

## CHAPTER 11

# GRACE WILL BRING US HOME

## Genesis 35

**S**urely God was done with Jacob.

His season at Shechem was a toxic wasteland.

Pitiless and inhuman. Jacob forgot who he was and what God had commanded. He was only twenty miles from Bethel, within a zip code of obedience. But he stopped short. His disobedience resulted in a devastated family. Rape. Carnage. Sacrilege.

Genesis 34 is the darkest chapter in the Jacob story. It's not that God was not present. It is that God was not sought. Jacob once again lived life by his own terms and paid a high price for doing so.

God has had his fill of the man, right? The flip-flopping fraud. What a sorry excuse for a patriarch. God will surely abandon him, turn away. And who could blame him? But that's not what happens.

Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who ap-



peared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.” (Gen. 35:1 NIV)

Instead of giving up on Jacob, God spoke to him! Directed him! God took the initiative. Whereas God is not mentioned in Genesis 34, his name appears, by my count, eleven times in the first fifteen verses of chapter 35. Jacob’s tent was still pitched in the shadow of Shechem. Blood was under the fingernails of his sons. The stench of death was in the air. Jacob and his sons had behaved like the pagans who surrounded them.

Yet, God came to Jacob. And Jacob came to his senses.

So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where

I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone.” So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. Then they set out, and the terror of God fell on the towns all around them so that no one pursued them. (Gen. 35:2–5 NIV)

Jacob had an Old Testament version of a come-to-Jesus moment. He reassumed the role of elder of the clan, leader of the family. No more false gods. No more flirting with Shechem. No more vacillating and waffling between convictions. Jacob resumed the journey home.

Yet, the hero of the hour was not Jacob. The hero was God. It was God who prompted Jacob, not Jacob who sought God. It was God who moved Jacob, not Jacob who moved God. It was God who stepped in, not Jacob who looked up. Jacob



repented, yes. But only after God called out his name.

God not only stirred Jacob; he reminded him of his new name and of his promise to him.

God said to him, “Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.” So he named him Israel.

And God said to him, “I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will be among your descendants. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you.” (Gen. 35:10–12 NIV)

Jacob forgot God over and over again, but God never once forgot Jacob. The One who promised to bless, blessed, and Jacob was confirmed, yet again, to be Israel.

Grace. All grace.

Could you use some?

Each day seems to bring a new way for us to wander off course. Anyone who tells you they haven't needs to read a book on honesty. The Christian life is not difficult; it is impossible. Need proof? Consider the Everest-level standard set in the Sermon on the Mount.

“Whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.” (Matt. 5:22)

“Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (v. 28)

“Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” (v. 39)



“Love your enemies, bless those who curse you.” (v. 44)

I’m 0 for 4! Exactly how can we fulfill these commands?

Who has a chance? What hope do we have? The same hope that Jacob had. Grace. “Though sin is shown to be wide and deep, thank God his grace is wider and deeper still!” (Rom. 5:20 PHILLIPS).

Isn’t that the great discovery? “He pre-destined us to be adopted by Himself as sons through Jesus Christ—such being His gracious will and pleasure” (Eph. 1:5 WNT). God moved you into his family. He changed your name, your address, and gave you a seat at the dinner table. You are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6).

A young woman once approached me after hearing a sermon on forgiveness. I was happy to see her and hear how she was doing. She had bat-

tled much rejection in her young life. But on this day she felt something different. “I’ve made a discovery.”

“What?”

“I’m not an exception to acceptance.”

Neither are you.

So for heaven’s sake, accept your acceptance.

No more self-incrimination. No more self-accusation. No more self-condemnation. Make grace your permanent address. God has joined himself to you. You are “complete” (Col. 2:10). You are “made right with God” (2 Cor. 5:21 NLT). You are “holy, and blameless, and above reproach” (Col. 1:22). “He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:14 ESV).

God has made a covenant to love you with an everlasting love, and he will keep it.

He did so with Jacob.

The old patriarch finally made it back to Bethel.



I wonder if he went on a search for the stone he'd used as a pillow. How long was he in Bethel before he told his wives that he'd need a backpack and a camel for the night? Did he meander around the desert in the fading light until he found the place where he saw the ladder? Did he rustle up a rock, lie on his back, and stare at the stars as the memory of the stairway came back to him? Did he reflect on the mess he'd made of his life? He'd cheated his brother. He'd swindled his nearly blind father. But in spite of it all, God had opened the heavens and lowered the celestial ladder so that Jacob would discover the greatest lesson of grace: God pursues us when we turn away from him.

In 1890 Francis Thompson, a Roman Catholic poet, described God as "The Hound of Heaven":

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;

I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  
Up vistaed hopes I sped;  
And shot, precipitated,  
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears.<sup>1</sup>

Thompson speaks of Jesus as "this tremendous Lover" who pursues "with unhurrying chase, and unperturbed pace, deliberate speed, majestic instancy."

Would you open your heart to this possibility? God is wooing you, pursuing you, romancing you. Refuse him if you wish. Ignore him if you desire. Linger in the stench of Shechem for a time. But he will not give up. Did he not promise to lead you home? And has he ever broken a promise?

Not on your life.



This is the message of God, the aggressive  
promise of grace.  
Trust it.