



Group Session

Small Group Study

Overview

After God sent a ram to save Isaac from being sacrificed, Isaac grew to manhood and took a wife of his own. Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons, whom they named Jacob and Esau. This session is about the struggle between those two sons. Despite the customs of the day, God used the younger son to carry out His promise to make Abraham and his descendants into a great nation. This is a vivid reminder that each generation, and ultimately each person, must learn to trust God's plan for themselves.

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Engage

QUESTION

Share about a time in your life when you were so jealous of what another person had that it caused you to do things you now regret. (Example can be silly or serious.)

As his aged father prepared to bless his oldest son, Jacob and his mom Rebekah decided to trick Isaac into blessing Jacob instead. This seemingly simple plan resulted in years of separation and ultimately regret for both brothers before they were reunited many years later.

Watch

As we watch this video, consider these questions:

QUESTION

What is something that you waited a long time for (or are still waiting)? How did your relationship with God impact your attitude as you waited?



Consider

Early one morning Thomas, a nine-year-old boy, came across an unwelcome sight when he walked out his back door. His next-door neighbor, Sam, was in his own backyard playing with a brand-new toy. But it wasn't just any new toy—it was the coveted action figure both boys had been longing to own.

Brokenhearted, and not just a little jealous, Thomas went back inside and began to cry. Finding his mother upstairs, he threw a tantrum until she agreed to take him to the store and buy the action figure for him. As you might imagine, all the world was right again for Thomas after getting the new toy.

It's a silly story, likely one played out in all our lives in one way or another. The problem for Thomas, however, wasn't in wanting the toy. The problem began with his feeling of jealousy over Sam getting it first. Closer to the heart of the problem is how Thomas successfully manipulated his mother into buying him the toy. But the real problem is not in what Thomas did as much as who he was becoming—someone driven by jealousy and willing to manipulate those he should be trusting.

The real problem is that Thomas didn't trust his parents to make the decision of whether he should even have the toy at all. This theme plays out over and over again in Scripture. God, who should be trusted, has a plan for our good. But jealousy of others causes us to fight against God's plan.

QUESTION

Is there a time in your childhood you can remember not trusting your parents to make the right decision for you?

What the Bible Says

Let's explore what God shows us about trust through the decisions of Jacob and Esau. The younger one was chosen by God to play a bigger part in His plan of salvation for His creation and the human race. The other was not. Only three generations into Abraham's family becoming the nation through whom God's salvation would come to the world, and we are already finding enormous problems because people aren't trusting God, His plan, and their role in it.

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Twins at Last

Read Genesis 25:19–26.

Like Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah were at first unable to bear children together. Through answered prayer, God not only blessed them with one son, but two. Along with the twins came an interesting word from God that both would birth nations and that the older son, Esau, would serve the younger, Jacob. That was quite the change since in that culture, the firstborn son was typically given advantages that placed him in the stronger position. Yet for some reason God chose to go against the cultural norm.

QUESTION

What is an example from your life when someone was allowed to do something against the norm? What problems did it cause? (For example, a junior varsity player was allowed to play on the varsity team causing strife, or a younger sibling was allowed to do something an older sibling wasn't allowed to do at that age, etc.)

The Struggle to Trust God

Read Genesis 27:1–10.

Even though God spoke a clear word that Jacob would be greater, Rebekah didn't trust God to make this happen. She felt that she needed to control the process using deceit and manipulation. Perhaps we can sympathize with Rebekah that it was hard for her to see how God's salvation would really come through this tiny family. But even though God's plan seemed impossible, Rebekah should have trusted God.

QUESTION

Have you ever wanted to "help God out" in a situation rather than trusting Him to resolve it?

QUESTION

Why is it so hard for us to trust God beyond what we can see or understand?

Jacob Deceives His Father

Read Genesis 27:18–25.

Five different times Isaac asked Jacob to prove who he was. Isaac was obviously suspicious. Maybe Isaac knew that his wife was capable of deception since they had schemed together to deceive the king of the Philistines some years earlier (Genesis 26:1–11).

Whatever the reason, the facts did not add up in Isaac's mind. However, with each response, Jacob deceived and lied even more. If he had any doubts about whether to complete this ruse, he was in too far to turn back now.

QUESTION

When you were a kid, did you ever try covering up wrongdoing only to realize that deception took you further than you intended to go?

God Is in Control

Read Genesis 27:30–38, 41.

It is important to note that God's plans were not thwarted by Rebekah and Jacob's deceit. God's sovereign plan will be accomplished. But how much unnecessary pain was caused? It makes us wonder: if they hadn't tricked Isaac, how would God have caused Jacob to lead Esau?

We have no way of knowing. But knowing the character of our loving God, we can safely say it would not have caused the pain Esau felt in this moment. Would it have led him to want to kill Jacob instead of serving him? Almost certainly not. Rebekah and Jacob's lack of trust in God's ability to bring about His plan had a devastating fallout. People were hurt, and a family was destroyed.

