#1. OPENING DISCUSSION

Over the past few weeks, we've observed that Isaac's family is far from the picture of an ideal godly household. The husband and wife engage in schemes against one another, and both parents have their favorite between their two sons. The rivalry between the brothers escalates as they compete for their father's blessing. This kind of drama and conflict mirrors the struggles we've seen in the lives of Abraham and Sarah. Yet, despite the actions of these flawed individuals and their ungodly choices, the Book of Genesis reveals God's patient and unwavering grace. His grace is not contingent upon human righteousness, but is instead rooted in God's abundant provision and love.

Consider Hebrews 11:20-21 & Matthew 28:19-20. How do we see in these passages that God's kingdom is built purely by grace and not man's behavior or choice?

How does this shape our relationship with God and influence how we view and treat others with their imperfections?

#2. A "NOW" KIND OF FAITH (HEBREWS 11:1)

Read Genesis 28:10-22. What do you think was going through Jacob's mind as he settles in for the night, out in the middle of nowhere? How does Jacob respond to this incredible dream? Consider his oath to make that place "God's House" and to "tithe." Is this some kind of deal or bargain that Jacob is trying to make with God?

#3. FINDING FAULT

The promise God makes to Jacob is spelled out for us: 1) God promises to be Jacob's God, just as He was the God of his fathers before him—Abraham and Isaac. 2) God promises that the land will one day belong to the descendants of Jacob and that they will be a mighty nation of people and from them will come blessing for all peoples. 3) God promises that He will bring Jacob back to this land and will not abandon Jacob in all his time away.

For all Jacob's striving to get Isaac's blessing, here God comes to Jacob at such an unlikely moment and abundantly delivers blessings a hundred-fold. What might this teach us?

#4. It's not hard understand the promise given to Jacob, God spells it out. But what is the significance of the vision of the ladder, the angels? See what Christ says about it in John 1:43-51.

#5. The account of Jacob's ladder culminates in the understanding that Jesus embodies the true ladder connecting heaven and earth, as He enters humanity in the incarnation. Unlike the expectation of human effort to climb toward God, the ladder and Jesus Christ—the one true ladder—illustrate that the relationship with God is established through faith in Him, who comes down to provide salvation and friendship with God. In what ways does God regularly extend His grace and friendship to you through Christ?

SESSION 4 Answer Key:

#1 – Genesis powerfully challenges our natural assumptions about worthiness and grace. It reveals a stunning truth: God's choice isn't about our resume of righteousness or obedience but is founded purely on unmerited grace. Think about it—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, despite their moral flaws and questionable choices, are celebrated as pillars of faith. In Hebrews 11, we're met with the jaw-dropping declaration that these imperfect men lived by faith. What does that tell us about the essence of faith? It's a humbling reminder that living by faith isn't about us at all; it's about what God can do through us.

Now, let's take it a step further. When we look at the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20, we see Jesus extend a breathtaking invitation to "ALL NATIONS." He calls us to go forth and baptize without mentioning prerequisites, tests, or any conditions. This radical openness challenges our human tendency to impose barriers and judgments. Imagine the implications: God's family isn't exclusive, and His grace isn't earned; it's a gift freely given.

This message can be nearly scandalous for us as humans, who often struggle to be so open and accepting. It pushes us to reflect on our own attitudes—are we quick to judge or slow to embrace? As we ponder these truths, let's celebrate the beauty of a faith that doesn't depend on our perfection but revels in God's boundless grace.

This beautiful reality allows us to approach Him with our imperfections without fear of rejection. By embracing this grace, we cultivate a deeper relationship marked by humility and gratitude, acknowledging our need for His forgiveness.

Additionally, understanding that God works through flawed individuals encourages us to resist judging others. Instead of fixating on their shortcomings, we can uplift and support them, recognizing that God's grace is available to all—just as it has been offered to us.

#2 – We can only imagine what Jacob is going through, but it doesn't take much to consider the loneliness and fear that he was feeling. The journey before him is roughly 500 miles. Note that he doesn't stay in the nearby city of Luz. Perhaps he is fearful of what they might do to him or perhaps he's afraid that Esau might find him there.

He's amazed to discover the intense presence of God in that place—where he is lonely, desperate, fearful and hunted. But sometimes that exactly where God chooses to come to us. Interestingly, Bethel is mentioned in Chapter 12:8 and 13:3, where God appeared to Abraham in this same vicinity and Abraham built an altar there an worshiped God there and dwelt there.

In response to God's three-part promise, Jacob makes a three-part vow. Like other ancient vows recorded in scripture, this vow isn't meant to coerce God, but merely to be a fitting response. Jacob pledges to worship God, make a house for God in Bethel, and give a tenth of his wealth to God. This is the second mention of tithing in the bible. Here as in Genesis 14, it is not commanded by God but shown to be a response of gratitude to God's gracious favor. His response shows the measure of how much he understands and rejoices in God's love and grace.

#3 – God's plans aren't contingent upon our smarts or strength. He comes to Jacob at his lowest point. Here Jacob seems much like Abraham in Genesis 13, who arrived in Canaan, far from his family and home. We too should remember and embrace the promises of our baptism and the Lord's supper when we are at our lowest. In baptism we have become His children. He is a perfect father and will not abandon His children.

#4 – This is the gateway to heaven. But not the physical place of Bethel, rather the promise that would be fulfilled through Jacob's offspring, Jesus. Ancient commentaries on this text often interpreted the "it" at the end of verse 12 as "him," referring to Jacob not the ladder. This might be the meaning Jesus intends when He says that the angels and will be ascending and descending upon "him" in John 1. Notice, also, that despite how modern interpretations of this text often talk about how God supplies this ladder for us to climb up to Him, Jacob never sets foot on this ladder. He is asleep. He is as good as dead (Ephesians 2:1). He can do nothing to come to God. In fact, he is on the run from the mess he has made back home. But God, alone, comes to us. Jesus truly is the gateway to haven for us.

#5 -- Word and sacrament ministry.