

# Jacob

## UNIT 4, LESSON 5

### Learning Goals

- › Jacob and Esau were twins who were in conflict with each other even in the womb.
- › Jacob tricked Esau into selling him his birthright as the oldest son of Isaac.
- › Laban tricked Jacob just as Jacob had tricked his father, Isaac.
- › The stories of Jacob wrestling with an angel and God's remembering Rachel illustrate the battle of prayer we all experience.



### Connection to the Catechism of the Catholic Church

- › CCC 2374
- › CCC 2561
- › CCC 2573
- › CCC 2725



### Vocabulary

- › Jacob
- › Esau
- › Rachel
- › Leah
- › Israel

## BIBLICAL TOUCHSTONES

And there was the LORD standing beside him and saying: "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you are lying I will give to you and your descendants. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and through them you will spread to the west and the east, to the north and the south. In you and your descendants all the families of the earth will find blessing."

GENESIS 28:13-14

God remembered Rachel. God listened to her and made her fruitful.

GENESIS 30:22

# Lesson Plan

## Materials

- › Jacob and Esau
- › Jacob and Laban
- › God Remembers Rachel
- › Jacob Wrestles with an Angel

## DAY ONE

### Warm-Up

- A. Have your students turn to a neighbor and take turns sharing about a time when they prayed to God because they wanted something very much. Have them discuss the following questions:
- › What did it feel like to want the thing you wanted so much?
  - › Did God answer your prayer (which could mean either yes and you got what you wanted, or no and you didn't get what you wanted)?
  - › If you got what you wanted, how did you feel?
  - › If you didn't get what you wanted, how did you feel?
- B. Explain to your students that Isaac and Rebekah were unable to have children. Remember, in the ancient world, one of the most important things people could do was to have children so that they could have an heir and their memory would continue on after their death. So, Isaac prayed for his wife because she was sterile. God heard Isaac's prayer and blessed Rebekah, and she became pregnant with twins! Even in her womb, the twins fought and jostled with each other. So, she prayed to God, who answered her prayer with a prophecy.
- C. Project Genesis 25:23, and have student stand and read it aloud:
- Two nations are in your womb, two peoples are separating while still within you; But one will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.
- D. Ask your student the following questions:
- › What did God tell Rebekah was in her womb? How does this make sense? *Two nations, two peoples separating. Each of the twins will be a founder of a nation of people.*
  - › What does God say about the relationship between the twins? *One will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.*
- E. Explain that usually in the ancient world, the oldest child was the heir (this is true even today in many places and cultures). It was unusual for a younger child to be the heir of the family.
- F. Ask your students to think back to what they shared with their neighbor at the beginning of this lesson about a time they prayed to God for something. Ask if God answered anyone's prayers by giving them something different from what they had originally wanted. Call on any students who agree, and ask how they felt about receiving something different in answer to their prayers.

- G. Explain to your students that God always answers our prayers. Sometimes He says yes, sometimes no; sometimes He says “wait,” and other times He gives us something completely different from what we prayed for. God certainly answered Isaac’s prayer for Rebekah by giving them children; Isaac and Rebekah did not expect the results.

## Activity

- A. Have your students turn to **Jacob and Esau** (page 187) and, working individually or with a partner, read the story of Jacob and Esau and then answer the focus and reflection questions. *Note: The reflection questions should be answered individually, even if your students work with a partner.*
- B. When your students have completed **Jacob and Esau**, review and discuss the correct answers.

## Formative Assessment

- A. Project Genesis 28:12-14, and have a student stand and read it aloud:

Then he had a dream: a stairway rested on the ground, with its top reaching to the heavens; and God’s angels were going up and down on it. And there was the LORD standing beside him and saying: “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you are lying I will give to you and your descendants. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and through them you will spread to the west and the east, to the north and the south. In you and your descendants all the families of the earth will find blessing.”

- B. Explain to your students that as Jacob traveled to stay with his uncle Laban, he had this dream. In this dream, God reaffirmed His promises to Abraham and renewed His covenant, this time with Jacob as the inheritor of the promises.
- C. Have your students read this passage again. Then ask what three things God promises to Jacob that He had previously promised to Abraham, writing the answers on the board as your students respond. *He will give Jacob and his descendant this land (land/nation), his descendants will spread across the earth (kingship/name), and his descendants will bless the earth (worldwide blessing).*

### Jacob and Esau

**Directions:** Read the story of Jacob and Esau, then answer the questions that follow.

**B**efore they were born, the twins Jacob and Esau fought in their mother’s womb. They continued to struggle with each other after they were born. Genesis 25:24-28 gives details about the birth of Jacob and Esau.

When the time of her delivery came, there were twins in her womb. The first to emerge was reddish, and his whole body was like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Next his brother came out, gripping Esau’s heel so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born. When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country; whereas Jacob was a simple man, who stayed among the tents. Isaac preferred Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah preferred Jacob.

The name Esau means “hairy,” and the name Jacob means “supplanter” or “holder of the heel.” To supplant means to replace, and that’s just what Jacob would do to Esau. Notice that Isaac favored his firstborn son, Esau, while Rebekah favored Jacob, the younger son. Recall the prophecy that stated “the older will serve the younger.” This prophecy about the brothers’ relationship will ultimately come true: Jacob will take Esau’s place – supplant him – as his father’s heir! The first story we learn about Esau and Jacob illustrates their different characters. We can see that Esau is more concerned with the here and now, while Jacob thinks of the future. Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew! We read about this in Genesis 25:29-34.

