his older brother. And while the differences in the two sons should have brought the family together, while ideally the Bible would say the differences that God gives in families are a good thing, that we can work together with different strengths and talents and gifts, unfortunately for this family, like so many families, there was not enough self-control to realize the gift and instead the differences divided them. Isaac the dad, who loved hunting and the taste of wild game, he gravitated toward Esau. And Jacob, who spent so much time in the tents with his mother, got close with his mom who is very smart and cunning and witty as well, the family gets divided and as we find out, things go from divided to destructive.

Let me share the last verses of Genesis 25. It says, "Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country famished." So here's the set up - Esau comes back from the hunt, he's sweaty, his face is redder than usual, he's dying of hunger. And Jacob is not just cooking up stew; actually the verb used to cook something up in every other instance in the Old Testament means to "cook up a plan." He's thinking. Is Jacob mad about his father who always shows more attention, love, to his older brother? Is he mad that stupid Esau who couldn't make a budget if his life depended on it was about to get the double portion of the dad's immense wealth and spoil it and squander it on guns and ammo? You know, we have no clue exactly what's

going through his mind but we know he has a plan and, unfortunately, Esau doesn't have the self-control or the intelligence to see it.

We continue: "Esau said to Jacob, 'Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!' (That's why he was also called Edom)." Edom is Hebrew for red. "Jacob replied, 'First, sell me your birthright.'" In the Hebrew language, Esau's words are about as intelligent as a caveman. He literally says to his brother, "Make me swallow that red thing." And Jacob, who's so smart, says, "Okay, yeah, I'd love to get you a bowl. But first, sell me your birthright." Because in that culture, you could do that. About 100 years ago, some archaeologists were digging in ancient Iraq and they came upon some 4,000 year old documents that date back all the way to the time of this family in this story. They called them the Nuzi text, N-u-z-i. In the Nuzi texts, there's a story actually of two brothers - Tuptikilla and Kurpazah - and Tuptikilla wanted his brother Kurpazah's birthright so he offered him a trade. He said, you know, you give me your portion of the inheritance and I'll give you three sheep. And the Nuzi text says apparently the inheritance wasn't much so he made the trade, which is what Jacob and Esau are about to do is except this is way, way more than a few extra bucks. If you read the rest of the book of Genesis, you will find out that this family was not on welfare. Abraham, the patriarch of the family, was stinking rich; he was super wealthy and he passed all of his wealth on to his son Isaac. In Genesis 26, a chapter after this story, we find that Isaac is going to become so rich, God is going to give him so many sheep and bulls and cows and flocks that actually foreign kings will fear his wealth and his power. The king of the Philistines, the neighbor just to the east of Israel, is going to come to Isaac and say, "You have to move away from us. Like, our flocks can't eat because you have so many sheep," so this guy's like Warren Buffet or Mark Zuckerberg or Bill Gates; he's loaded. So think about what Esau's about to do! He's going to trade his birthright - modern day terms; this is millions, hundreds of millions of dollars - for what? A bowl of soup.

You know in Las Vegas right now at the Cosmopolitan hotel is the most expensive bowl of soup in the world? Six hundred and eighty-eight dollars for a bowl of soup but that's nothing. I mean, if you would do that - pastors should not call people stupid - but I would call you stupid if you ate a \$688 bowl of soup. But this is thousands; this is millions of dollars and Esau's about to do it. Look at his response: "Look,' Esau said, 'I'm about to die. What good is the birthright to me?' But Jacob said, 'Swear to me first.' So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright."

"I'm dying," Esau thinks. It's like, dude, no, you're not. "But what good's the birthright to me? What else am I going to do? I'm going to die." How about go over to mom and dad's tent like 15 feet that way and ask for some bread. But he doesn't think of that. He's so impulsive, he is so unintelligent in the moment, that he thinks the only thing he can do is give up something so scared for something so small. And so Esau, the doer, eats and drinks and swallows and burps. He gets up, he leaves, and he despises his birthright and it's the end of the story.

So why is that in the Bible? I mean, why did God want that written down that you and I can read it 4,000 years later? Well, the interesting thing is this is one of those stories that God gives the answer to. The New Testament actually gives some commentary on this old story; it tells us how to apply it specifically and if we jump to Hebrews 12, here's what God says: "See that no one is

sexually immoral or is godless like Esau who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son." God says, "see to it that no one," - that means you, that means me - "that no one is godless like Esau." What was Esau's root problem? He was godless. He did not have enough God in his heart and so he took a single meal for his inheritance right, his birthright, as the oldest son. So if you're taking notes in your program today, here's what God wants you to know; it's our first point: Don't trade something so sacred for something so small.

So I want you to think today: What's your soup? You know, what in the moment just smells so good to you that even a part of you knows this isn't good, this isn't Christian, this isn't godly, this isn't right. Like in the moment, it feels so hard just to say no?

