

“Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph: Seeking Blessing and Finding Hope” // Hebrews 11:20–22 //

*Hebrews 11: Broken People and Famous Faith #7*¹

Hebrews 11:20–22... We are looking at three stories today that are all about passing the torch from one generation to the next. The level of formality is pretty foreign to us today... unless you are really into the British royal family, like I know many of you are.

I’m not entirely sure WHY so many people are obsessed with William and Kate and Harry and Meghan, especially since our national ancestors left England to escape the royal family. But still, I know you are. And so, you’ve watched the documentaries. You watched *The Crown*. You read Harry’s memoir, *Spare*. You’re tracking with the news of Princess Kate’s illness and all of the conspiracy theories about it. If one of the members of the royal family has a kid, or visits Wimbledon, or hiccups in a weird way, y’all know about it.

Even if you aren’t THAT into the royal family, however, you probably still know who is in line to be king. Right? Right now, Charles is the king, taking over for his mother, Elizabeth, who reigned for more than 70 years, and next in line is ... William. His whole life, he’s been training for this role. He’s served in the military, he’s been a model

¹ Works consulted: Michael Kruger, *Hebrews for You* (The Good Book Company); John Owen, *Hebrews* (Crossway Classics); Tim Keller, “[Abraham and the Test of Faith](#)”, October 30, 1994, Redeemer Presbyterian; Redeemer Presbyterian; Tim Keller, “[Real Faith and the Only Son](#),” June 17, 2001, Redeemer Presbyterian; Joby Martin, “[Mountains Week 1: Abraham and Isaac](#)”, March 10, 2019, The Church of Eleven22; Craig Groeschel, “[Exponential Week 1: Seed of Faith](#)”, March 12, 2018, Life Church; Sidney Griedanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis*. Tim Keller, Gen 48:8, [The Meaning of Free Grace](#). And others as noted throughout.

citizen, dutiful and put together. Why? Because his life is bigger than just him. He’s not just William. He’s William, the next king of England.

Harry, on the other hand? Well, given that he’s always known he won’t be king, he’s the sometimes-loveable wild child. The royal family wishes he would get it in line a bit more, but I mean, what else could you expect? He’s not training to be king. He’s just Harry.

When you hear today’s stories, I want you to imagine what it would be like if Charles, preparing to step down from the throne—or, maybe, on his death bed—invited in William and Harry ... only to announce to the world, “*Harry will be the next king.*” THAT is the kind of drama we’re dealing with in today’s stories, and it has profound gospel implications.

Remember, the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 11:6 that without faith it is impossible to please God, and defines faith as the three-fold conviction that:

- God is real
- He keeps his promises
- Seeking him is worth the effort

And then he introduces 16 different Old Testament characters to illustrate this faith. Think of faith as a many-sided diamond, and each of these people reveals to us one side of that diamond.

Today, we come to vv 20–22, a group of three men, all of whom did something at the end of their lives that showed incredible faith: [20] By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. [21] By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. [22] By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones. (Now, if you know anything at all about the Bible, you know that these guys--Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph--each had amazing, colorful, adventurous lives, and the writer of Hebrews could have picked out so many different things from their

lives to demonstrate faith, but instead he chose something rather mundane and obscure. I mean, think about Joseph: Joseph's life was crazy! Even after being sold into slavery, unjustly accused of rape, imprisoned and forgotten about but he never lost his confidence that God was at work and at the end of his life he said, "Everything that you meant for evil, God meant for good." It's one of the most extraordinary stories of faith in all of Scripture, and yet, the author of Hebrews chooses only the blessing of his sons and Joseph's instructions about his burial to illustrate faith.

What's up with that? To understand why he chose these moments, and their profound implications on our faith, we have to get our minds around the story of Jacob.

You ready? This story is always fun. Genesis 27 if you want to turn back there. Jacob and his brother Esau were fraternal twins, and about as opposite as two biological brothers could be.