Once, when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, “Let me gulp down some of that red stuff! I am famished!” That is why he was called Edom [Edom means “red” and is a variation of the name Esau]. But Jacob replied, “First sell me your right as firstborn.” “Look,” said Esau, “I am on the point of dying. What good is the right as firstborn to me?” But Jacob said, “Swear to me first!” So he sold Jacob his right as firstborn under oath. Jacob then gave him some bread and the lentil stew; and Esau ate, drank, got up, and went his way. So Esau treated his right as firstborn with disdain.

Even though Esau sold his birthright to Jacob, it was unlikely that Isaac would go along with it. So Rebekah and Jacob plotted to trick Isaac into giving his blessing to Jacob instead of to Esau. We read this story in Genesis 27:5-10, 15-17.

Rebekah had been listening while Isaac was speaking to his son Esau. So when Esau went out into the open country to hunt some game for his father, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “Listen! I heard your father tell your brother Esau, ‘Bring me some game and prepare a dish for me to eat, that I may bless you with the LORD’s approval before I die.’ Now, my son, obey me in what I am about to order you. Go to the flock and get me two choice young goats so that with these I might prepare a dish for your father in the way he likes.

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DAY TWO

Warm-Up

- A. Explain to your students that with Jacob, God’s promises to Abraham seem to be coming to fulfillment. By the end of Jacob’s story, he has twelve sons, by several different mothers, each of whom would go on to be the founder of a great tribe of people named after him. Together, they became known as the Twelve Tribes of Israel. In this lesson, we are going to learn about how Jacob met his wife, Rachel, and her sister, Leah. But first, let’s learn about Jacob’s twelve sons.
- B. Show your students the video of the song “Jacob and Sons” (up to the 2:10 mark) from *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* found at the following link: [SophiaOnline.org/JacobandSons..](https://www.sophiaonline.org/JacobandSons..)
- C. After the brief video, ask your students what we learn about Jacob and his twelve sons from this video? *Accept reasoned answers. Students might answer that Jacob lived in the land of Canaan; he was a fine example of a family man; they depended on farming to earn their keep; Jacob was the founder of a new nation because of how many children he had; he was also known as Israel; he and his sons were men of the soil, sheep, and crook; and the names of the twelve sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.*

Activity

- A. Explain to your students that, just as Abraham did not want Isaac to marry a Canaanite woman, Isaac did not want Jacob to marry a Canaanite woman, for much the same reason. A Canaanite would worship false gods and likely persuade Jacob to do the same, and thus forfeit the promises of God in the covenant. So Isaac sent Jacob to the same land and the same family that

Rebekah came from, that of Rebekah’s brother, Laban. There Jacob would find his wife. As we will learn, this did not happen easily. In fact, just as Jacob had tricked his brother and his father into gaining his family’s inheritance, Jacob would himself end up being tricked.

- B. Have your students turn to **Jacob and Laban (page 190)** and, working individually or with a partner, read the story of Jacob and Laban and then answer the focus and reflection questions. (Note: The reflection questions should be answered individually, even if your students work with a partner.)
- C. When your students have completed **Jacob and Laban**, review and discuss the correct answers.

**Jacob and Laban**

**Directions:** Read the story of Jacob and Laban, then answer the questions that follow.

**I**n Genesis 29:9-34 we learn about what happened when Jacob went to the land of his mother’s brother to seek a wife. The moment he first saw Laban’s younger daughter, Rachel, he fell instantly in love with her. Jacob knew he wanted to marry Rachel. He struck a bargain with his uncle Laban to work for him for seven years if he would give him Rachel to be his wife. For Jacob, the years seemed like days because of the love he had for Rachel. At the end of seven years, Jacob asked for Rachel’s hand in marriage. Laban threw a big wedding feast, but that night he substituted Leah for Rachel. Jacob married Leah unknowingly – at least until the next morning. We read about Jacob’s discovery of being tricked in Genesis 29:25-27:

In the morning, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, “How could you do this to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why did you deceive me?” Laban replied, “It is not the custom in our country to give the younger daughter before the firstborn. Finish the bridal week for this one, and then the other will also be given to you in return for another seven years of service with me.”

So Jacob agreed to serve Laban for another seven years so that he could marry Rachel also. After a week of marriage to Leah, Jacob also married Rachel and had to stay on and serve Laban for another seven years. Just as Jacob had tricked his family into receiving Esau’s birthright, Jacob was tricked into marrying both of Laban’s daughters!

Over the years, Jacob grew in righteousness with God. And God blessed him with great success and wealth. Jacob, know, however, that Laban could not be trusted. He created a plan to trick his uncle and make him pay justly for his now 14 years of service. We read about Jacob’s plan in Genesis 30:29-32:

Jacob replied, “You know what work I did for you and how well your livestock fared under my care: the little you had before I came has grown into an abundance, since the LORD has blessed you in my company. Now, when can I do something for my own household as well?” Laban asked, “What should I give you?” Jacob answered, “You do not have to give me anything. If you do this thing for me, I will again pasture and tend your sheep. Let me go through your whole flock today and remove from it every dark animal among the lambs and every spotted or speckled one among the goats. These will be my wages.”

In essence, Jacob asked Laban for any future offspring of the flock of sheep that were spotted or dark colored. Laban believed that only spotted or dark-colored animals give birth to spotted or dark-colored offspring and only solid-colored animals give birth to solid-colored ones. So, that very day, Laban had separated the dark and spotted sheep and goats from the solid-colored ones, leaving behind only the solid-colored animals. Laban believed he had made a great deal! Solid-colored animals would not give birth to spotted ones. Therefore, Jacob would earn only a small number of animals from the flock.

