

“Oh Boy, Twins!”
Genesis 25:19-34

It’s estimated that one out of every 250 pregnancies results in twins. That’s .45% of the time. My High school shop teacher, Mr. Kaufman, came from a family of 11 children that included two sets of twins. Before we moved to Camp, my grade school class at Carpenter Elementary in Lake Orion had five sets of twins. That’s the class not the school.

I read about a twin boys who had both been adopted out to different parents. They met later on in life. They both had the name Jim. They both married someone with the same name. They both had dogs growing up with the same name. They both had migraines. They both drove Chevy’s. They both smoked Camel cigarettes.

One guy wrote about the first time he went to the house of a girl he was dating in college. The door opened, he told her he liked what she had done with her hair, they kissed and went inside. The gal then hollered upstairs to her sister that her boyfriend was there. He said they were weird girls.

Perhaps even worse is a story my Dad told me about identical twins in his High school. The one would go out on a date with his girlfriend and then the next night his twin brother would take her out.

Twin brothers were running for class office their senior year. When it came time after school for speeches the one gave his speech for Vice-president, but his brother had forgotten about the event so had walked home. When it was time for his speech, the other brother borrowed a shirt and gave another speech on the spot. Both were elected.

Another set of twins had the same Spanish class and the teacher got them confused all the time. Part of their final exam was speaking to the teacher out in the hall. The one brother took his turn, then changed shirts with his brother because he wasn’t as good in Spanish, but he received the better grade.

I think most of you know I have a twin. The only

thing identical about are us our parents and our last name. Otherwise, we are like night and day. I’m older, but he is taller. I was blond, he had had brown hair. He looked like Dad, I looked like Mom. He was a sprinter. I ran distances. He was smarter, I was, well, not as smart.

In some respects, we aren’t all that different than the twins we will talk about in our passage today. Turn in your Bibles to **Genesis 25:19-34**.

This is more than just a story of twin boys and the struggle between siblings. They serve as an accurate depiction of two natures. Esau shows us the old nature, the nature of the person who wants nothing to do with God, the nature that rejects God, the nature that lives for the here and now, gratifying immediate needs. Jacob on the other hand, though flawed here, shows us the new nature, one that really does want to follow God, but who, like his grandfather Abraham, wants to speed things up. It’s the nature that is continually being changed as it yields more and more to God’s control.

To set the stage though, for what is to happen in the unfolding drama of redemption, we need to look first at their parents and the prayers that are answered. We find that in **verses 19-23**.

I. THE PRAYERS THAT ARE ANSWERED – vs. 19-23

We shift from the life of Abraham to that of his son Isaac. This is one of 10 accounts or genealogies in Genesis. There is the account of the heavens and earth, the account of Adam, the account of Seth, the account of Noah, the account of Abraham and now the account of Isaac.

Let me just say that while we buried Abraham in the first part of this chapter, in **verse 19** we do a little backtracking. Abraham died when he was 175 years old. He was 100 when Isaac was born and we learned that Isaac was 40 when he married Rebekah making Abraham 140. We read in **verse 26** that Isaac was 60 when Esau and Jacob were born. So if you are still with me on the math these twins were

born when Abraham was 160 years old. He would be around for another 15 years. So for 20 years Rebekah was barren, childless. The first prayer we see is from Isaac. He offers a prayer of belief.

A. Isaac's Prayer Of Belief – vs. 19-21

There are several principles about prayer that we glean here from Isaac. If someone was reading this for the first time or just skimming over it, he could get the impression they had been waiting for a son to be born and after 20 years he finally prayed and God answers. I don't think that the case at all. I think he's been praying a long time, like much of the 20 years. God had given Abraham a promise that from him would come a great nation. That promise was passed on to Isaac who was the son of promise. Isaac knew he was the promised son and that for the promise of becoming a great nation he would also need to have a son. Now let me just say this, just because we have been given a promise doesn't mean we can sit back and do nothing. Yes, waiting may be required but we should also be doing something in the waiting and that something is praying.

So far, for 20 years nothing has happened. No heir has been born. How will you respond when you have been given a promise but it hasn't materialized yet? We can become discouraged even despondent and give up any and all hope that it will ever happen or we can continue to walk in faith, trusting God will do what He says He would do in His own time. How we respond isn't up to God, it's up to us. How we respond depends on our view of God.