The author of Genesis presents Esau as an "outdoors-y" kind of guy, sort of a man's man—he liked to hunt, ate lots of red meat. His name, Esau, means literally "red and hairy." Which is kind of funny when you consider that he was given this name *at birth*. Evidently he came out of the womb like a chia pet. They basically named their kid, "Fuzzy." I imagine that grown up, he looked something like this→



And I'm pretty sure he would have loved NASCAR races.

Jacob, on the other hand, was more of an indoor cat. We know he had soft skin, he liked to cook; he probably used a luffa and he knew not to wear white after Labor Day. He had great hair and was a fabulous dresser. Think of this [kind of guy](#).

Now, Esau was the oldest, by just a few seconds, but that meant he got "the blessing." Now, real quick-- "blessing" in those days meant more than some kind of general "well-wishing." "Blessing" in those days was the official bestowal of the family inheritance. You became

the executor of the estate and the head of the family clan. And for Abraham's descendants, it also meant your line would inherit the specific promises given to Abraham that one of his offspring would bring salvation to the world.

By tradition this blessing always went to the oldest son, which, like I said, was Esau by just a few seconds. And in the case of Esau and Jacob, that actually worked out well, because Esau completely embodied the stereotype they envisioned for a national leader--Esau was a warrior, big and manly and aggressive. The author makes clear that Esau was his daddy's favorite, because Esau had all the qualities that men in those days wanted in their sons. In his commentary, John Calvin points out that the narrator of Genesis himself prefers Esau.

So, bottom line: Isaac was excited to give the blessing to Esau and everybody expected that. Esau was the preferred heir; Jacob was the spare.

But just before their birth, something strange had happened. Rebekah, Jacob and Esau's mom, went to see a prophet because she was having a really rough pregnancy. In those days, if you were having a rough pregnancy, you didn't go to see an OBGYN, you went to see a prophet. And I'm very grateful we're not in those days anymore, by the way. Anyways, she said to this prophet, "Look, I don't know what's going on in there, but I feel like I'm going to give birth to a couple of ultimate fighters--like Conor McGregor and Jon Jones are in there--or something." And the prophet of God said, "That's because two warring nations are in your womb..." which is what every mother of twins wants to hear, of course. But then the prophet of God went on to say (*this is **Genesis 25:23***) that in this case, the younger, Jacob, is the one who will prevail and to whom God will give the blessing.

Jacob turns out to be not only less manly than Esau, he also turns out to be somewhat of a dirtbag. We first see this, somewhat symbolically, in something that happened as these little boys were coming out of the womb. As I said, Esau came out first, and just as he did, this little hand came out after him and grabbed a hold of his heel, as if to pull him back and say, "Oh no you don't! I want to be first." For that reason, they gave the name to this second son, 'ha Yacob,' which literally means "the heel grabber." But it also means "the deceiver." One commentator says, "The Trixter." "Mr. Sneaky." (When I played soccer in high school we used to have to run this 3-mile course as part of warm-up. The last two miles of the course made a big loop through the woods, and one of the guys on the team would sometimes duck into the trees when we got into the woods and then join us when we came back out. That would have been Jacob. "Mr. Sneaky.")

You may think that's an odd name to give a baby, but that name turns out to capture Jacob's entire approach to life. And this all comes to a head when it was time for Isaac, their dad, to officially bestow the blessing on Esau.

Genesis 27:1, "When Isaac was old and almost blind, he called for Esau, his older son, and said, "My son?" "Yes, Father?" Esau replied. **2** "I am an old man now," Isaac said, "and I expect every day to be my last." (And he tells Esau to go out and hunt him up some wild game, dress it and make a feast out of it, and they'll use that feast as a ceremony where Isaac formally bestows the blessing on Esau. So Esau grabs his crossbow and his hunting knife and he heads out into the woods.)

Verse **5**: **But Rebekah overheard the conversation.** Esau had been Isaac's favorite, but Jacob was Rebekah's favorite. So she says, **9** "Go

out to the flocks and bring me two fine young goats. I'll prepare your father's favorite dish from them. 10 Take the food to your father; then he can eat it and bless you instead of Esau before he dies." ("But mom," Jacob replied. "He wants to bless Esau, not me. And I know he's almost blind, but he's not an idiot, he'll for sure know it's me. I mean, Esau's voice is deeper, and think about how hairy Esau is and how smooth my skin is! Plus, I smell like lavender and he smells like some weird mixture of armpits and onion.")