## Formative Assessment

Have your students respond to the following prompts in complete sentences on their own paper:

- ▶ Think about all of the trickery and deception in Jacob's story (Jacob tricked his brother and his father, Laban tricked Jacob twice, and Jacob tricked Laban). Do you think Jacob got what he deserved? Why or why not?
- ▶ Although people today don't necessarily dress up as other people to trick their family members, and brides are not switched on their wedding day, do you think people today still lie, cheat, and manipulate to get what they want? Why or why not? What would be a better alternative?

## DAY THREE

### Warm-Up

- A. Have your students, with a partner, create their own definitions of prayer. Allow your students a few minutes to discuss and then write their definitions on their own paper.
- B. When your students have completed their definitions of prayer, call on student pairs to share and explain their definitions.
- C. Project the following excerpt from *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 2561:

Prayer is the response of faith to the free promise of salvation and also a response of love to the thirst of the only Son of God.
- D. Ask your students how similar to or different from their definitions of prayer this definition from the *Catechism* is. Discuss their answers.
- E. Explain to your students that, in this final lesson about Jacob, they will learn about two different experiences of prayer. The *Catechism* also describes prayer as a battle, and we see this description played out in the story of Rachel and in the story of Jacob the night before he is to meet his brother, Esau, after twenty years.

**God Remembers Rachel**

**Directions:** Read about Rachel and the battle of prayer, then questions that follow.

**J**acob's beloved wife Rachel was barren; she could not have any children. Her sister, Leah, who was also married to Jacob, had many children. She gave birth to six sons. Rachel was unable to bear children. Scripture tells

He has a plan of hope for our lives. That's not to say that everything will always be easy. But, in the end, God will fulfill all of His promises to us. When the sacred author of Genesis

**Jacob Wrestles with an Angel**

**Directions:** Read the story of Jacob wrestling with an angel, then answer the questions.

**A**fter Jacob earns his pay in spotted sheep and goats from Laban's flock, God speaks to Jacob and tells him to return to the land of his ancestors, where he was born, in order to reclaim his inheritance from his brother, Esau. Jacob gathered his wives, children, flock, and possessions and set out for the land of Canaan. Along the journey, Jacob grew frightened of what would happen when he met his brother again. The last time they had seen each other, Esau had wanted to kill Jacob. So, the night before they were to meet, Jacob found himself alone and struggling with his feelings. Then, a strange event occurs. An angel appeared before Jacob, and the two wrestled until dawn. We read this peculiar story in Genesis 32:25-30.

Jacob was left there alone. Then a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When the man saw that he could not prevail over him, he struck Jacob's hip at its socket, so that Jacob's socket was dislocated as he wrestled with him. The man then said, "Let me go, for it is daylight." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go until you bless me." "What is your name?" the man asked. He answered, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be named Jacob, but Israel, because you have contended with divine and human beings and have prevailed."

In his distress, Jacob wrestles an angel of God to dawn, although he is wounded in the process. Because of this, the angel changes Jacob's name to Israel, which means "he who

wrestles with God." Israel, of course, would become the name of the people that would grow from Jacob's 12 sons.

What happened that night? Did Jacob really wrestle with an angel? Perhaps. The greater truth of this story, however, is what it tells us about our experience of prayer. One way of understanding this story is that Jacob, in his fear, "wrestled" with God in prayer.

Our prayer lives can sometimes be similar to Jacob's experience. The Catechism of the Catholic Church no. 2722 describes prayer as a battle:

Prayer is both a gift of grace and a determined response on our part. It always presupposes effort. The great figures of prayer of the Old Covenant before Christ, as well as the Mother of God, the saints, and he himself, all teach us this prayer is a battle. Against whom? Against ourselves and against the wiles of the tempter who does all he can to turn man away from prayer, away from union with God. We pray as we live, because we live as we pray. If we do not want to act habitually according to the Spirit of Christ, neither can we pray habitually in his name. The "spiritual battle" of the Christian's new life is inseparable from the battle of prayer.

The opportunity to pray to God is first and foremost a gift, but it also requires us to do something, to respond to Him. The battle of prayer, then, is against our own weaknesses.

**Activity**

- A. Arrange your students in pairs or trios. Have half of the groups turn to **God Remembers Rachel (page 193)** and the other half turn to **Jacob Wrestles with an Angel (page 195)**. Have each group read their respective stories about the battle of prayer and answer the focus questions.
- B. Explain to your students that when they have finished, each group will be asked to stand and give a brief summary of their story and explain what they learned about the battle of prayer from their assigned story. Allow your students a few extra minutes to prepare their summaries and explanations.

**Assessment**

When your students are ready, call on each group to summarize their assigned story and explain what they learned about the battle of prayer.

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## Jacob and Esau

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**Directions:** Read the story of Jacob and Esau, then answer the questions that follow.

**B**efore they were born, the twins Jacob and Esau fought in their mother’s womb. They continued to struggle with each other after they were born. Genesis 25:24-28 gives details about the birth of Jacob and Esau.

When the time of her delivery came, there were twins in her womb. The first to emerge was reddish, and his whole body was like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Next his brother came out, gripping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born. When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country; whereas Jacob was a simple man, who stayed among the tents. Isaac preferred Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah preferred Jacob.