QUESTION

Think back to the earlier question about problems caused by situations that went against the norm. How might this situation have worked itself out in a positive way that those involved could not have anticipated? How did interference in the situation complicate matters more than necessary?

Reflect

It's easy to judge Rebekah and Jacob for trying to force things to work out in their favor, rather than trusting God. The greatest mistake we could make, however, is to act as though we could not be just like them.

Instead, we should allow the Spirit of God to search our heart and reveal the areas of our life where we may be tempted to force our will instead of trusting God's. We should remember that trusting God to make good on His promises is an active, rather than passive, part of our faith. It is achieved only through the hard work of consistent prayer and meditating on His promises.

Listen to God

The goal of *Listen* is not only to gain an understanding of God's Word, but also to pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few

moments and reflect on the following questions. Choose the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

Recall a time when you caused unnecessary hurt by trying to take matters into your own hands rather than trusting God's plan.

QUESTION

In what ways has jealousy over others having what you desire caused you to act in ways you regret?

QUESTION

How might learning to have greater trust in God and His plan help with the hurt you may have experienced or caused in the past?

QUESTION

What thoughts or habits do you need to let go of in order to grow in your trust of God in this area of your life?

QUESTION

What area(s) of your life seems to be the most consistently difficult for you to trust God?

Think on this thought from our Group Session time: Trusting God to make good on His promises is an active, rather than passive, part of our faith. In other words, it is achieved only through the hard work of consistent prayer. Here are some encouraging reminders from God's Word.

- God's ways are higher than ours. (Isaiah 55:8–9)
- Despite our feelings at times, God is not being slow to accomplish His plans. (2 Peter 3:9)
- Ultimately, God is good and so are His plans for us. (Psalm 34:8)
- Though the righteous will face trials, God will rescue us. (Psalm 34:19)

QUESTION

Consider writing down these truths and the Scriptures, and post them in a place you will see them often.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and remember to pray for them during the week.

Did You Know?

God uses all kinds of people in His plans. The Old Testament makes it clear very early that He isn't limited to exclusively working through the firstborn son, regardless of ancient, cultural norms.

God changed the younger brother Jacob's name to Israel, and Jacob's descendants became the nation through whom Jesus would bring God's promised salvation to Israel and the whole world. God used Jacob's wife Rachel, a younger sister, to miraculously give birth to Joseph, who later fulfilled God's plan to provide His people with food during famine.

Moses, with the assistance of his older siblings, would take point on leading God's people into the Promised Land. And the youngest son of Jesse, David, would eventually become the greatest king the nation of Israel would ever have.

Personal Devotion

Listening to God is something we need to do every day. Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1

Read Genesis 25:19–27:41.

Look back over the Group Session section and complete the Personal Reflection Questions. If time permits, read Genesis 25:19–27:41 again.

QUESTION

What do you sense that God is saying to you?

Personal Devotion

Day 2

Read Matthew 26:47–56.

In this passage we see Peter using his sword to force God's plan in a way that God never intended. Similar to Rebekah not trusting God's plan, Peter was not demonstrating trust in Jesus' ability to be in control of the situation because Peter misunderstood how God's plan would unfold.

QUESTION

How does Jesus' response in the Garden demonstrate a complete trust in the Father?
In what way can you put that kind of trust into action in whatever you're facing today?

Personal Devotion

Day 3

Read Isaiah 55:8–9.

In a moment of soaring poetry, the prophet Isaiah reminds us of one of the most crucial points for learning to trust the plans of God. In short, God has a different perspective than we do. He knows what we cannot know and sees what we cannot see.

QUESTION

In what two specific things does God declare that He is “higher” than us?

QUESTION

How can you include declaring this truth in your daily prayers?

QUESTION

How can you allow this to bring comfort to you today?

Personal Devotion

Day 4

Read 2 Peter 3:8–9.

These verses are specifically about God delaying judgment to work His plan for us. He desires that every person come to salvation in Jesus. But the truth of this Scripture is that despite appearances, God is not actually being slow to accomplish His purposes—even though it *feels* to us like He may well be. This truth can be applied in many situations in our own lives.

QUESTION

On Day 3 we looked at how God’s “ways” and “thoughts” are different from ours. According to 2 Peter 3, in what other way is God’s perspective different from ours?

QUESTION

How has the feeling that God isn’t doing things in the proper timing affected decisions in your own life?

Personal Devotion

Day 5

Read Psalm 34:1–22.

David wrote this psalm concerning one of the most painful times of his life. King Saul was trying to kill him, and David was running for his life. David began to deceive people and even act crazy to get out of threatening circumstances. Looking back later, David wrote about the goodness of the Lord to him despite his mistakes. David didn't always get it right. But we can learn from his mistakes, and we can apply the lessons he learned to our present circumstances.

QUESTION

Take a moment to recall a time in your life God has been good to you despite your mistakes and mishandling of situations. Spend some time worshipping the Lord for His goodness in your life.

QUESTION

God's plan for your life doesn't include a promise that you will never face troubles, even as a righteous person. How can knowing you will face troubles possibly help you prepare for them?