Verse 12:(And) What if my father touches me? He'll see that I'm trying to trick him, and then he'll curse me instead of blessing me." Vs. 13, Rebekah convinces him he can pull it off... 14 So Jacob followed his mother's instructions, bringing her the two goats. She took them and cooked a delicious meat dish, just the way Isaac liked it. 15 Then she took Esau's best clothes, which were there in the house, and dressed Jacob with them. 16 She made him a pair of gloves from the hairy skin of the young goats, and she fastened a strip of the goat's skin around his neck. (I'll be honest, I'm into the man's man bit as much as the next guy, but when to impersonate you somebody feels the need to cover themselves with a dead goat, that's a bit much for me.)

But Jacob does it, and 18 Jacob carried the platter of food to his father and said, "My father?" "Yes, my son," he answered. "Who is it—Esau or Jacob?" 19 Jacob replied, (high) "It's Esau, your older son. ("Ahem, [LOWER]: It's your older son, ESAU.") I've done as you told me. Here is the wild game, cooked the way you like it. Sit up and eat it so you can give me your blessing." 20 Isaac asked, "How were you able to find it so quickly, my son?" Uh-oh, turns out the old man is not as senile as everyone thinks! But Jacob is quick on his feet: "Because the Lord your God put it in my path!" Jacob replied. FIRST SHOT, DAD! Amazing. 21 Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Come over here. I want to

touch you to make sure you really are Esau." 22 So Jacob went over to his father, and Isaac touched him. "The voice is Jacob's, but the hands are Esau's," Isaac said to himself. 23 But he did not recognize Jacob because Jacob's hands felt hairy just like Esau's. So Isaac pronounced his blessing (...) on Jacob.

Now, watch this: 30 As soon as Isaac had blessed Jacob, and almost before Jacob had left his father, Esau returned from his hunting trip. 31 Esau prepared his father's favorite meat dish and brought it to him. Then he said, "I'm back, Father, and I have the wild game. Sit up and eat it so you can give me your blessing." 32 But Isaac asked him, "Who are you?" "Why, it's me, of course!" he replied. "It's Esau, your older son." 33 Isaac began to tremble uncontrollably and said, "Then who was it that just served me wild game? I have already eaten it, and I blessed him with an irrevocable blessing before you came." 34 When Esau understood, he let out a loud and bitter cry. "O my father, bless me, too!" he begged. 35 But Isaac said, "Your brother was here, and he tricked me. He has carried away your blessing." 36 Esau said bitterly, "No wonder his name is Jacob, SNEAKY, for he has deceived me... Then Esau broke down and wept." (And he vowed to kill Jacob the next time he saw him, which led to Jacob fleeing for his life. He'd never see his mom again, and he would come back to Canaan only after several decades for the final days of his father.)

Here's the thing: Jacob didn't need to do all this. What's ironic about this whole story is that Jacob had already been given the blessing by word of prophecy. Had Jacob just believed what God said and trusted him with it, he could have saved himself so much heartache.

So, what's it got to do with faith and Hebrews 11? *Jacob's search for blessing sounds like the opposite of faith, like Jacob is scheming to get*

what God had promised him instead of trusting him for it. Exactly, which is what makes what Jacob does as he is dying so significant: **Hebrews 11:21**, By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.

This is the part of the Jacob story you've never heard, but it is probably the most important part, which is why the writer of Hebrews zeroes in on it. **Genesis 48**: We're now at the end of Jacob's life; Joseph, his son, has gone through all that he's gone through and now rules over Egypt, and he brings in his dad, Jacob, to bless his two boys before he dies. Jacob reaches out his arms to bless them. Now, in Jewish culture, the right hand was the hand of blessing, and as Joseph reaches out his arms to bless the boys, he crosses his arms, putting his right hand, the hand of blessing, on the younger son, Ephraim, and his left hand on the head of the older one, Manassah.