The name Esau means “hairy,” and the name Jacob means “supplanter” or “holder of the heel.” To supplant means to replace, and that’s just what Jacob would do to Esau. Notice that Isaac favored his firstborn son, Esau, while Rebekah favored Jacob, the younger son. Recall the prophecy that stated “the older will serve the younger.” This prophecy about the brothers’ relationship will ultimately come true: Jacob will take Esau’s place – supplant him – as his father’s heir! The first story we learn about Esau and Jacob illustrates their different characters. We can see that Esau is more concerned with the here and now, while Jacob thinks of the future. Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew! We read about this in Genesis 25:29-34:

Once, when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, “Let me gulp down some of that red stuff; I am famished.” That is why he was called Edom [Edom means “red” and is a variation of the name Esau]. But Jacob replied, “First sell me your right as firstborn.” “Look,” said Esau, “I am on the point of dying. What good is the right as firstborn to me?” But Jacob said, “Swear to me first!” So he sold Jacob his right as firstborn under oath. Jacob then gave him some bread and the lentil stew; and Esau ate, drank, got up, and went his way. So Esau treated his right as firstborn with disdain.

Even though Esau sold his birthright to Jacob, it was unlikely that Isaac would go along with it. So Rebekah and Jacob plotted to trick Isaac into giving his blessing to Jacob instead of to Esau. We read this story in Genesis 27:5-10, 15-17:

Rebekah had been listening while Isaac was speaking to his son Esau. So when Esau went out into the open country to hunt some game for his father, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “Listen! I heard your father tell your brother Esau, ‘Bring me some game and prepare a dish for me to eat, that I may bless you with the LORD’s approval before I die.’ Now, my son, obey me in what I am about to order you. Go to the flock and get me two choice young goats so that with these I might prepare a dish for your father in the way he likes.

## Answer Key

1. Jacob and Esau fought with each other, even while still in their mother's womb.
2. Esau was a skillful hunter, and Jacob was a simple man who stayed among the tents.
3. Jacob means "supplanter" and Esau means "hairy." Jacob would eventually replace or supplant Esau as his family's heir. Esau was hairy.
4. Isaac favored Esau.
5. Rebekah favored Jacob.
6. Esau sold his birthright as heir of the family for a bowl of stew and some bread because he was hungry, saying "What good is the right of the firstborn to me?"

Then bring it to your father to eat, that he may bless you before he dies."

Rebekah then took the best clothes of her older son Esau that she had in the house, and gave them to her younger son Jacob to wear; and with the goatskins she covered up his hands and the hairless part of his neck. Then she gave her son Jacob the dish and the bread she had prepared.

Jacob brought his old, blind father the food and pretended to be his brother Esau. Then, he tricked Isaac into giving him his blessing and making him his heir. The plan worked, and Isaac gave his blessing to Jacob. The blessing Isaac gave to Jacob (disguised as Esau) took the following form from Genesis 27:27-29:

See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed! May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!

After Esau discovered his brother's trickery, he became very upset. From this moment forward, Esau desired to kill his brother, Jacob. And so, Jacob fled his home and Esau's wrath and went to live with his uncle Laban.

1. What was Jacob and Esau's relationship like even before they were born?

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2. How does the book of Genesis describe the differences between Jacob and Esau?

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\_\_\_\_\_

3. What do the names Jacob and Esau mean? How were they appropriate names for the brothers?

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Which brother did Isaac favor? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Which brother did Rebekah favor? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How do we know that Esau was more concerned with the here and now rather than the big picture or the future?

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\_\_\_\_\_

## Answer Key

7. Isaac would dress as Esau and bring his father some food and ask for his blessing.
8. He prayed God would give him the dew of Heaven and the fatness of earth, plenty of grain and wine, that peoples would serve him and the nations bow to him, that he would be lord of his brothers and they would bow to him, and that anyone who cursed him would be cursed and anyone who blessed him would be blessed.
9. He became very angry and sought to kill Jacob. Jacob fled to live with his uncle Laban.

### Reflection Questions:

1. Accept reasoned answers.
2. Accept reasoned answers.

7. How did Jacob and his mother plan to trick Isaac into giving Jacob his blessing?

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8. After Jacob tricked his father into giving him his blessing, what did Isaac pray God would give to his heir (Jacob, disguised as Esau)?

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9. How did Esau feel after he discovered he was tricked? What did Jacob do in response?

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### Reflection Questions

1. The sacred author of Genesis makes it clear that Esau was not fit to be head of his family after his father, Isaac, died. Even so, he was tricked out of his birthright as the oldest son. Do you think it was fair how Jacob became his family's heir? Why or why not? Do you think Esau's response to being tricked was fair? Why or why not?

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2. Describe a time when you were not chosen to be on a team or to do something that you felt you should have been chosen to do. What happened? How did you feel? How did you react? How did things turn out? If you could go back to that moment, what would you do differently?

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## Jacob and Laban

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**Directions:** Read the story of Jacob and Laban, then answer the questions that follow.

**I**n Genesis 29:9-14 we learn about what happened when Jacob went to the land of his mother's brother to seek a wife. The moment he first saw Laban's younger daughter, Rachel, he fell instantly in love with her. Jacob knew he wanted to marry Rachel. He struck a bargain with his uncle Laban to work for him for seven years if he would give him Rachel to be his wife. For Jacob, the years seemed like days because of the love he had for Rachel. At the end of seven years, Jacob asked for Rachel's hand in marriage. Laban threw a big wedding feast, but that night he substituted Leah for Rachel. Jacob married Leah unknowingly – at least until the next morning. We read about Jacob's discovery of being tricked in Genesis 29:25-27:

In the morning, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban: "How could you do this to me! Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why did you deceive me?" Laban replied, "It is not the custom in our country to give the younger daughter before the firstborn. Finish the bridal week for this one, and then the other will also be given to you in return for another seven years of service with me."