I believe Isaac has been praying a long time. This isn't a pleading prayer. It's a believing prayer. It's one that says "God, I'm going to trust you no matter what, no matter how long." The prayer of belief prays believing that faithful is He who promised.

Let me give you three principles I see in Isaac's prayer of belief. The first is to pray in faith.

1. Pray in faith

We have already talked a bit about this principle, but let me add a couple more thoughts. We read in

James 5:15 that the prayer offered in faith will heal the sick. In the context of the passage it's about the elders of the church going to pray for someone who is sick anointing that person with oil. Now there is no healing property in the oil itself as some suggest and neither does it mean that if you have enough faith that person will get healed suggesting that if the person does not get healed you didn't have enough faith. The prayer of faith really means that you are praying to God who is fully capable of healing, believing that He can heal miraculously if He chooses to heal in that way. So the prayer of faith has every confidence in an omnipotent God. The prayer of faith has absolute trust in God asking for His will to be done.

We read in **II Peter 1:4** that God has given us great and precious promises. Isaac had been given the promise of becoming a nation of uncountable people. His prayer was offered in faith believing or trusting in the promise of God. It's an unwavering faith.

Now that takes us to a second principle about his prayer of belief and that is to pray according to God's will.

2. Pray for God's Will

There is a movement within certain Christian circles that a believer can claim something he names and he or she will get. They cite **Mark 11:24** which says "**whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.**" You want that new car, and not just any car mind you, that sweet Beemer or the Lexus, name it and it's yours.

You want that new house, name it and it's yours. You want that promotion, name it and it's yours.

Those kinds of prayers place demands on God as if He were in some way obligated to give us what we want never stopping to consider whether God wants us to have it. He can't refuse our request because we named it and claimed it.

There's a troubling verse in **Psalms 106**. In it the psalmist is recounting Israel's deliverance from

Egypt. He reviews the miraculous ways they were brought out of Egypt and headed to the Promised Land. Along the way they complained – a lot. They didn't have water and they didn't have meat. They whined until God gave them what they wanted. **Verse 15 “So He gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them.”** The KJV reads **“He sent leanness to their soul.”**

Compare that with **Psalm 78:15-32.**

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said in **Matthew 7:11 – “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”**

What was it that Jesus prayed in the garden?
“Not my will, but Thine be done.”

Are the things we ask for really according to God's will? Be careful what you pray for, God may give it to you, but will also send leanness to your soul. What Isaac was praying for in faith was already part of God's will for his life, so that's what he prayed.

We learn yet another principle about the person who would pray in faith according to the will of God. The third principle is to pray in specifics.

3. Pray in specifics

Verse 21 says that he prayed on behalf of his wife because she was barren. He teaches us to be specific in our prayer. He prayed for Rebekah because she was barren. This isn't a name it and claim it prayer. He was aware of God's will and was asking for something he already knew to be the will of God and that was for his wife to become pregnant.

Our prayers shouldn't be general.
Bless the missionaries.
Pray for people to be saved.
Guide our church.
Watch over our parents or children or grandchildren.

Isaac wasn't general in his prayer. He specifically prayed for his wife and he specifically prayed that she would become pregnant. We need to be specific in prayer.

Does God want missionaries to be blessed? Yes.
Does God want people to be saved? Yes.
Does God want to guide our church? Yes.
Does God want to watch over our loved ones? Yes.
Be specific when you pray those things.

Lord, some people like the _____ are going into all the world to preach the gospel. Would You bless them in _____ that they might effectively learn the language of the people they are serving with the opportunity to share the gospel? Would You bless them with additional support to meet their daily needs?

Lord, Your Word says You don't want anyone to perish. Would You speak to the hearts of our neighbors the _____ who need to be saved and give me the opportunity to share the gospel?

Lord, You want Your people to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Would You work in the lives of our congregation to desire to know You?

Lord, would You be with our pastor today that he might be filled with Your Spirit as he preaches? Today would You encourage _____ because he/she is having a difficult time with _____?

Every week in the bulletin we include a missionary, family and student to pray for. Use Scripture as an outline because it provides specific ways to pray. Let it be a prayer of belief. Isaac prayed in belief and the Lord answered His prayer and his wife became pregnant.

