

## Stairway To Heaven

On Sunday, we began a new sermon series called, “If We Knew Now What They Knew Then. . . 7 Steps To Spiritual Power.” Each week we’ll look at a different Bible character and draw a key lesson from his or her life. We began with Jacob.

1. Warm up question: Jacob came from a hugely dysfunctional family. How ‘bout yours? Tell us something dysfunctional (serious or silly) about your family of origin.
2. Jacob and his twin brother Esau were rivals. Their Dad loved Esau best because Esau was a great outdoorsman. Their Mom loved Jacob more because he loved to cook. As the elder (by a few minutes), Esau was entitled to the “birthright,” i.e., a double portion of his Dad’s inheritance. But their Dad was getting senile and blind, and Jacob tricked him into giving him the birthright instead.
  - a. How do you think it felt to be part of Jacob’s family? How do you imagine it affected Jacob?
  - b. How has it felt to be part of your family of origin? How has it affected you?
3. Jacob’s Mom seemed determined that her favorite son was going to marry a wife from her side of the family. So she got Jacob’s Dad to order him to go on a long journey back to their ancestral village to find a wife from among his cousins, i.e., the daughters of his mother’s brother. Travel was treacherous in the ancient world, and once Jacob arrived he would have to work for his Uncle to pay a dowry for his new wife. So Jacob knew he was going to be away from home for a long time.
  - a. As Jacob set out on this journey, what kinds of thoughts, questions, doubts, and uncertainties do you suspect were swirling around in his heart and mind?
  - b. Does Jacob’s time of great transition and great uncertainty remind you of a similar time of transition and uncertainty in your own? Tell us about it, and how you felt.
4. Read Genesis 28:10-22.
  - a. Jacob experienced a vivid dream that contained a divine message meant specifically for him. Have you ever experienced a dream that felt like a message from God?
  - b. What do you think the ladder and angels represented? What was God trying to convey to Jacob through those images?
  - c. Look again at verses 13-15. What specific things did God promise Jacob – and how do you think those promises made Jacob feel?

5. Verse 16 says, “Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, ‘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 Jeff suggested we are meant to learn a great lesson. In a nondescript place in his life – along the side of a road on a journey of uncertainty, in a crazy, confusing transition time in his life – Jacob experienced the presence of the infinite God right there with him one ordinary night. Lesson: **God is present – somehow, someway – in every situation, just waiting to be discovered.**
- a. Jeff said he thinks this is a foundational lesson we must learn if we want to live a life of faith. What do you think? Do you buy it?
  - b. When in your life has God’s presence and power manifest itself in a situation that surprised – and reassured – you?
  - c. Read Psalm 139:8-12. Picture a situation of great difficulty in your life (real or imagined). Try to picture how you would respond to that situation if you felt God was absent and you were on your own. Then try to picture how you would respond to that same situation if you felt confident God was powerfully present in it. How does your response differ depending on whether you think God is present or not? (This is just another way of asking: What are the benefits of believing God is vividly present in every situation? What’s lost if you don’t believe that?)
6. Jeff suggested three steps for making today’s lesson real in our own lives:
- **Ask.** Pray, “God, reveal yourself to me in this.”
  - **Expect.** Approach the situation with a lively expectation that God is going to reveal Himself to you somehow in it.
  - **Pay Attention.** Be on high alert! Watch for signs!

Is there a situation in your life right now where you feel called to apply these principles? Tell us about it.

7. As we move through this new sermon series, we will look at 7 Steps to living a powerful life of faith. Jeff analogized these to building blocks. The Bible encourages us to think of our lives like a temple under construction. I Corinthians 3:16. If you think about your life that way – a great temple under construction – where do you imagine yourself being in the construction process? How far along? How much is taking shape? How much remains? What does the temple that’s coming together look like so far? Are you pleased with progress?

**Prayer Reminder:** This week we’re sending out mailers to homes in the neighborhoods around the church telling people about us and inviting those who feel like we might be a good fit for them. Please pray that those who need us will find us!