So Jacob agreed to serve Laban for another seven years so that he could marry Rachel also. After a week of marriage to Leah, Jacob also married Rachel and had to stay on and serve Laban for another seven years. Just as Jacob had tricked his family into receiving Esau's birthright, Jacob was tricked into marrying both of Laban's daughters!

Over the years, Jacob grew in righteousness with God. And God blessed him with great success and wealth. Jacob, knew, however, that Laban could not be trusted. He created a plan to trick his uncle and make him pay justly for his now 14 years of service. We read about Jacob's plan in Genesis 30:29-32:

Jacob replied: "You know what work I did for you and how well your livestock fared under my care; the little you had before I came has grown into an abundance, since the LORD has blessed you in my company. Now, when can I do something for my own household as well?" Laban asked, "What should I give you?" Jacob answered: "You do not have to give me anything. If you do this thing for me, I will again pasture and tend your sheep. Let me go through your whole flock today and remove from it every dark animal among the lambs and every spotted or speckled one among the goats. These will be my wages."

In essence, Jacob asked Laban for any future offspring of the flock of sheep that were spotted or dark colored. Laban believed that only spotted or dark-colored animals gave birth to spotted or dark-colored offspring and only solid-colored animals gave birth to solid-colored ones. So, that very day, Laban had separated the dark and spotted sheep and goats from the solid-colored ones, leaving behind only the solid colored animals. Laban believed he had made a great deal! Solid-colored animals would not give birth to spotted ones. Therefore, Jacob would earn only a small number of animals from the flock.

## Answer Key

1. The land of his mother's brother, Laban
2. He would work for Laban for seven years if at the end he would be allowed to marry Rachel.
3. Jacob thinks he's marrying Rachel, but on the wedding night, Laban had switched Rachel with Leah, his oldest daughter. He tells Jacob that it is not the custom to allow the younger daughter to marry before the oldest.
4. Work for Laban for another seven years.
5. All of the dark-colored and spotted offspring from the flock of sheep and goats.
6. He believed that only dark-colored and spotted sheep gave birth to dark-colored and spotted offspring. So, before he made the deal with Jacob, he removed the dark-colored and spotted sheep from the flock so that there would be no dark-colored or spotted offspring born.
7. He had used creative breeding practices so that the solid-colored sheep and goats would give birth to dark-colored and spotted offspring. Thus, he grew very rich with a large flock of sheep.
8. Back to the land of his father in order to claim his inheritance.

Jacob, however, knew Laban would try to trick him again. So he had planned for this moment. With some creative breeding practices and God's blessing, Jacob had engineered the flock of sheep and goats so that the solid-colored animals would in fact give birth to spotted and dark-colored ones and not solid-colored ones. Genesis 30:43 describes the result:

So the man [Jacob] grew exceedingly prosperous, and he owned large flocks,

male and female servants, camels, and donkeys.

At the end of Jacob's years of service, Laban was not too happy about being tricked. And so Jacob gathered his wives, children, and servants, and he assembled his now large flock and possessions and fled from Laban's land. They set out to return to the land of his father, Isaac, to take possession of his inheritance.

1. Where did Jacob go to find a wife? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What was the deal Jacob made with Laban so that he could marry his daughter Rachel?  
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3. How was Jacob first tricked by Laban? What reason does Laban give for his trickery?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
4. What did Jacob agree to do so that he could still marry Rachel?  
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5. What did Jacob ask Laban for as payment for his 14 years of service?  
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6. Why did Laban believe he had tricked Jacob again?  
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7. How did Jacob end up tricking Laban?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Where did Jacob flee to after tricking Laban? \_\_\_\_\_

### Reflection Questions

1. Describe a time when you had to work hard to achieve something you wanted. What was it like to work for what you wanted? Did the time go by quickly or slowly? Why? How did you feel after you had achieved your goal?

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2. When we first met Jacob, he used his skills of trickery and manipulation for his personal gain. By the end of his time with Laban, however, Jacob had grown in maturity and righteousness in the eyes of God. God blessed Jacob and allowed him to use his skills so that justice was done. What special skills and talents do you have? Describe a time you used skills and talents selfishly. How did that situation turn out? Describe a time you used your skills and talents justly for God. How did that situation turn out?

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## God Remembers Rachel

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**Directions:** Read about Rachel and the battle of prayer, then questions that follow.

Jacob's beloved wife Rachel was barren; she could not have any children. Her sister, Leah, who was also married to Jacob, had many children. She gave birth to six sons. Rachel was very upset because she was unable to have children of her own. She became jealous of her sister. Eventually, Scripture tells us that "God remembered Rachel. God listened to her and made her fruitful" (Genesis 30:22). Rachel, despite her frustration and jealousy of her sister, cried out to God and He heard her. Rachel eventually gave birth to two sons, one of whom, Joseph, would grow up to be the savior of his people and all of Egypt.

Sometimes, when things aren't going our way and we seem to be down on our luck, it can feel as if God has forgotten us. But this is not true. God cannot forget us. He is God, our Creator and our Father. Psalm 49:15 tells us, "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you." In a poetic way, the psalmist tells us that even in the unlikely event that our own mothers would forget us, God will not. He cannot!

So how do we make sense of God's "remembering" Rachel if He does not forget us? In those moments in life when things aren't going our way and we become angry at God and feel as if He has forgotten us, the truth is, we have forgotten Him. Often in those moments, we turn away from God, fall into sin, rely only on our own abilities, and fail to trust others or seek help. We abandon our faith in God's promises to us. We forget that

He has a plan of hope for our lives. That's not to say that everything will always be easy. But, in the end, God will fulfill all of His promises to us. When the sacred author of Genesis explains that God "remembered" Rachel and "listened" to her, that first required Rachel to come back to God and cry out to Him.

