

Genesis 25:21-32

Pray for your time together in God's Word!

Read to the Group (Synopsis of Study): We are going to study a small portion of Jacob and Esau's story. We'll look at the beginning of their lives and the strife that divided them. Then we'll compare the way each of the brothers related to God and the gifts given to them and think about how we pursue God and value our relationship with Him.

Ask the Group: Have you ever given away something that you later regretted or discovered was very valuable?

Read passage out loud as a group. Option: Give group 3 minutes to look at the passage by themselves.

Leader's Note: We intentionally are using ESV because of the way it describes Jacob in vs. 27 as a "quiet man." If your group reads this passage in NIV it may be helpful to reread vs. 27 from ESV.

Genesis 25:21-32 (ESV)

²¹ And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. ²² The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. ²³ And the Lord said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the older shall serve the younger."

²⁴ When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵ The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. ²⁶ Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

²⁷ When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. ²⁸ Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

²⁹ Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. ³⁰ And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.) ³¹ Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright now." ³² Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" ³³ Jacob said, "Swear to me now." So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Ask the Group: God tells Rebekah that the wrestling of Jacob and Esau in her womb is a prophecy of things to come. Why do you think these two boys were at odds with each other?

Possible Answers: They are brothers-siblings often fight and it's easy to see how they would be in competition with each other, especially in light of the unequal treatment they received from their parents. They also were treated unequally with regard to their inheritance. Even though they were twins, and the same age, Jacob would receive less, simply because was born second. They also had different strengths - Esau was a hunter, while Jacob stayed near the tents, was better at cooking, etc.

Leader's Note: The sons also differed in their view of God. God was one of the most important things in Jacob's life, and his hunger for intimacy with God created problems for Esau. This will become evident as you continue in the study.

- **Ask the Group:** Have you ever struggled with a relationship that should have been easy?

Leader's Note: If you think your group might know what a birthright and blessing are in their biblical context, feel free to ask them (i.e. What is a birthright? What is a blessing?). Alternatively, you can read the background information below out loud to the group.

Optional Read to the Group: A birthright referred to a person's inheritance. Biblically, the first born child of a family would receive an extra inheritance from his father. When the father died, his inheritance would be divided up by the number of sons he had, plus one. The eldest son would receive two shares of the inheritance (his own and the extra one) and the remaining sons would receive a single share each. Thus, if a man died having three surviving children, his inheritance would be divided four ways. The eldest child would receive two-fourths (that is, one-half) of the estate, and the other two children would each receive one-fourth of the estate. (Deuteronomy 21:17) A birthright also carried the connotation that this son was going to carry on the father's legacy - though the blessing, discussed later in Genesis, also played a big part in that too. The family blessing was a way to designate who became the head of the extended family when the father died.

Read to the Group: Though we are specifically looking at how Jacob steals the birthright, we see that later, in Genesis 27, Jacob steals the blessing as well.

Ask the Group: We see in Genesis 25 that Jacob manipulates his brother into selling the birthright and later, in Genesis 27 he deceives Isaac into giving him the blessing. What do you think motivated Jacob to do this?

Possible Answers: He was jealous of his brother and the relationship he had with their father. He may have wanted more wealth. He might have thought Esau did not deserve it.

Read to the group: It's easy for us to look down on Jacob as the less masculine son or the "weaker" brother who is by default inferior to Esau. But the word in Verse 27 that describes Jacob as a "quiet man" has been hard to translate. The root word is sometimes taken to mean "perfect" or "complete" or "morally and ethically pure." It's the same word that God uses to describe Job when talking to Satan. "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." (Job 1:8) Later on in the bible, Malachi 1:2-3 and Romans 9:13 both reference how God loved Jacob. In this light, Jacob is not the weaker brother, but has a better understanding of the importance of the birthright and a heart for God.

Ask the Group: Given this insight into Jacob, what do you think the birthright meant to him?

Possible Answers: Though the means by which Jacob acquired the birthright were wrong, at the heart of Jacob's desire is a hunger to be blessed by God, and God responds favorably to this. God blesses him as the third patriarch and changes his name to Israel. He knew that part of the responsibility of carrying the birthright was to carry on his father's spiritual legacy. The Bible often connects people to God through their heritage (i.e. think about all the passages referencing "the God of your/their/our fathers" (Exodus 3; 1 Chronicles 29; Acts 3:25; Acts 7:32 etc.)). Jacob's desire for the birthright was connected to his desire for intimacy with God.

Ask the Group: What do you think it means when the passage says Esau despised his birthright? What may he have been thinking or feeling when he sold his birthright to his younger brother?

Possible Answers: He was foolish and young, but the heart of it might be a lack of respect for God, a lack of a relationship with God, or a lack of interest in God. He did not value the birthright for what it was—an opportunity to carry on his father's line and the covenant his father had with God. He subordinated both the honor and duty of carrying on his father's legacy for meeting his immediate, physical, and selfish desires.

- **Ask the Group:** What are ways that these same motives or feelings that Esau had, similarly influence us and how we respond to God in our lives?

Possible Answers: immediate material needs or desires overtake responses of faith and obedience, having a low view of God may cause us to dishonor Him, cast aside his blessings and seek instead to honor ourselves

Tell the Group: Now let's look at a two parallel passages from the New Testament, and see the role of birthright to believers, and how God wants us to pursue His blessing.

Read passage out loud as a group.

Ephesians 1:4-8a (NIV)

⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us.

Ask the Group: The birthright in Genesis is a shadow of the birthright given from God, through Christ, to believers. Through the gospel, what is the believer's birthright and blessing?

Possible Answers: Adoption into the family of God, forgiveness of sin, being made holy and blameless, reconciliation to God freely through Christ, having God's grace lavished on us

Ask the Group: Because of sin our birthright has been forfeited. From this passage, how has Jesus reclaimed our birthright?

Possible Answers: We lost our birthright because we are sinful. Jesus' death on the cross restored our relationship with God and through God's grace, even as we continue to trade our "birthright" for sinful desires, we receive God's forgiveness and salvation.

- **Ask the Group:** Reflecting on this truth, how do we respond, as ones who have been reclaimed into God's family?

Possible Answers: Humility, love, holy living empowered by God's grace in our lives, overflowing with thankfulness, intentional reflection and meditation on this truth, awe at God's work, abandoning a works-based mentality regarding our standing with God, repentance of sin

Read passage out loud as a group.

Hebrews 12:15-17 (NIV)

15 See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. 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. 17 Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

Ask the Group: What were the consequences of Esau despising his birthright?

Possible Answers: He regretted doing it and realized that the short-term gain of getting his physical need met was not worth the long-term loss of the birthright and blessing he was in-line to receive from his father.

Ask the Group: What do you think are the consequences of despising our birthright, given in Christ? Has there been a time in your life where you experienced these consequences?

Possible Answers: Lack of intimacy with God, loss of purpose for who we are created to be and what we are created to do, hopelessness, feeling dissatisfied, loss of joy in experiencing God and his presence and blessing in our lives

- **Ask the Group:** Have you missed opportunities to receive or pursue the blessing of our birthright because of these obstacles?
- **Ask the Group:** Esau sold away his intimacy with God for a cup of soup. Are there ways that you are selling your intimacy with God for something less?

Ask the Group: In light of the redemption we receive through Christ, how can we be more like Jacob and pursue greater intimacy with God?

Ask the Group: What is our community application of this passage?

Leader's Note: You may choose to create your own application question as a group based on your discussion, or highlight a question from this study.