I bet for a lot of you here today, especially a lot of you guys, your soup is respect. You want to be respected. And to be respected, you can't be like everyone else; you have to trade in something that most people aren't willing to trade. So many of us start our jobs and want to be respected. We don't want to be average, we don't want to be just another cog in the company machine. We want to be the people that impresses the manager and the boss and so we work and we work and we work. For some of us, maybe the first woman in your family who's gone to college or gotten her master's degree or doctorate but that doesn't come without a great sacrifice or a price. You want to be respected with that title.

For some of you, it's athletics and for some of you it's parenting. You want to be the parent whose kid can swim and who can sing and who can swing a bat, the intelligent one, the athletic one, but that's going to cost you a crazy schedule. And you know what, to be respected, you often have to trade something sacred and what most of us have to trade is our faith. Not directly; we would never say, "Here, God, I'll trade my soul just to get this respect." But the stuff that strengthens our soul, our connection to this word and to these people. And maybe your grandparents, like Sunday for them was nonnegotiable; they just would have been in a place like this to connect with Jesus and his word and his people but for you, that's drifted just week by week. And maybe you really want to pray, like that's your plan to pray at night, but you're working so many hours and you're returning emails late into the night that by the time you open the book and try to communicate with God, you're fast asleep. And you'd love to have those Christian relationships where you confess your sins and forgive each other and encourage each other and pray but you know, with practice Tuesday and Thursday, and tournaments on the weekend, so often we want to get the soup of respect but we trade away our really strong spiritual life and connection with God. And the devil pulls up his food truck and he knows exactly what kind of soup to put in that window; what's going to smell best.

And how many of us just wake up and we just wish, like Esau, we wouldn't have given in in the moment? Hebrews 12 goes on to say that the next day, Esau, with tears, he regretted what he did. He knew it was so stupid but he couldn't take it back; he couldn't undo the trade he had made with his brother.

So back to the question: How do you get more self-control? I mean, if you realize what your soup is, how next time can you say no to that? And the Bible's answer to that question is beautiful and for many of you, it's going to be unexpected. Do you know what the Bible says self-control is? It's not a choice, it's not an action. It's not something you do. Here's a verse I

love to talk about at our church - Galatians 5 says, "The fruit of the spirit is self-control." Self-control, the ability to be patient, to wait, is not something you do, the Bible says. It's fruit. And if you have a garden in your backyard or you grew up on a farm, you know how fruit works, right? To make fruit grow, you can't focus on the fruit; you have to give your attention to the roots. The soil. Where it's planted. I was watering our garden the other day and I got out the hose - do you think I found those little green tomatoes just starting to grow and I turn the hose on full jet? You know, blast it right at the fruit? That will make it grow! No, no. Where do you put the water? By the roots because if the roots are strong, if the roots are in the right place, the fruit just happens.

So the Bible would say if you want more self-control, if you want to say no to that temptation, if you don't want to go back to the same old patterns of the past, what you need is not just to say, "God, give me self-control, God, give me self-control, God, give me self-control." Instead, you need to focus on the root. And do you know what the root is? It's Jesus. The more you focus on Jesus - and this might seem counterintuitive to you - but the more you focus on him, the more you're infatuated, captivated by his love, the more you're willing to wait for it. The more you look at your own heart, right, and you quote that classic Seinfeld episode and you say, "No soup for you!" Like, I can face that temptation but you know, I'm going to stand in this line. The devil's got his truck all ready to go but I'm not going to take that soup. I'm willing to wait because I know so much about Jesus that he's worth waiting for. And I'll wait for the Lord; I'll be strong. And I will take heart and I will wait for the Lord because the Bible says the most amazing thing about Jesus. The New Testament has two verses that apply to this story in the Old Testament; the one I shared with you from Hebrews 12. The other one, to me, is the most amazing. Let me show you the words of Romans 9. It says, "Before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose in election might stand, not by works but by him, the God who calls, Rebekah was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written, 'Jacob I loved.'"

You know, I read this story and as you start to know Jacob's life, you're going to wonder about those last three words. Why did God love Jacob? He comes out of the womb as a little heel grabber, a little deceiver. He's smart and he uses his smart just to sin. He trips up his brother, he's greedy, he wants money, he thinks about himself. Why would God love a person like that? And there's only one answer: Because it's not by works but by the crazy loving, and forgiving God who calls. That God would elect, that he would choose, that he would love and he would bless people who have not always exercised the best self-control and not always made the best choice. Instead, he would just love because he's that kind of God.