Then there is Rebekah's prayer of bewilderment.

B. Rebekah's Prayer Of Bewilderment – vs. 22-23

Sarah had to wait 25 years to become pregnant, and here Rebekah waited 20 years. That's a long time to wait on God, but then God's ways are not our ways. It was in His time and according to His plan. Unknown to her, she was carrying twins. The first thing we notice is the ruckus she felt.

1. The ruckus she felt

Movement in the womb is normal, so I'm told. I don't have any personal experience on the matter, so I have to go on what women have said about their pregnancy and the movement of the developing little person inside.

When my mom was carrying my brother and me, she would go in for her check-ups and the doctor kept insisting that there was only one baby and Mom kept insisting that there were two. She would emphatically state that she could count elbows and feet. The experienced doctor told the first-time mother to be that there was only one. Was he ever surprised! Now, she never described our movement as wrestling.

But what Rebekah felt didn't seem normal to her. Our text describes it as jostling or wrestling. The ESV says they were struggling together. The Christian Standard Bible makes it even clearer by saying that they struggled with each other. This was more than just fetal movement or development. It's a word that means to crush or oppress. The Hebrew literally reads "the children smashed themselves inside her."

It must have been quite the war zone and it was concerning to Rebekah because she didn't understand. Maybe she went to some neighbors and asked for some advice.

Don't worry honey, a little movement is normal. Maybe it's something you ate that's causing them to be a bit more active.

None of the answers she may have received gave her any relief or comfort, so she did the only logical thing in this circumstance, she prayed about it. She went to the Lord for some answers.

2. The request she made

Prayer should be the natural inclination of all we are going through she wanted to know about the struggle inside her.

The words of Joseph Scriven so eloquently remind us to pray in these kinds of situations.

Have we trials and temptations?

Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged;

Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful

Who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness;

Take it to the Lord in prayer.

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Hey, Lord, what's going on inside me. It was distressing so she made a request of the Lord.

Verse 23 provides the revelation she heard.

3. The revelation she heard

And some revelation it was. There aren't just two boys with different personalities within you. It's not just normal active development. You have two nations who are struggling within. There will be an ongoing struggle between them. They will vie for superiority over each other, but in the end the younger will prevail and the older will serve the younger.

How would you as an expectant mother like to hear those words? No matter how many times you told them growing up to get along, the prophecy was that there would always be tension between the two, a struggle for supremacy over the other.

In a spiritual sense that same struggle exists in us. Even as a believer, we experience the battle between the old nature and the new nature. Even though we have become a new creation in Christ (**II Corinthians 5:17**) there is still that ongoing struggle for dominance. The old nature is what we were born with, then comes the new nature that comes through faith in Christ. The old nature never really goes away because we live in a sin cursed world. But in the end and through submission to God's Spirit the new nature can have the supremacy over the old nature where it must serve rather than be served.

John Phillips provides some helpful insight.

"In the verses that follow, the existence of the two natures is first experienced, then, explained, and then exposed. Step by step, Rebekah's actual

physical experience is designed to teach spiritual truth. In other words, Rebekah's experience is a type of the Romans 7 experience of the believer, and should be regarded in that way...The old nature is neither eradicated when we trust Christ nor is it cancelled when we yield to Him for fruitfulness. It is an ever-present foe, bitterly hostile to any work of the Holy Spirit in us, and quick to contest every Spirit-born effort toward fruitfulness for God. Far from being eradicated, the flesh seems to be stimulated into virile and murderous activity by any sign of developing holiness in life."

In this life there will always be a struggle between the two natures within us, but in the end, the new nature will win out because when we get to glory, the old nature will then be completely eradicated. There will never be a struggle with it anymore. And to that we say a hearty AMEN. I can't wait because it is a struggle.

It was no doubt quite a revelation for Rebekah as she sought an answer from the Lord. Both Isaac and Rebekah had prayers that are answered by the Lord. In **verses 24-35** we see the patterns that are abysmal.

II. THE PATTERNS THAT ARE ABYSMAL – vs. 24-34

We will first look at Esau's disdain and then look at Jacob's deceit.