Our prayer lives can sometimes be similar to Rachel's experience. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 2725 describes prayer as a battle:

Prayer is both a gift of grace and a determined response on our part. It always presupposes effort. The great figures of prayer of the Old Covenant before Christ, as well as the Mother of God, the saints, and he himself, all teach us this: prayer is a battle. Against whom? Against ourselves and against the wiles of the tempter who does all he can to turn man away from prayer, away from union with God. We pray as we live, because we live as we pray. If we do not want to act habitually according to the Spirit of Christ, neither can we pray habitually in his name. The "spiritual battle" of the Christian's new life is inseparable from the battle of prayer.

The opportunity to pray to God is first and foremost a gift, but it also requires us to do something: to respond to Him. The battle of prayer, then, is against our own weaknesses, temptations, failures, distractions, and laziness. It is also a battle against the work of the devil himself, who wants nothing

## Answer Key

1. She was barren; she could not have any children. Her sister, Leah, gave birth to six sons.
2. Scripture says that “God remembered Rachel.” He “listened to her and made her fruitful.”
3. He is our Creator and Father.
4. Even if our own mothers were to forget us, God will not.
5. He does not forget us; we “forget” Him.
6. She needed to come to Him and cry out to Him in order for Him to hear her.
7. Ourselves and our own weaknesses, temptations, failures, distractions, and laziness, and against the devil himself, who wants to pull us away from God.
8. Humbly recognize we cannot do it alone, trust God to hear our prayers, and persevere against all obstacles.

more than to pull us away from God. To be successful in the battle of prayer, we must humbly recognize that we cannot do it alone. We must trust in God to hear our prayer, and

persevere against all obstacles that stand in our way. In this way, we will “remember” God throughout our lives.

1. Why was Rachel jealous of her sister, Leah?

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2. How does Scripture describe what happened between God and Rachel?

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3. Why will God not forget us?

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4. What does Psalm 49 say about God’s “forgetting” us?

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5. If God does not forget us, how do we make sense of God’s “remembering” Rachel?

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6. What had to happen first before God “remembered” Rachel?

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7. The *Catechism* describes prayer as a battle. Whom are we fighting in this battle of prayer?

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8. What three things must we do in order to win the battle of prayer?

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## Jacob Wrestles with an Angel

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**Directions:** Read the story of Jacob wrestling with an angel, then answer the questions.

**A**fter Jacob earns his pay in spotted sheep and goats from Laban's flock, God speaks to Jacob and tells him to return to the land of his ancestors, where he was born, in order to reclaim his inheritance from his brother, Esau. Jacob gathered his wives, children, flock, and possessions and set out for the land of Canaan. Along the journey, Jacob grew frightened of what would happen when he met his brother again. The last time they had seen each other, Esau had wanted to kill Jacob! So, the night before they were to meet, Jacob found himself alone and struggling with his feelings. Then, a strange event occurs. An angel appeared before Jacob, and the two wrestled until dawn. We read this peculiar story in Genesis 32:25-39:

Jacob was left there alone. Then a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When the man saw that he could not prevail over him, he struck Jacob's hip at its socket, so that Jacob's socket was dislocated as he wrestled with him. The man then said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go until you bless me." "What is your name?" the man asked. He answered, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be named Jacob, but Israel, because you have contended with divine and human beings and have prevailed."

In his distress, Jacob wrestles an angel of God to a draw, although he is wounded in the process. Because of this, the angel changes Jacob's name to Israel, which means "he who

wrestles with God." Israel, of course, would become the name of the people that would grow from Jacob's 12 sons.

What happened that night? Did Jacob really wrestle with an angel? Perhaps. The greater truth of this story, however, is what it tells us about our experience of prayer. One way of understanding this story is that Jacob, in his fear, "wrestled" with God in prayer. Our prayer lives can sometimes be similar to Jacob's experience. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 2725 describes prayer as a battle:

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The opportunity to pray to God is first and foremost a gift, but it also requires us to do something, to respond to Him. The battle of prayer, then, is against our own weaknesses,

## Answer Key

1. Return to the land of his ancestors and reclaim his inheritance from his brother, Esau.
2. The last time they met, Esau wanted to kill Jacob.
3. He was left alone struggling with his feelings, and he wrestled an angel to a draw.
4. Israel, which means, “he who wrestles with God.”
5. Jacob, in his fear, “wrestled” with God in prayer.
6. Ourselves and our own weaknesses, temptations, failures, distractions, and laziness, and against the devil himself, who wants to pull us away from God.
7. Humbly recognize we cannot do it alone, trust God to hear our prayers, and persevere against all obstacles.
8. Bring the battle directly to Him.

temptations, failures, distractions, and laziness. It is also a battle against the work of the devil himself, who wants nothing more than to pull us away from God. And God wants us to bring this battle directly to

Him. To be successful in the battle of prayer, we must humbly recognize that we cannot do it alone. We must trust in God to hear our prayer and must persevere against all obstacles.

1. What did God call Jacob to do after he had earned his pay?

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2. Why was Jacob afraid of meeting his brother again?

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3. What happened the night before Jacob was to meet his brother?

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4. What did the angel change Jacob's name to? What does his new name mean?

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5. While Jacob may or may not have actually wrestled with an angel, what is one way of understanding this story that reveals a greater truth about our own experience of prayer?

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6. The Catechism describes prayer as a battle. Whom are we fighting in this battle of prayer?