Joseph objects--He's like "Dad, no! You're blessing the wrong one. Manassah is the older one, he's the one that gets the blessing." To which Jacob says, "I know, son, but God wants to bless Ephraim, the younger one. Who is older or who is more worthy is not the basis of God's choice. Grace is." Jacob, who had spent his whole life trying to become worthy of blessing, now accepts it as a gift of grace.

Jacob had learned the essence of the gospel. You see, the real blessing that God would give was not property rights in the Middle East or to be the head clansman of a nomadic tribe. The real blessing was God's favor, his forgiveness, a place in his family and his kingdom--is not given to those who earn it or strive for it. God's inheritance is given by grace and has to be received that way. One day God would reach out his hands of blessing; his right hand of blessing should have rested upon the head of Jesus. But instead God crossed

his arms. God laid the right hand of blessing on us, and the hand of cursing on Jesus. God made him who knew no sin to become sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

And if you believe that, and receive it, his blessing becomes yours. Write this down. The first dimension of faith we see in these verses...

1. By faith they... sought the blessing through grace

Listen, inheritance laws don't work like this anymore, but we all still seek blessing. What is blessing?

- **It's validation.** We want someone to tell us we're ok, that we have value. That we're important.
- **It's the promise of security.** That we belong. That we will be taken care of. That things are going to turn out ok.

Children are born in a posture of crying out for blessing. And the first place we seek it is from our parents, and if we don't hear it, the effects are devastating.

- **Lance Morrow**, writing a few years ago in *Time* magazine, says, "The damage caused by a father's absence may be severe and may last a lifetime. It is a shadow; the longing of sons for their fathers is almost physical; something passionate, profound. It is often mysterious to sons what it is they want from their fathers, but I have seen it in other men, and I see it in my sons: their longing for me."
- **It's because we're seeking blessing.** And when we don't hear it, it has devastating effects. Studies show that kids without a strong father figure are 46 percent more likely to use drugs, 27 percent more likely to use alcohol, and 52 percent more likely to skip school. One school study noted that 98 percent of its discipline problems were emotionally damaged young boys whose common

characteristic was father loss. What you hear in that are kids crying out, “Somebody look at me”; “Somebody bless me!”

Some of you still have wounds from words of blessing you didn’t hear when you were young. We come to recognize that one of the most untrue things was that little jingle, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” Psychologists tell us that the words we hear, especially early in life, even off-handed comments, have a massively shaping effect on us. “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words make or break my very soul.”

So what do you do when you seek blessing but aren’t getting it?

Well, what did Jacob do? He tried to dress up like someone else. That’s what we do, right? We try to dress ourselves up like whomever we think we need to be to obtain that blessing. We try to become Esau so our dad will bless us. But it’s exhausting, and it leads only to stress and disappointment and heartache and broken relationships.

- Years ago I saw an article about Madonna in (I think it was) *Vogue* Magazine. If you’re under the age of 35, Madonna was one of the most popular female 80s singers. No, I don’t have an active subscription to *Vogue* magazine. This was a one-off. But in this interview Madonna said, “My drive in life comes from a fear of being mediocre. That is always pushing me. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being but then I feel I am still mediocre and uninteresting unless I do something else. Because even though I have become somebody, I still have to prove that I am somebody. My struggle has never ended and I guess it never will.” Look, I’m not exactly a Madonna fan either, but that is a very insightful statement. She might know herself better than you know yourself.

What we seek in blessing God gives us in Christ. In Psalm 139, David exults in how special he is to God. He says, “You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made... Your eyes saw my unformed substance and in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me.” (Psalm 139:14–16)

David says, “I was fearfully and wonderfully made, in your image, to play a role.” Something you should understand about creation. God created the world incomplete so that we could be his co-Creators. He made man a gardener: he put him into an unplowed field so man could work the ground and beautiful flowers and plants for food. In the same way, he creates each of us with certain abilities to develop the earth. Not all of us have the same talent; he puts different parts of his image into different ones of us. But you, YOU are fearfully and wonderfully made, for a purpose.

