



Day 1 — Read Genesis 30:41-43 A SCAMMER GETS OUT SCAMMED

We learned last week that Laban scammed Jacob into marrying *both* of his daughters rather than just his younger daughter. Today, we learn that although Jacob has grown through that experience, he's still looking out for himself and trying to take shortcuts. It's not just that he's trying to receive *more* livestock for himself, but he's trying to get the *best* of the livestock. Clearly neither Jacob nor Laban have any trust for the other.

Were you ever in a situation where there was no trust? Were betrayal, selfishness and revenge woven throughout the experience? What did you struggle the most with? How did that work out?

Wrong + Wrong ≠ Right

Day 2 — Read Genesis 31:31, 38-41

Jacob might have been overwhelmed by his situation

From this passage we can see that Jacob has been hard-working and loyal despite Laban's deceptions. He seems to have done everything Laban has asked of him and more. Jacob is finally voicing years of frustration with Laban.

It's not only injustice that can be overwhelming. Our responsibilities, finances, relationships, and health can also take a hit causing us to struggle. No matter how much we want to do the right thing, the cards are stacked against us. It can be crushing, wearing us down to the point of self-preservation. Have you ever had this sort experience? What was the most overwhelming to you? How did you get through the hours or the days? What gave you strength and encouragement?

Day 3 — Read Genesis 31:6-7

Jacob might have justified his decision

Jacob was betrayed yet again by Laban. It may seem that he was justified in "cheating" Laban out of the best livestock, but it still wasn't the right thing to do.

There's a message that's pervasive in today's advertising campaigns: You *deserve* it! Just watch and listen for this message, and you'll begin to notice it everywhere. It slowly becomes part of our thoughts, so when we feel overwhelmed we fall back on it. "My teacher was unfair, so I deserve to lash out at [name]." "My boss was being a jerk, so I deserve a few glasses of wine tonight." "Life is short, so I deserve to have as much fun as I want today." How are you trying to justify your choices this week?

Day 4 — Read Genesis 31:3, 11-13

Jacob might have spiritualized his action

Jesus taught his followers to love God, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Nevertheless, the inward pull toward self-preservation and self-gratification is constant. Both inner nature and cultural messages argue: *If you don't look out for yourself, no one else will?* So how's that been working for you? Has it given you greater contentment or richer relationships? How did it work out for Jacob? This lesson from history can move us beyond justifying and spiritualizing our actions, to making God-honoring and effective choices.

Day 5 — Read Proverbs 14:12; Genesis 4:6-7; 1 Samuel 13:1-13; Romans 7:21-24 THE STRUGGLE IN ALL OF US

It's easy for us to choose to do the thing that's comfortable, popular, quick, or uncomplicated. It's often not the *right* thing to do though. When have you taken a shortcut, cheated, lied, or acted too quickly? When have you put your own needs over the needs of others? Did you recognize that gnawing feeling inside of you that it wasn't the right thing to do?

Read Ephesians 2:8-10; Proverbs 3:5-6; Philippians 2:3-5 GOD'S GRACE IN OUR STRUGGLES

What do these scriptures say about who we are and how God is working through us? Do you need to carry guilt from your past mistakes? What can you imply about taking the high road? How do you put trust for God into practice? Write out some things you can do this week. How can meditating on scripture verses give you strength and endurance? What are your favorite verses to help you struggle well?