A. Esau's Disdain

Let's read the portion that just pertains to Esau. It would read like this: **"When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. (Incidentally, Esau means red.) The boys grew and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country...Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau...One day when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished (KJV – faint). He said to Jacob, 'Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished (faint)!'... 'Look I'm about to die,'**

Esau said. 'What good is the birthright to me?' So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob...He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright."

From these verses we see first that Esau distorted his predicament.

1. Esau distorted his predicament

We learn that Esau was a skillful hunter, but on this particular day he had come home empty handed. We don't know if it was just one day or several days. In either case he came home not having gotten anything in the hunt. He was tired and hungry. The word faint or famished can also be translated thirsty or parched. The context of the verse indicates that he was hungry.

Survivalists speak in terms of threes. You can go three weeks without food, although after eight hours the body begins to process things differently. You can go three days without water. Three hours without shelter and three minutes without air. Of course, those are contingent on the circumstances.

It's highly doubtful that Esau had been without food for three weeks so, while he may have been extremely hungry, he was not to the point of death by starvation, so he is exaggerating his condition.

But of even more concern than his physical well-being is his spiritual well-being. The decision he is about to make will determine the course of his life. It's the same with us. The choices we make today may well have a bearing on our future. Esau's choice was to live for the here and now, to make no consideration for the future. Because he distorted his predicament, he despised his position.

2. Esau despised his position

As the firstborn came the privilege of the birthright. After the death of the father, the firstborn son assumed the authority and responsibility of the father. He would receive twice the inheritance as the other sons. We read in **Exodus 22:29** that the firstborn son was consecrated to the Lord. It was a special privilege and it belonged to Esau and he was

willing to give it all up for a bowl of stew. By renouncing his birthright he was proving himself to be unholy because at the heart of the birthright was the covenant promise. He treated his position with contempt looking down on God's promises that through him all the nations of the world would be blessed. He viewed things temporally rather than eternally. And that's the character of the old nature, living for the here and now gratifying the flesh without any thought of what is yet to come. The birthright did not matter to him if he was going to die. The person who is spiritually dead gives no thought to the spiritual birthright of the person who is in Christ. It means nothing to him, so he treats it with disdain. That's Esau.

On the other hand, there is Jacob and in these verses we see his deceit.

B. Jacob's Deceit

“When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. The boys grew up. Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Rebekah loved Jacob. Once when Jacob was cooking some stew and Esau came in famished from the hunt begging for something to eat, Jacob replied ‘first sell me your birthright...Swear to me first.’ Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew.”

The name Jacob is a play on the word heel and originally carried the idea of protecting as the rearguard of an army. You were the group that was in the back and kept watch over an attack from behind. But with his developing character over time it took on a more negative meaning. The heel catcher came to mean a person who supplants or takes the place of by force or by plotting and so it came to be associated with someone who deceives.

We can only imagine that as they were growing up Mom and Dad shared about the discussion between God and Mom that the younger would rule the older and so Jacob took that to heart and rather than waiting for God's timing took matters into his own

hands looking for an opportunity and one fell right in his lap, the moment he had been waiting for and he sprung his trap. I think that Jacob believed God's promise but not apart from his own manipulation. Maybe he believed in the notion that God helps those that help themselves.

Kent Hughes describes Jacob as an opportunist, cheating, self-seeking, self-serving schemer who was an exploitative rascal.

1. **He developed a plan**
2. **He deployed it with precision**

God has good things for us, but we can become like Jacob and pursue them in a wrong way. Was this a self-fulfilling prophecy that Jacob took into his own hands believing that it was up to him to make happen? We'll never know what might have happened had Jacob waited on God. He has great things in store for us if we are willing to trust Him and wait on Him. Let me leave you with three practices that are applicable from today's passage. They need little comment from me.

III. PRACTICES THAT ARE APPLICABLE

- A. **Be Prayerful – speak with God**
- B. **Be Patient – surrender to God**
- C. **Be Pure – stay with God**

What we have learned from the life of Abraham is certainly true here and lessons we can take with us. If we seek to follow God, we need to discern His will through prayer. Sometimes it means waiting for His timing even when we don't understand the circumstances. And both the praying and the patience require that we walk with Him. If we choose to follow God we need to put off the old nature and its desires. No, Jacob wasn't perfect, but as we will see God will continue to work in him to bring him to complete surrender. That's God's desire for us.