But David goes on: “Where could I go from your Spirit? Or where could I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol (the Old Testament word for hell), you are there!”(Psalm 139:6)

- David is saying, “I literally can’t get away from your love! Even if I made my bed in hell, God, you wouldn’t leave me there.” Truth is, of course, we did make our bed in hell. We rejected God and ran as far away as we possibly could from him. And yet, even there he still kept his promise to protect us--he entered hell and took it in our place.
- It is no wonder David says, “How precious also are your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I could count them, they would outnumber the sand!” I used this illustration several weeks ago, but the number--of grains of sand on the seashore--is 8 quintillions, by the way--or, 8 with 18 zeros after it. That number looks like this: 8,000,000,000,000,000,000. That’s the amount of

times God has thought about you, individually, and your protection.

- **(Illustration: Pick up a handful of sand** and let it run through fingers) I wonder what God thought about ME in this one? Or with this one and this one and this one? And when you're at the beach, look down that long beach and those billions of grains of sand and think, "Each of these grains of sand represent a thought about ME." I can't even get my mind around that.
- ***Do you ache to be special to someone? You are special to God. Do you long to be loved? He loves you more than you could imagine. I mean, MY GOODNESS! God's thoughts about YOU outnumber the sands on the seashore.***

Where do you get that? By grace. I just got back from a tour in Germany and Austria that about 60 of us here at Summit took, where we walked the path of Martin Luther in the Reformation. **The Reformation started with one insight...** salvation is a gift. Most people live with the question of have they done enough to be accepted by God. Have they been good enough; prayed enough; gone to church *enough*. Martin Luther said that God's salvation in the Bible is a gift. We don't get it as a result of doing enough to earn it; we receive it as a gift, and then spend the rest of our life serving God in thanks for it.

- I've told you before it's like you're a SWIMMER ABOUT TO SWIM, and at the finish line is a banner that says "acceptance..." And we're thrashing with all our might through the water, because unless we get there first, we feel like we won't be accepted; we won't have worth. For many of us, competition brings out the WORST in us: it makes us ANXIOUS, HATEFUL, BITTER, JEALOUS, Most of all, EXHAUSTED. And that's because competition is tied to our self-image. The gospel reverses that scene. Imagine instead of "acceptance" being the banner waiting for us at the end, it's what is written on the little platform you jump off of. The little platform says 'acceptance,' and you swim not from the desire to prove you

are a beloved son, but from the assurance that you already are one.

- Or, we were doing family devotions one night, and I was talking about the concept of grace. Well, during this season our family was also watching *The Voice* together, that show where you have the 3 professional singers who listen to you sing with their chairs turned backwards so they can't see you, and if they like what they hear, they hit this button and their chair spins around and across the bottom it says, "I WANT YOU," which means they see such gifting and potential in you they want to take you on and train you. So, during this devotion about grace, my daughter Allie, who was about 8 at the time, said, "Dad, it's like God hits the button and spins around his chair and says, 'I want you,' before we ever started singing."

Here's what I can tell you... you are loved right now, though you are Jacob. Though you are the "second-born." Though you are not the right kind of person. Though you lack some of the qualities the world values or your parents valued--maybe you don't think you're pretty enough, thin enough, smart enough, successful enough. God says, "I want you! You are mine." Though you've spent your life scheming with God and man instead of trusting in God's promise. God says, "I want you, and my grace is enough."

Before we leave this, I'd like to speak specifically to parents for a moment. Don't create Jacobs in your house. Don't make your words of blessing something that has to be earned. That's what the world does. Don't let it be that way in the home. The home should resemble God's love in that acceptance is given as a gift, not in response to you becoming something.

In their great little book called, literally, *The Blessing*, by Gary Smalley and John Trent, that uses examples like Jacob's to talk about the key ingredients in any blessing. There are 5, all of which we see in Jacob and Isaac's story: **(1) Meaningful touch, (2) Spoken words, (3) Communicating high value, (4) Envisioning a special future, and (5) Genuine, undying commitment.**

Give those to your kids. Give it to other people in your life.

