

The Journey

1. Warm up: How did you define success when you were 10 years old? How did you define it when you were 25?
2. As we grow and evolve, the Bible encourages us to deepen our understanding of the meaning of life and what it takes to survive and thrive down here on planet earth. Superficial definitions of success tend to quickly fail us. Jeff told a story about Elizabeth Gilbert. At age 40 she had “everything” – a successful career as a writer, a big house in the Hudson Valley, a devoted husband, etc. – but she found herself feeling empty and lost and hating her life. Missionary Andrew Brunson tells a similar story from a more religious perspective. When he was arrested and jailed in Turkey, he “completely lost the sense of God’s presence.” He too felt broken and lost. In your own life, when have you felt most lost?
3. Jacob knew something about feeling lost. As a teenager, his immigrant parents forced him to leave their home in the Land of Promise to return to their ancestral village to find a wife there. Jacob had to travel 457 miles by himself on foot or donkey on a dangerous, uncertain journey into the unknown. Talk about feeling lost and alone! Read Genesis 28:6-7, and 10-17, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Verse 11 tells us that, after traveling about 100 miles of his journey, “Jacob came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place.” As he slept under the open sky, using a rock for a pillow, exhausted, barely a quarter of the way along his journey, how do you imagine he felt? Imagine yourself as him, how would you feel?
 - b. As he drifted off to sleep, Jacob had a vivid, life-changing dream. Have you ever had a dream that had a huge impact on you? Tell us about it.
 - c. Do you think God speaks to us in dreams? Why or why not?
 - d. Look again at the description of Jacob’s dream in verses 12-15. What is the meaning of the ladder and angels? If you were Jacob, what part of the words God spoke in the dream would have been most meaningful to you?
4. When Jacob woke from his dream, he exclaimed, “Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it! How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” From this, we drew the first of two key spiritual lessons we must learn if we’re going to survive and thrive in life: ***Wherever you may roam, whatever may happen, however alone you might feel, you are never lost. God will find you where you are, and it will all lead somewhere.***
 - a. Jeff said, “Around the corner ahead of you, God’s already waiting for you in that place you don’t even yet know you’re going to be.” Do you buy that? How do you feel about that?

- b. Jeff said, “When I say that it’s all leading somewhere, that doesn’t necessarily mean God put you where you are in any given moment. Maybe you screwed up and you’re in a place God never meant you to be. But God will still meet you there and take whatever happened and use it to advance your journey.” When have you taken yourself someplace God didn’t want you to be? How did God use that to advance your journey?
 - c. Jeff told about a time as a teenager when he felt terribly lost, but was also surprised to experience the presence of God right there with him. Have you ever experienced something like that?
 - d. In great literature, there’s something known as “the hero’s journey.” Joseph Campbell once said, “Every great journey begins with leaving home.” By “home,” he means something that’s familiar and therefore comfortable. Where in your life right now is God calling you to leave the comfort of the familiar and strike out into the great unknown? Are you going to follow that call?
5. Jacob did survive his hero’s journey. He did find a wife – actually two wives. And God did bring him safely home again to the Land of Promise with considerable wealth. When he got back home, Jacob must have thought, “Now life’s going to be easy and comfortable. I have arrived!” But that’s not how it happened. Jacob’s wives fought. So did his children. And in his old age, Jacob had to flee with his family from the Land of Promise to Egypt to survive a famine. Jacob died there, a stranger in a strange land. From this we drew our second key lesson for surviving and thriving in life: ***You never arrive. After every battle, there’s another battle.***
- a. Tal Ben-Shahar defines the Arrival Fallacy as “the illusion that once we make it, once we attain a certain goal or reach a certain destination, we will reach lasting happiness.” Most of us carry that implicit subconscious assumption with us. How are you most tempted to finish the following sentence? “When _____ happens, then my life will be good.” However you complete that statement, do you believe it’s true?
 - b. All of this raises the question, “Why does life have to be so hard? Why is it that after every battle there’s yet another battle?” Second Corinthians 4:16 says, “But we do not lose heart. . . . For this slight momentary affliction ***is preparing us*** for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.” In other words, each battle is a chance to grow the strength and beauty of our soul in preparation for eternity. As examples, Jeff cited what Steve Jobs said about getting fired from Apple and what Michael J. Fox said about his Parkinson’s diagnosis. As you look back over life, tell us about a tough battle you’ve fought and what you gained from it.
 - c. What battle, *i.e.*, challenge or hardship, are you facing right now? What might God be trying to teach you through it? How might this battle benefit your soul?

***Remember: God is with you in your battle, and it’s leading somewhere!
Embrace the adventure!***

Genesis 28:6-7 and 10-17

6 Isaac . . . blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there, and . . . as he blessed him he charged him, “You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women,” ⁷and . . . Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and [went] to Paddan-aram.

10 Jacob left Beer-sheba and went towards Haran. ¹¹He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place.

¹²And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³And the LORD stood beside him and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; ¹⁴and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. ¹⁵Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

¹⁶Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!” ¹⁷And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”