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7. What three things must we do in order to win the battle of prayer?

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8. What does God want us to do in our battle of prayer?

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# Jacob and Esau

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**Directions:** Read the story of Jacob and Esau, then answer the questions that follow.

**B**efore they were born, the twins Jacob and Esau fought in their mother’s womb. They continued to struggle with each other after they were born. Genesis 25:24-28 gives details about the birth of Jacob and Esau.

When the time of her delivery came, there were twins in her womb. The first to emerge was reddish, and his whole body was like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Next his brother came out, gripping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born. When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country; whereas Jacob was a simple man, who stayed among the tents. Isaac preferred Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah preferred Jacob.

The name Esau means “hairy,” and the name Jacob means “supplanter” or “holder of the heel.” To supplant means to replace, and that’s just what Jacob would do to Esau. Notice that Isaac favored his firstborn son, Esau, while Rebekah favored Jacob, the younger son. Recall the prophecy that stated “the older will serve the younger.” This prophecy about the brothers’ relationship will ultimately come true: Jacob will take Esau’s place – supplant him – as his father’s heir! The first story we learn about Esau and Jacob illustrates their different characters. We can see that Esau is more concerned with the here and now, while Jacob thinks of the future. Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew! We read about this in Genesis 25:29-34:

Once, when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, “Let me gulp down some of that red stuff; I am famished.” That is why he was called Edom [Edom means “red” and is a variation of the name Esau]. But Jacob replied, “First sell me your right as firstborn.” “Look,” said Esau, “I am on the point of dying. What good is the right as firstborn to me?” But Jacob said, “Swear to me first!” So he sold Jacob his right as firstborn under oath. Jacob then gave him some bread and the lentil stew; and Esau ate, drank, got up, and went his way. So Esau treated his right as firstborn with disdain.

Even though Esau sold his birthright to Jacob, it was unlikely that Isaac would go along with it. So Rebekah and Jacob plotted to trick Isaac into giving his blessing to Jacob instead of to Esau. We read this story in Genesis 27:5-10, 15-17:

Rebekah had been listening while Isaac was speaking to his son Esau. So when Esau went out into the open country to hunt some game for his father, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “Listen! I heard your father tell your brother Esau, ‘Bring me some game and prepare a dish for me to eat, that I may bless you with the LORD’s approval before I die.’ Now, my son, obey me in what I am about to order you. Go to the flock and get me two choice young goats so that with these I might prepare a dish for your father in the way he likes.

Then bring it to your father to eat, that he may bless you before he dies.”

Rebekah then took the best clothes of her older son Esau that she had in the house, and gave them to her younger son Jacob to wear; and with the goatskins she covered up his hands and the hairless part of his neck. Then she gave her son Jacob the dish and the bread she had prepared.

Jacob brought his old, blind father the food and pretended to be his brother Esau. Then, he tricked Isaac into giving him his blessing and making him his heir. The plan worked, and Isaac gave his blessing to Jacob. The blessing Isaac gave to Jacob (disguised as Esau) took the following form from Genesis 27:27-29:

See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed! May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!

After Esau discovered his brother’s trickery, he became very upset. From this moment forward, Esau desired to kill his brother, Jacob. And so, Jacob fled his home and Esau’s wrath and went to live with his uncle Laban.

1. What was Jacob and Esau’s relationship like even before they were born?

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2. How does the book of Genesis describe the differences between Jacob and Esau?

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3. What do the names Jacob and Esau mean? How were they appropriate names for the brothers?

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4. Which brother did Isaac favor? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Which brother did Rebekah favor? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How do we know that Esau was more concerned with the here and now rather than the big picture or the future?

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7. How did Jacob and his mother plan to trick Isaac into giving Jacob his blessing?

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8. After Jacob tricked his father into giving him his blessing, what did Isaac pray God would give to his heir (Jacob, disguised as Esau)?

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9. How did Esau feel after he discovered he was tricked? What did Jacob do in response?

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### Reflection Questions

1. The sacred author of Genesis makes it clear that Esau was not fit to be head of his family after his father, Isaac, died. Even so, he was tricked out of his birthright as the oldest son. Do you think it was fair how Jacob became his family's heir? Why or why not? Do you think Esau's response to being tricked was fair? Why or why not?

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2. Describe a time when you were not chosen to be on a team or to do something that you felt you should have been chosen to do. What happened? How did you feel? How did you react? How did things turn out? If you could go back to that moment, what would you do differently?

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# Jacob and Laban

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**Directions:** Read the story of Jacob and Laban, then answer the questions that follow.

In Genesis 29:9-14 we learn about what happened when Jacob went to the land of his mother's brother to seek a wife. The moment he first saw Laban's younger daughter, Rachel, he fell instantly in love with her. Jacob knew he wanted to marry Rachel. He struck a bargain with his uncle Laban to work for him for seven years if he would give him Rachel to be his wife. For Jacob, the years seemed like days because of the love he had for Rachel. At the end of seven years, Jacob asked for Rachel's hand in marriage. Laban threw a big wedding feast, but that night he substituted Leah for Rachel. Jacob married Leah unknowingly – at least until the next morning. We read about Jacob's discovery of being tricked in Genesis 29:25-27:

In the morning, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban: "How could you do this to me! Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why did you deceive me?" Laban replied, "It is not the custom in our country to give the younger daughter before the firstborn. Finish the bridal week for this one, and then the other will also be given to you in return for another seven years of service with me."

So Jacob agreed to serve Laban for another seven years so that he could marry Rachel also. After a week of marriage to Leah, Jacob also married Rachel and had to stay on and serve Laban for another seven years. Just as Jacob had tricked his family into receiving Esau's birthright, Jacob was tricked into marrying both of Laban's daughters!