- **Meaningful touch:** A hug, a gentle pat on the back, or a reassuring hand on the shoulder. My wife sometimes does this for me. When she knows something is bad for me, I'm getting some criticism or some bad news, if she's anywhere nearby she'll just reach out and put her hand on me and it means, "I'm here. Who cares what they say. I believe in you."
- **Verbal affirmations.** We've all heard the story of the older couple where the wife complains that he never says "I love you," and he responds, "Well, I told her on the day we got married, and she should assume that if it ever changes that I'll tell her." That's not how people work! We need to hear these things spoken repeatedly.
 - 3 phrases every kid needs to hear: I love you, I'm proud of you; you are good at...
 - I've heard that the 4 most powerful words you can speak to someone are, "I believe in you" or "You have what it takes." Though I guess technically that's 5, that you get the point.
 - God creates by speaking... let there be light. He declares his acceptance of us.
 - In the gospel, God declares his acceptance of us! And that creates.
- Third: **Communicating high value.** Call out their strengths. Declare what they are good at. And don't feel like you're not just making it

up; Psalm 139 says this is how God made them. They reflect God's image in a specific way. Then Eph 2:10. recreated in Christ Jesus for specific good works. Call those things out.

- Don't let your relationship with them be characterized by criticism. Sure, we all have to correct our kids. But what I want them to remember is how much I believed in him. I want them to one day stand on my grave and say what I will one day say on my dad's--nobody ever believed in me like this man did.
 - Many of you think, "Well, if I don't criticize them, no one will. The whole world criticizes them." Speak words of belief and blessing. If you have to err, err on the side of criticizing too little and blessing too much.
- Fourth: **Envision a special future** (for them, and help them envision it), which lifts their eyes above today and points them to tomorrow. Help them envision their potential and the opportunities before them. This is particularly important for kids, who struggle to think big picture like this. But if **you** do, you'll give them a sense of purpose to grow into.
- Finally: **Genuine, undying commitment.** Show them they are more important than your job. Than your golf game. Show them by being home for family dinner. Planning vacations and spring break trips.

You say, "Well, I don't have kids," or, "I'm not married." Show these things to others God puts in your life. We live in a world where people all around us cry out for blessing, and become Jacob to try and get it. Show them that what they're looking for is in God's love in the gospel.

2. By faith they... found hope in God's plan

Three times in these verses some Old Testament character looked beyond their present circumstances to what they believed God was doing. Isaac was a nomad still in a tent, and in blessing Jacob and Esau he looked forward to the time when God would give them the land and keep all his promises to them. When Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph, he and his whole family were living as refugees in Egypt because of a famine. His blessing pointed to his confidence that God would bring Israel to a land of blessing just like he had promised Abraham. Joseph gave instructions about having his bones exhumed and returned to the promised land. He didn't want to be buried in Egypt. Even though things had worked out well for him in Egypt, his hope, his home, was in the land of God's promises.

You see, Joseph knew that Israel was in for a rough time in Egypt. Ultimately, Jacob's descendants--that small clan that would eventually become the nation of Israel--was going to be in Egypt for 400 years, where they would become slaves, and only then would God lead them out. Joseph knew it was going to be rough. But Joseph had first hand experience with God's faithfulness even in the midst of dark days. You see, Joseph had himself been imprisoned for many years. He was sold into slavery by his brothers because they were jealous of him. Then he was unjustly accused of rape and imprisoned and forgotten about for many years. But eventually, he saw that God had a plan, and Joseph learned that even in the dark chapters, when it seemed like God was absent, God was at work. And one day he even declared to his brothers, "What you meant for evil in my life, God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." Genesis 50:20

So Joseph now, looking ahead to some dark days for Israel, said, "I know from first hand experience that God is at work. I know he'll keep

all his promises, so I want my bones to be buried in the land of those promises."

Faith makes its home the land of God's promises, not its present circumstances.

What does that kind of faith look like in our lives?