And I guarantee you, if you plant your life and your heart in that truth - the gospel of Jesus Christ; that even though I messed everything up, God still loves me. And even though my family is as dysfunctional as this family, God is still with me. And even though I've messed up a hundred times and I've woken up the next morning wondering why I lack so much self-control that God is still with me, that he still chooses and forgives and saves me, the more that thought and that God captivates your heart, the more the greatest desire and passion you will have is to serve him, to trust him, to wait for him.

And so that's my prayer for you. We're going to pray for self-control later in the service but more than anything, I want you connected to Jesus. I want you to come back here. I want you to tune into the show. I want you to keep listening to the podcast. I want you to open your Bible at home, not to check some productivity boxes but so that your heart can be planted in the crazy, unstoppable love of Jesus.

Because here's what I want to leave you with today: Jesus is so good that despite all the stuff you messed up, he did not change his name. Have you heard these days that some Christians don't want to be called Christians? I hear this a lot from different kinds of trendy pop culture pastors. Christians have done so many stupid things, you probably know some really extreme kind of weird, wacko Christians, that some people are saying, you know, "I don't want to be associated with that, so don't call me a Christian. Call me a follower of Jesus." And they change their name out of embarrassment.

Do you know who's not going to do that? Christ. He's not going to look at you Christians and say, "Man, that's what a Christian is? Don't call me Jesus the Christ. Call me, I don't know, the Nazarene or something; make up a new name." No, he's not embarrassed of you. He's not ashamed of you. He's not going to run away. He's not going to change his name. Instead, he will call you everything he died on the cross to give. That you're not deceitful in his eyes; you're delightful. That you're not going to get a little bit of the inheritance; you're going to inherit all of eternity with him. That he will love you - even the times you don't deserve it - like he loved Jacob. He'll love you.

So brothers and sisters, I know the soup smells good. I know the line can be really long but wait for the Lord. Be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

Let's pray.

Dear Holy Spirit, we pray to you today because without you, without the fruit that you give, our lives would be a mess. In a moment of misunderstanding, husbands would say things to wives that they can't take back. Wives would fire back just as quickly in words that would not easily be forgotten. But with you, Holy Spirit, there can be patience and kindness and forgiveness and love and respect and that is what we want so dearly.

With you, Holy Spirit, fathers can love their children; they can be like God the Father and forgive them and be so patient with them. Without you, we're going to yell way more often than we should, so help us. And more than anything, I pray that we would not be deceived; that we would not think the church or the Christian faith is for good people who just need to get better but instead, people like Jacob, sinful people, who need to be made saints by the blood of Jesus.

Holy Spirit, help us to remember how good and glorious God is. There is nothing in this world that is better or gives us lasting happiness like Jesus. So fix our eyes on him, on things that are eternal and unseen, that we would love and trust and fear God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Make us a patient people, a self-controlled people, because we believe, God, you are the one worth waiting for. We pray this all, Jesus, in your amazing name, Amen.



TIME OF GRACE®

Flawed but Blessed: Why Does God Love Me?

Study Notes

Summary

The first story of Jacob in the Bible is a sad sign of things to come. Despite God's promise to bless this younger brother, the "heel-grabber," Jacob uses his intelligence to hustle his older brother. What might seem small, however, starts a pattern of behavior that will ruin Jacob's family and nearly destroy his life. This account warns us of the "small" sins that will become a pattern of something greater. Finally, it serves as a contrast with Jesus, the "older Brother," who chose to give up his birthright of blessing to foolish sinners like us.

- **Genesis 25:19-23:** ¹⁹This is the account of the family line of Abraham's son Isaac. Abraham became the father of Isaac, ²⁰ and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean. ²¹ Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. ²² The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. ²³ 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."
- **Genesis 25:24-28:** ²⁴ When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. ²⁵ The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. ²⁶ After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them. ²⁷ The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents. ²⁸ Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.
- **Genesis 25:29:** Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished.
- **Genesis 25:30,31:** ³⁰ He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.) ³¹ Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."
- **Genesis 25:32-34:** ³² "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" ³³ But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him,

selling his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.

- **Hebrews 12:16:** See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son..
- Don't trade something so _____ for something so _____.
- **Galatians 5:23:** The fruit of the Spirit is . . . self-control.
- **Romans 9:11-13:** ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved,"
- **Hebrews 2:11:** So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.
- If self-control is the _____, Jesus is the _____.

Points to Ponder

1. In what areas of your life do you lack self-control? Examine your words, actions, and thoughts and share your struggles with a close Christian friend.
2. Name three reasons why Jesus is the key to the fruit of self-control. What is it about Jesus that makes us willing to wait for God's will to be done at God's time?
3. List three ways that your self-control is like fruit. (For example, fruit is what comes from roots just like self-control is what comes from Jesus.)

Homework for Next Week

Read Genesis 27.

*"Here's the paradox of Christian living. We must give up self-control to gain self-control."
—Andy Mineo*