



Love Community Baptist Church

Wednesday Night Virtual Bible Study

Dr. Michael O. Oyedokun II, Senior Pastor/Founder
pastor@lovecommunitybc.org
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God Never Gives Up on You – Max Lucado

CHAPTER 3

“Ladders from Heaven”

Genesis 28:10-17

You've had, or will have, moments of deep despair. You've had, or will have, hours in which your eyes weep a river, and your heart breaks into a thousand pieces. You've had, or will have, journeys through dry, barren stretches that will leave you exhausted and isolated. You will feel stripped of all you cherish. You will look around and see no one to comfort you. You will search for strength, but you will search in vain, for strength will not come. Yet in that desolate moment as you sit near the headstone and cry, on the barstool and drink, or in your bedroom and sigh,

God will meet you.

You will sense and see him as never before. Do not begrudge the barren stretches, for in the barrenness we encounter God. We find the presence of God. Jacob did. And no one was more surprised than he.

Life was in free fall. Jacob left behind a weeping mother, a seething brother, and an aging, angry father. He had no herds. No servants to serve him. No guards to protect him. No cooks to prepare food for him. No companions. No resources.

Jacob was the grandson of a baron. The son of an aristocrat. Had he lived today, he would have been raised in a mansion, pampered by servants, and educated in the finest schools. He had everything he needed. And then, from one moment to the next, he had nothing. He ran for his life, suddenly and utterly alone.

On the evening of the second day, as the sun set over a village called Luz, he stopped for the night. He did not enter the city. Perhaps its occupants were dangerous people. Perhaps Jacob was insecure. Why he stopped short of Luz is not revealed. What we are told is this: “He took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep” (Gen. 28:11). Without so much as a bedroll for his head, he was the Bronze Age version of the prodigal son. The desert was his pigpen. But the prodigal in the parable did something Jacob did not do. “[He] came to himself” (Luke 15:17). He snapped to his senses. He looked at the pigs he was feeding, considered the life he was leading, and determined, “I will arise and go to my father” (Luke 15:18).

Jacob showed no such initiative. He made no resolve, displayed no conviction of sin, showed no remorse. Jacob did not pray, as did Jonah, or weep, as did Peter. In fact, Jacob's lack of repentance is what makes the next scene one of the great stories of grace in the Bible.

Daylight dulled to gold. The sun slid low like a half-lidded eye. Orange gave way to ebony. Stars began to flicker.

Jacob dozed, and in a dream he saw:

A ladder resting on the earth and reaching up into heaven, and he saw angels of God going up and coming down the ladder. Then Jacob saw the LORD standing above the ladder. (Gen. 28:12–13 NCV)

A ziggurat spanned the distance between Jacob's barren, borrowed bed of dirt and heaven's highest, holiest dwelling. The stairway was a flurry with activity: angels ascending, angels descending. Their moving was a rush of lights, back and forth, up and down. The Hebrew wording of Jacob's response implies raised arms and open mouth. A direct translation would be "There, a ladder! Oh, angels! And look, the Lord himself!" (v. 16, emphasis added).

When Jacob awoke, he realized that he was not alone. He'd felt alone. He'd assumed he was alone. He appeared to be alone. But he was surrounded by august citizens of heaven! So are we.

What is their task? "All the angels are spirits who serve God and are sent to help those who will receive salvation" (Heb. 1:14 NCV). There is never an airplane on which you travel or a classroom into which you enter that you are not preceded and surrounded by God's mighty servants. "He has put his angels in charge of you to watch over you wherever you go" (Ps. 91:11 NCV).

Jacob was not given a lamb, but he was given heaven's comfort. The message of the vision could not be clearer: when we are at our lowest, God is watching over us from the highest. Between us stretches a conduit of grace upon which messengers carry out his will.

Our prayers have a thermostatic impact upon the actions of heaven.

Mothers, when you pray for your child . . .
Husbands, when you ask for healing in your marriage . . .
Children, when you kneel at your bed before going to sleep . . .
Citizens, when you pray for your country . . .
Pastors, when you pray for the members of your church . . .

Your prayers trigger the ascension of angels and the downpour of power!

Jacob saw heavenly activity. One might well wonder why God would pull back the veil and show Jacob the hosts that surrounded him. After all, Jacob had not sought God.

Yet what Jacob saw scarcely compares with what Jacob heard. You'd expect a lecture, a holy scolding. But God gave Jacob something altogether different. God told Jacob that he would make him and his descendants a great people who would cover the earth. Despite Jacob's deception and shortcuts, God repeated to him the blessing he gave Abraham and Isaac: "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you" (Gen. 28:15 NIV). The fugitive had not been abandoned. The trickster had not been cast aside. God committed himself to the lifelong care of Jacob.

Again we might wonder why. Had Jacob done anything to show he was worthy of the blessing? No. Jacob had done nothing but slimy stuff thus far. He leaked integrity like a sieve. He played his brother like a two-dollar fiddle. He worked the system like a riverboat gambler. There is, thus far, not one mention of Jacob in prayer, Jacob in faith, or Jacob in earnest pursuit of God.

*God did not turn away from one who had turned away from him.
He was faithful. He still is. "If we are faithless, he remains
faithful" (2 Tim. 2:13 NIV).*

Grace does this. It pursues. Persists. Shows up and speaks up. In our dreams. In our despair. In our guilt. Grace is God on the move saying, "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (Gen. 28:15 NIV).

Extraordinary, don't you think? Jacob certainly felt so. "Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it'" (Gen. 28:16). How many people could say the same? The Lord is in this place, but they don't know it. They are unacquainted with the God who meets us. They believe in a God who created the world but not a God who is involved in the world. A God who made the universe but not a God who makes a difference in the day-to-day. A God who started it all, but not a God who walks in the midst of it all. Christian atheists, they are. Their faith has a limp because they do not recognize the presence of God.

He is the conduit through which blessings come and prayers ascend. He is the intermediary between you and God. The question is not "Is he active?" The question is "Are we watching?" Jacob was away from his family, an escapee from his brother, a victim of his own folly. The vulture pecking at his joy was reared in its own nest. He was penniless and homeless, not even a blanket for his head. He thought he'd lost it all, but in actuality he'd found it all. He found a heavenly Father who found him first.

Jacob responded admirably. "He took the stone he had used for his pillow and stood it up as a memorial pillar and poured oil over it. He christened the place Bethel (God's House)" (Gen. 28:18–19 THE MESSAGE). Jacob turned his pillow into a pillar and renamed the place of his pain. The stone pillow, a symbol of all he lacked, became a holy pillar, a memorial to all he found. The land was a windswept badland no longer. It was a place of God. What is your version of a stone pillow? What reminds you of mistakes you've made, things you've lost? A divorce decree? A headstone? The picture of the kids who forgot you? What is your version of a desert? An empty house? A hospital room? A desktop of unpaid bills? The promise of Jacob and Bethel is this: the Lord is in the wilderness, in the despair, in the misery, mess, and mayhem, and in broken hearts. God will meet you in this unwanted and unwelcome waypoint. With his help your pillow will become a pillar; your barren land will become a place of worship. God will speak, angels will come, and you will soon declare: "The LORD is in this place, and I did not know it."

Lucado, Max. *God Never Gives Up on You: What Jacob's Story Teaches Us About Grace, Mercy, and God's Relentless Love* (p. 36). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.