Over the years, Jacob grew in righteousness with God. And God blessed him with great success and wealth. Jacob, knew, however, that Laban could not be trusted. He created a plan to trick his uncle and make him pay justly for his now 14 years of service. We read about Jacob's plan in Genesis 30:29-32:

Jacob replied: "You know what work I did for you and how well your livestock fared under my care; the little you had before I came has grown into an abundance, since the LORD has blessed you in my company. Now, when can I do something for my own household as well?" Laban asked, "What should I give you?" Jacob answered: "You do not have to give me anything. If you do this thing for me, I will again pasture and tend your sheep. Let me go through your whole flock today and remove from it every dark animal among the lambs and every spotted or speckled one among the goats. These will be my wages."

In essence, Jacob asked Laban for any future offspring of the flock of sheep that were spotted or dark colored. Laban believed that only spotted or dark-colored animals gave birth to spotted or dark-colored offspring and only solid-colored animals gave birth to solid-colored ones. So, that very day, Laban had separated the dark and spotted sheep and goats from the solid-colored ones, leaving behind only the solid colored animals. Laban believed he had made a great deal! Solid-colored animals would not give birth to spotted ones. Therefore, Jacob would earn only a small number of animals from the flock.

Jacob, however, knew Laban would try to trick him again. So he had planned for this moment. With some creative breeding practices and God's blessing, Jacob had engineered the flock of sheep and goats so that the solid-colored animals would in fact give birth to spotted and dark-colored ones and not solid-colored ones. Genesis 30:43 describes the result:

So the man [Jacob] grew exceedingly prosperous, and he owned large flocks,

male and female servants, camels, and donkeys.

At the end of Jacob's years of service, Laban was not too happy about being tricked. And so Jacob gathered his wives, children, and servants, and he assembled his now large flock and possessions and fled from Laban's land. They set out to return to the land of his father, Isaac, to take possession of his inheritance.

1. Where did Jacob go to find a wife? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What was the deal Jacob made with Laban so that he could marry his daughter Rachel?  
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3. How was Jacob first tricked by Laban? What reason does Laban give for his trickery?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
4. What did Jacob agree to do so that he could still marry Rachel?  
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5. What did Jacob ask Laban for as payment for his 14 years of service?  
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6. Why did Laban believe he had tricked Jacob again?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. How did Jacob end up tricking Laban?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Where did Jacob flee to after tricking Laban? \_\_\_\_\_

## Reflection Questions

1. Describe a time when you had to work hard to achieve something you wanted. What was it like to work for what you wanted? Did the time go by quickly or slowly? Why? How did you feel after you had achieved your goal?

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2. When we first met Jacob, he used his skills of trickery and manipulation for his personal gain. By the end of his time with Laban, however, Jacob had grown in maturity and righteousness in the eyes of God. God blessed Jacob and allowed him to use his skills so that justice was done. What special skills and talents do you have? Describe a time you used skills and talents selfishly. How did that situation turn out? Describe a time you used your skills and talents justly for God. How did that situation turn out?

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# God Remembers Rachel

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**Directions:** Read about Rachel and the battle of prayer, then questions that follow.

Jacob's beloved wife Rachel was barren; she could not have any children. Her sister, Leah, who was also married to Jacob, had many children. She gave birth to six sons. Rachel was very upset because she was unable to have children of her own. She became jealous of her sister. Eventually, Scripture tells us that "God remembered Rachel. God listened to her and made her fruitful" (Genesis 30:22). Rachel, despite her frustration and jealousy of her sister, cried out to God and He heard her. Rachel eventually gave birth to two sons, one of whom, Joseph, would grow up to be the savior of his people and all of Egypt.

Sometimes, when things aren't going our way and we seem to be down on our luck, it can feel as if God has forgotten us. But this is not true. God cannot forget us. He is God, our Creator and our Father. Psalm 49:15 tells us, "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you." In a poetic way, the psalmist tells us that even in the unlikely event that our own mothers would forget us, God will not. He cannot!

So how do we make sense of God's "remembering" Rachel if He does not forget us? In those moments in life when things aren't going our way and we become angry at God and feel as if He has forgotten us, the truth is, we have forgotten Him. Often in those moments, we turn away from God, fall into sin, rely only on our own abilities, and fail to trust others or seek help. We abandon our faith in God's promises to us. We forget that

He has a plan of hope for our lives. That's not to say that everything will always be easy. But, in the end, God will fulfill all of His promises to us. When the sacred author of Genesis explains that God "remembered" Rachel and "listened" to her, that first required Rachel to come back to God and cry out to Him.

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The opportunity to pray to God is first and foremost a gift, but it also requires us to do something: to respond to Him. The battle of prayer, then, is against our own weaknesses, temptations, failures, distractions, and laziness. It is also a battle against the work of the devil himself, who wants nothing

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persevere against all obstacles that stand in our way. In this way, we will “remember” God throughout our lives.

1. Why was Rachel jealous of her sister, Leah?

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2. How does Scripture describe what happened between God and Rachel?

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3. Why will God not forget us?

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4. What does Psalm 49 say about God’s “forgetting” us?

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5. If God does not forget us, how do we make sense of God’s “remembering” Rachel?

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6. What had to happen first before God “remembered” Rachel?

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Him. To be successful in the battle of prayer, we must humbly recognize that we cannot do it alone. We must trust in God to hear our prayer and must persevere against all obstacles.

1. What did God call Jacob to do after he had earned his pay?

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