#1. FEAR TURNS TO JOY

Read Genesis 33. Based on Jacob's interactions with Esau, what lessons can we conclude that Jacob has learned about God's faithfulness? Psalm 113 says, *"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore."* Like the psalm, what is so wonderful and fulfilling about this chapter?

#2. DOUBLE TROUBLE

Read Genesis 34 carefully. This chapter presents a complex and challenging narrative about sin, justice, and revenge. It's often said that one sin leads to another—how do you see that dynamic playing out here?

Do you think Simeon and Levi were justified in their response to what happened to their sister? Why or why not? If you were in their position, what might have been a better way to seek justice for their sister?

Read Romans 12:17-19. How does this passage challenge or support Simeon and Levi's actions? Imagine you are one of the brothers advising Simeon and Levi before they act. What counsel would you give them, keeping in mind the call to peace from Romans?

Can the problems caused by violence ever be fixed with more violence? What would be a "Christian" way to address a situation like this?

#3. SOME IRONIC TWISTS

The first time Jacob came to Bethel he was fleeing his brother, who wanted to kill him, and after having deceived his father. Now Jacob returns to Bethel in the wake of his sons deception and murder. Additionally, Jacob makes preparations to go to Bethel—"the house of God—but first he must hide all the idols in his household. We also learn that Jacob's household has lots of idols, but Jacob is supposed to be the follower of the one the God (Note: the earrings are a indicator that these idols were actually being worshipped). Compare all this to the constant faithfulness of God, who steps into the chaos and disorder and calls Jacob, yet again, to go to Bethel. And there God speaks words of Amazing Grace to his wayward, fickle servant.

God did not say anything to Jacob about "strange gods" or changing garment sin his command of Genesis 35:1 yet we find Jacob telling his household about these matters. What does this yell you about Jacob? In what ways do we, like Jacob, carry "idols" or distractions in our lives that hinder our relationship with God and make our lives feel chaotic or unfaithful? How do we address these idols in worship every Sunday at our own Bethel—St. John?

SESSION 10 Answer Key:

1. God turns Jacob's fear into joy. Jacob humbles himself. Lots of beautiful elements here: Forgiveness, echo of the story of the prodigal son, humility, story of Joseph and his brothers. As much as possible, without compromising God's word and our faith, we should make peace in the world—especially family. God set the example in this, for while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:10). Jacob also makes restitution (restoration). He stole the birthright, so he now pays Esau back. This is often the hardest part for us. We are usually okay with saying the words, "I'm sorry" when we've hurt someone. But are we also willing to make things right? Repentance is costly! It means changing our ways and making the changes necessary to make things right.

   Note that Jacob does not go and live with Esau, unlike Lot who chose to live near Sodom. Jacob goes toward the promised land as directed by God. I'm sure he and Esau visited. Later they both bury their father, Isaac.

2. Shechem's sin seems to instigate the whole episode, but he seems to want to make things right. Jacob seems conspicuously passive in this chapter. Why did he not intervene? Jacob doesn't seem to mind the plundering of the Shechem. Jacob also seems to be dragging his feet in entering Caanan. For while, Shechem is technically in Caanan, God had told him to ravel to the "land of his fathers" (Genesis 32) and at Bethel (Genesis 28) Jacob had vowed to return to Bethel and worship God. But Jacob has now purchased property and built booths in Succoth and purchased property in Shechem. Is this a *Shechem and stay* or *Bethel or bust* mentality? Does this delay set the stage for the rape of Dinah? Jacob also seems content with the offer of Hamor to essentially be assimilated into Hivite culture by intermarrying. This would be a grievous departure from God's plans and purposes for Jacob and Abraham had forbidden Issac from marrying Canaanites (Genesis 24 and Issac had forbidden Jacob (Genesis 28). . Simon and Levi pretend to be pious about circumcision—the very sign of the covenant God made with Abraham, but they use it as a pretext to lie and kill and destroy.

   Zeal for a right cause is good, but moderation and due process are what a wise person seeks in finding justice. Time and patience and prayer rather than our hastiness, gives God time to act.

   Christians must remember that we are image of God in this world. We should seek to do all things in an honorable way and peaceably. When Christians resort to shady shenanigans and corrupt or violent means, it only makes the ways and word of God look bad and gives a terrible witness to the world. Consider how even to this day, many atheists will point to the crusades as proof that God's ways are evil. Why did Jacob not invite Shechem to marry his daughter and become a worshiper of the true God?

   A Christian way to handle this would be to start with a reminder that Christ died for the men of Shechem and for the sins of Simeon and Levi.

3. I find that Jacob proves to be more of a negative example than a positive one. I wish he would be more zealous for being faithful to God in the day-to-day. But He is so much like any of us. The faith we profess with our lips is not always lived out in our lives. But the good news is that Jacob is not the main actor in the story. God is! And He is faithful and gracious and merciful and good, even to sinners like Jacob and to us.

   We may not have actual statues and shrines that signify our idolatry, but there are many things in our lives that reveal our devotion. How many these things put us into compromising positions, taking us away from worship, causing us to associate with godless people, and skew our priorities away from the word of God? In response to this reality (and it is our everyday reality), the first thing we do in worship is confess our sins and unworthiness.