#1. OPENING DISCUSSION

Moments of disappointment in life is something we are all familiar with. We've all faced setbacks, pain, and tough challenges. When we're in the thick of it, it's natural to wonder, *"Does God even notice what I'm going through?"* How can we, as Christians, cope with these feelings of disappointment?

#2. LIKE A SOAP OPERA

Read Genesis 29:1-30. It's hard not to laugh at the irony of Jacob being the "deceived deceiver." The master trickster Laban gets both his daughters married off, all the while, extracting seven more years of free labor from Jacob. Additionally, the description of Leah and Rachel in Gen 29:17 is always funny to me. The NIV says " Leah's eyes were delicate, but Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance." The ESV says Leah's eyes were "weak." I once heard a Rabbi say that a more literal translation was that Leah was "hard to see" meaning hard to look at (not pretty), but the kind English translators pushed the description toward "hard of seeing" or poor eyesight, eventually becoming the NIV's "eyes were delicate." But the passage seems to make more sense as not pretty vs. beautiful.

So, if the sisters' appearances were so strikingly different, how come Jacob didn't notice until the morning after their wedding night?

Read Genesis 29:31 – 30:24. The intertwining lives of Jacob and his literal sister-wives are a whirlwind of longing, heartache, and deep-seated struggles. Just as Jacob and Esau were rivals, we see the same in Leah and Rachel. Leah yearns for her husband's love, pouring her heart into a quest for affection that seems endlessly out of reach. Meanwhile, Rachel battles feelings of inadequacy, desperately seeking validation as she grapples with the sorrow of being unable to bear children. And then there's Jacob, simply trying to navigate the chaos while keeping his sanity intact! Amid this tangled web of emotions and conflicts, what profound connections can we draw between their tumultuous story and the overarching narrative of God's incredible plan for our salvation through Jesus Christ?

#3. WAITING ON GOD

In many cases, modern technology allows us to have much more say in how and when we have children and a family. But the desire to control such things is as old as Rachel and Leah and superstitious beliefs about a mandrake plants ability to improve fertilization. But ultimately, as Jacob suggests in Genesis 30:2, we cannot take the place of God--nor should we try to. In the end, despite all of these sister's lamenting the fruitfulness of their wombs, it is God who opens the womb and closes it again. Modern-day fertility treatments, procedures and medications can be a slippery slope

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--while on the one hand, provide much blessing for a couple struggling to concieve, but on the other putting man in the place of God.

How can we balance our desire for control over family planning and reproductive choices with the understanding of God's sovereignty in the process of conception and fertility? In what ways can we

seek God's guidance in these deeply personal decisions while also making use of modern technology?

#4. What's in a name? Part of the problem we have with our reading today is that it just seems to be a list of births between to competing wives. But each name given to the son's of Jacob indicate something about the faith of Rachel and Leah. Did they trust God or do we see some serious idolatry going on here? On what or on whom were these sisters basing their meaning and purpose for life? In their pursuit of family, what sin did they resort to that we've seen before in Genesis?

Today, most parents choose names for their children primarily based on how they sound or their uniqueness. Occasionally, a name might be passed down to honor a relative—what we might call a "family name." However, it's rare for us to select names that reflect our faith and trust in God. Perhaps our children are relieved that they aren't burdened with names like Peace, Mercy, Increase, or Ichabod. But behind the scenes, there is something greater at work. The man that Rachel and Leah were married to was no ordinary man. He was the bearer of the promise given to Abraham and Issac. This means there was much at stake in the conflict between these sisters. What could this mean for any of the sons that would be birthed by these sisters?

#5. The sorry, sordid tale of Jacob's years in Haran and the infighting that characterized his family and His relationship with the Lord compares and contrasts well with his grandfather Abraham's life and relationship to God; for where Abraham's life was characterized by faith, Jacob's life seems to be characterized by grace. Would you agree or disagree?

SESSION 4 Answer Key:

#1 - Reflect on Scripture: Turn to the Bible for comfort and guidance. He always creates everything through His word, that includes hope. Hebrews 11:1 –faith is trusting God's promises as the patriarchs did. It's not mere optimism. It's trusting His Word. Verses like Romans 8:28 remind us that God works all things for the good of those who love Him. Meditating on these promises can provide hope during tough times.

