

Karma

Warm up: There's nothing like driving to remind us of the power of sowing and reaping. On Sunday Jeff illustrated with a classic road rage story. One aggressive maneuver begets another, so on and so forth. What's the worst road rage situation

you've ever found yourself in?

In previous weeks, we've seen how Jacob dealt sharply with his brother Esau, taking advantage of him in a moment of weakness to convince him to sell his birthright for a bowl of soup. On another occasion, we saw how Jacob was outright deceitful, impersonating his brother and tricking his blind, dying father into conferring on him the deathbed blessing meant for Esau. As a result, Genesis 27:41 tells us, "Esau hated Jacob ... and said, 'The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.'" When word reached Jacob, he and his mother cooked up a scheme to convince his dying father to send him back to their ancestral homeland to find a wife. That gave Jacob the excuse he needed to get away before his brother could kill him. Jacob ended up living with his Uncle Laban, his mother's brother. That's where we rejoin the story. Read Genesis 29:16-28, as printed on p. 3.

a. Think about a time when someone took advantage of you in a shocking way.

What happened and how did you feel?

b. Describe what you imagine Jacob was feeling and thinking when he unveiled his

new bride only to discovered he had been hoodwinked.

c. How do you imagine Leah felt?

Life had now come full circle for Jacob. He had impersonated his brother and stole the deathbed blessing. Now Leah impersonated her sister

and deprived Jacob of his hoped for wife. Even though he deserved it, Jacob still got angry.

a. Do you think Jacob saw the irony in what happened to him?

Do you think he

learned anything from it?

b. During the seven extra years Jacob worked for Laban, what would you guess

Jacob was thinking and feeling?

c. Hosea 8:7 says, "They (who) sow sto] the wind ... shall reap the whirlwind."

Galatians 6:7 adds, "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh." What do you think these verses mean? How would you explain them to a 7-year-old child?

d. Jacob learned the hard way that karma can kick our butt. When in your life have

you sown to the wind and reaped the whirlwind? What happened? What did you learn from that experience?

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It's important to emphasize that karma is not an inherently negative principle. Just as bad seed yields a bad harvest, so too good seed yields a good harvest. Second Corinthians 9:6 says, "The one who Sows sparingly will reap sparingly, [but] the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." Jesus himself said, "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and

you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” Luke 6:37-38.

a. When in your life have you sown good seed and, in return, received back an even more? What happened? What did you learn from that experience?

b. Jeff said that, when talking about sowing and reaping, it's important that we not be overly simplistic. Sowing and reaping is just one of several core principles that gets inixed together with other factors to determine complex outcoines in life. Jeff used the graph on p. 3 to illustrate his point. Take a look at the chart and critique it. What makes sense to you and what doesn't? Which of the factors in this chart do you think carry the most weight in determining outcomes?

c. Do you believe there are times when people sow good seed but experience hardship or sow bad seed but experience blessings? If so, why does this happen?

Sowing and reaping is all about accountability - the idea that actions have consequences. Yet the Bible teaches that God is all about grace. Sowing and reaping, in its simplest form, says, “You get what you deserve.” Grace says, “God gives us much better than we deserve.” Jeff challenged us to think about how grace can be reconciled with sowing and reaping. He suggested that sowing and reaping is a natural principle. If you hit a lion with a stick, she's probably going to eat you for lunch. That's how our natural world works. Grace, by contrast, is a supernatural principle. Sowing and reaping tells us how the natural world works. Grace tells us how God works. Natural and supernatural principles operate simultaneously and intersectionally, which means, life is a complex dance between both karma and grace.

a. Romans 8:28 says, “All things work together for good for those who love

God,

who are called according to God's purpose." Do you think that means that God can and will draw good out of even our worst decisions and actions? Explain your answer.

- b. Jacob's trickery begat Laban's trickery, which resulted in Jacob having an extra wife he didn't want (Leah). But without Leah, Jacob would have only had two sons instead of the twelve necessary to create the twelve tribes that would become the nation of Israel. Moreover, Jesus the Messiah ultimately came from the descendants of one of Leah's sons, Judah. So God took the consequences of Jacob's mistakes and fashioned great things from them. Have you ever experienced that? Tell us about a time when you messed up big time, but God still managed to bring good things from the mess you made.
- c. Do you think grace always gets the last word? Why or why not?

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Genesis 29:16-28 **16** Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." **20** Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

21 Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." _So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. **-4**(Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) **25**When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not

serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?"

Laban said, "This is not done in our country - giving the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me for another seven years." - Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife,

Major Factors Determining Outcomes In Life

Things I Do (Sowing & Reaping)

Things Others Do (Free Will)

Outcomes

Things God Does (Providence)

Things That Defy Explanation (Mystery)

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