- It looks like not giving up even in dark days. Even when we feel unjustly imprisoned, or lied about, or suffering. My friend Justin Taylor says, "For those who are in an intractable situation with no light at the end of the tunnel, consider the story of Joseph. Abandoned by his siblings and sold as a teenager. Falsely accused of rape and imprisoned for two whole years. Unreconciled to his family for 22 years. And he saw that God intended all of it for good." You can look ahead and say, "I know when it's all said and done, God is going to keep all his promises. And I'm going to build my home there. I want my bones to be kept there."
- Showing this kind of faith means rejoicing when some kind of financial or physical tragedy hits you, that God is using it for his kingdom. My friend Rachel, who was on this trip to Germany with us, is a young mom of 4 who was diagnosed with leukemia 2.5 years ago. It came out of nowhere. She thought, "I don't think I'll get to see my kids graduate high school." She told Veronica and me that one of her worries was that she was going to die before her youngest kid, who was only about 2 at the time, would even know her and he would grow up only knowing her through pictures. But she said, "In those things that don't seem "good" to me, I remember that I am not the definer of "good." He is. I've known seasons of happiness and ones of sorrow. In this valley of sorrow, I realize that joy was never found in this world at all. Those

previous seasons of comfort and happiness were vapors that faded when the next season came. But this everlasting joy, the kind my soul needs, is only found in nearness to him. So, I thank him for the cancer. I praise him for the chasm that created a chasm only he could fill. Because in that chasm, my soul knows fullness of joy.”

- Can you do that in a leukemia diagnosis? Or a lost job? Or a failed business or a foreclosure? I trust, God, that you are keeping your promises and one day I’ll see even this as part of your good plan in my life and so I’ll make my home, plant my tent, bury my bones in that place, rather than here in Egypt. I won’t let this tragedy make me despair. My bones rest in God’s promised land, the land where I know he keeps all his promises.
- **Showing this kind of faith means things like continuing to serve God even when your own kids aren’t following Jesus.** And you say, “God, I want to serve you but what about my kids? When are you going to bring them back?” Or serving God when your own marriage has fallen apart? And you say, “God, I trust you... I place the bones of all my hopes in the land of your promise where one day I know I’ll see that your plan was always and only infallibly good in my life.

Can you say that right now: All my life you have been faithful? Can you say it by faith looking to the future? All my life you *will be* faithful?

Jacob takes it one step further: [21] By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.

That’s not just a random little detail. Why did Jacob have a staff? Well, in the midst of all his striving, to get his attention one night God sent an angel to wrestle with him, and just before the angel left it touched Jacob’s hip socket and knocked it out of joint, and for the rest of his life, Jacob walked with a pretty painful limp.

In Jacob’s final moments, he leans on that staff and worships. He says, “Thank you God for the wounds, for even in the wounds, especially in the wounds, you were working good in my life. Through these wounds, I learned to depend on you.”

3. By faith they... worshiped through their wounds

Jacob saw this wound as the most important event in his life! In **Genesis 48:15** Jacob said of God, “God, who has shepherded me all my life to this day.” **Illus:** Jacob saw his relationship with God like the shepherd... I’ve told you about the shepherd who breaks legs... Psalm 119, “Before I was afflicted, I went astray.”

Or the ancient Japanese art of kintsugi, where they...

Faith recognizes that God is present in my wounding. He hasn’t gone. He hasn’t forgotten me. He’s shepherding me. He’s always using things for my good. He promises that no good thing will he withhold from me. He promises that he’s working all things together in my life for good.

Where has he wounded you?

By faith they...

- ...Sought the blessing through grace

- ...Found hope in God's plan
- ...Worshiped through their wounds

Where do you need to hear this today?

- *Where are you striving to be someone else rather than receiving God's blessing as a gift of grace in Christ?*
- *Where do you need to trust in God's plan--that he is keeping his promises to use all things for good, and to bury your bones--to place all your hopes--there in that land instead of this one?*
- *Where do you need to look at a wound--a loss, a failure, some kind of physical pain--and worship through it, realizing that even in that God never stopped being good to you?*

Good news! God's blessing and these promises are given to you as a gift. But you have to receive it! But if you do, one day you'll be able to sing with all of us, *"All my life you have been faithful; all my life you have been so, so good; with every breath that I am able, I will sing of the goodness of God. Your goodness is running after me! Surely goodness and mercy will indeed follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, just like you said!"*