Pray: Pour out your feelings to God in prayer. Share your disappointments, frustrations, and doubts with Him. Prayer can be a source of strength and can help you find peace. Find Comfort in Jesus' Example. Remember that Jesus experienced disappointment too (e.g., His prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane). His example shows us that it's okay to express pain while still trusting in God's plan.

Focus on God's Faithfulness**: Reflect on past experiences where God showed His faithfulness in your life. This can bolster your trust in His plans for your future.

Today's text is to be interpreted in this same way… Hebrews 11 teaches us that for as imperfect as all these patriarchs were, they trusted in God's Word and Promise that salvation would come through the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

#2 - We simply don't know how or why Jacob did not know it was Leah. We can only guess, i.e., wedding veil, dim lighting, or Jacob was too drunk to notice and fell asleep after. But, the text says nothing about a veil or being drunk, and it seems rather absurd to think that he would not recognize someone for which he waited seven years to marry and with whom He was madly in love. Moreover, this only questions Jacob's failure to notice the trick, but does not question Leah and Rachel's involvement. Did Rachel do nothing to stop her sister from taking her husband? Did Leah not think about the consequences of forcing herself on Jacob through trickery? And what does it say about Laban and the morality of the people of Haran that a ruse like this would be accepted? Finally, it seems the thing that the author wants us to note is the irony that Jacob who deceived his father with an elaborate ruse, is now himself deceived by an even more elaborate ruse.

What connections can we make to the story of salvation?

>Just as Jacob deceived his father Isaac to obtain the blessing, he finds himself on the receiving end of a deception. This highlights a fundamental truth about humanity—that we all are flawed and can fall victim to our own schemes. It serves as a reminder of the need for grace and redemption, which is a central theme in the narrative of salvation.

>Although the events unfold through human deception and manipulation, God's overarching plan remains intact. Jacob's anguished journey leads him to become the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, demonstrating how God can work through our mistakes and circumstances. This mirrors the salvation story, where despite human failures, God remains faithful to His promises and purposes.

>Just as Leah often gets overlooked in the future, God's grace often comes in unexpected forms and from surprising sources. Despite Leah's less desirable position, she becomes an integral part of God's lineage, a reminder that God's purposes can use anyone, regardless of their status or situation.

>How much more beautiful is the story of God giving His own son (as unlikely as that seems) to be our Heavenly groom. There are no prerequisites or conditions. He marries himself to us all through holy baptism.

We see that God keeps His promise made to Jacob at Bethel. Even despite the messed up circumstances of his family, God grants Jacob 12 sons and one will indeed be the he through whom the Savior comes.

#3 – God does give us free-will in matters not related to salvation. So, for us to forbid something that God does not explicitly forbid would be wrong. However, God's word does give us much that we need to live a godly life and to honor God with our lives. Though we may be free to do many things, not everything gives us the opportunity to serve and honor the Lord. Indeed, there is much that we can choose that can make honoring God with our lives difficult and complicated. It's like credit-card debt. Credit cards can be a blessing and enable us to purchase things we don't have the money for at the moment. But the debt that ensues can make it difficult for us to be the generous people the gospel calls us to be. So to with something like IVF. It can make the blessing of a baby possible. But what of the many embryos that result? What of the doctor who gets to decide which is viable and which is not? What of the debt that is incurred?

#4 - While they pray and name their children after the Lord's provision, nevertheless, the rivalry and the animosity and despair seem to suggest that their husband's affections and their fertility was of greater value than will of God. Whatever we must have instead of, or in addition to the one true God, is our idol. Rachel and Leah's theology may be orthodox—they talk about God and talk to Him—but their treasures something else. What is it that makes you worry and be anxious? What is it that most infuriates you or brings you joy? What is that you obsess over most or sacrifice anything for? Your answer to these questions may well be your idol.

In service to their idol, they are willing to give their maidservants to their husband, as Sarah had in Gensis 16. Though Rachel seems to credit God for the births of Dan and Naphtali, the author of Genesis does not mention God's agency in this as is the case with other births mentioned in this chapter.

The background question, ultimately is: Who would be the mother of the one through whom the Abrahamic blessing would extend? Who would be the ancestor of the long-awaited messiah. God reverse things by making the birthright extend through Juda (although, it should have been Ruben, Simeon or Levi, but as we will see they are disqualified).