

Series: Beginnings, Betrayal, Blessings
Title: Laban and Sons: Dealing with a Toxic Work Environment
Text: Genesis 28-31

(Inspired by Ross Cochrane)

THE STORY

Genesis 28:1-4 Sent Jacob to find a wife and for safety

¹ ... "You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women. ² Arise, go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel your mother's father, and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. ³ God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. ⁴ May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham!" ⁵ Thus Isaac sent Jacob away.

Genesis 28:10-22 Jacob's ladder dream

- God renews the family promise
- Jacob builds an altar

Genesis 28: 17

And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Genesis 29:1-12 Jacob meets the neighbors and meets Rachel

- The conversation
- The stone on the well
- Meeting Rachel, rolls stone and watering her flocks
- *¹⁰ Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. ¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud.*

Genesis 29:13-30 Jacob's wages in wives - 14 years and two wives

- *¹⁵ Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?"*
- Leah and Zilpah
- Rachel and Bilhah

Genesis 29:31 - 30:24 Jacob's Eleven Children born

- Leah has four
- Bilhah has two
- Zilpah has two
- Leah has two more and a daughter
- Rachel has one – Joseph

Genesis 30:25-43 Jacob's wages in sheep

- Laban prospers
- What can I give in wages
- Speckled and striped spotted sheep
- Laban moves them all away
- Jacob's breeding strategy
- God's blessing

Genesis 31:1-21 Laban angry and Jacob leaves

- Jacob's flock grows and strong; Laban's not so much.
- Jacob says to Rachel, *"I've worked for your father with all my strength, yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me. . . . So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me. In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. The angel of God said to me in the dream, . . . 'Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you'"* (Genesis 31:6–12).

Genesis 31:25-32 Laban overtakes Jacob and accusations fly

- Why did you leave?
- Why are you taking my daughters?
- What about my grandchildren?
- You have even taken my idols.
- *"What have you done, that you have tricked me and driven away my daughters like captives of the sword? ²⁷ Why did you flee secretly and trick me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre? ²⁸ And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? Now you have done foolishly. ²⁹ It is in my power to do you harm. ..."*
- God tells Laban he better not to say anything good or bad.

Genesis 31:32-34 Laban searches for his idols and does not find them

- Rachel had taken them.
- She hides them under her seat.
- Begs not to rise because she is in a womanly way.

Genesis 31:36-42 Jacob lays out his claim

⁴¹ These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times.

⁴² If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night.”

Genesis 31:43-55 The pillar of peace

- They would part and not do harm to one another

Looking at this story and the chapters that reveal it there are several themes that could be addressed

1. Going to a homeland for a spouse and a future

- a. Journey from Hebron by the dead sea far North to Haran in southeastern turkey

2. The strength of love that would work fourteen years for the hand of the one you love

- a. Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

3. A message on pettiness between sisters regarding children

- a. From hated to praise
- b. From barren to blessed

4. God’s promise given before Jacobs labor and the fulfillment of that after 26 years

- a. “in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

5. God’s miraculous intervention in work and in war

- a. The sheep
- b. The visit to Laban

But today I want to talk about dealing with unfair business practices and working in a toxic environment.

Laban & Sons is a toxic workplace.

- If we reverse the curse of their poisonous bullying we can find some positive principles for:

A HEALTHY WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT.

- If only Laban and his sons would...

1. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY AND ENCOURAGE OTHERS (instead of play the Blame Game)

- Jealous of Jacob's success, Laban perceives that it is at his expense.
- The company hasn't made a profit this year and Jacob becomes an object of false blame, a scapegoat.
- Surely a healthy workplace culture depends on a boss who takes responsibility and encourages his workers to succeed in their endeavors.

2. ENCOURAGE CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION (not Workplace Inflexibility and Oppression)

- Are the results of my changes welcomed or does it appear to others that I am trying to take over.
- A healthy workplace encourages creativity and innovation.

3. BE INCLUSIVE AND BUILD HEALTHY WORK RELATIONSHIPS (vs. Power Politics)

Laban: "There are unwritten laws and expectations. Everyone has to have some kind of workplace politics! All he has to do is tow-the-line and not challenge the status quo; do things our way. He won't accept that we are the ones in authority."

Jacob: "Am I willing to challenge those who legislate rules in favor of their autocratic leadership style?"

- It is often the few, like Laban and his sons, who have the loudest voices and they market their ideas in the cauldrons of power in order to coerce others to become a puppet of their political correctness.
- Are we destined to ape the morality of those we admire the least?

Relationship building, not autocratic power-mongering, is the sign of a healthy workplace environment.

4. INSPIRE SUCCESS (vs. being threatened by success)

- Does my workplace culture remain fluid and open to new ideas rather than domineering and repressive, inspiring success?
- We can choose to refuse a bullying culture.

- In educational institutions as well as political arenas, workplaces as well as neighborhoods, there are authoritarian, arrogant, narcissistic personalities,
 - who feel a strong need to control or dominate,
 - and who use bullying as a tool to conceal their shame and boost their self-esteem,
 - demeaning others in order to feel empowered,
 - ...the Laban and Sons of our world.
- As we overcome the obstacles, the barriers, brick walls, roadblocks, hurdles ahead and find the direction and the courage we need to move forward in our lives, moving away from toxic environments will we find the purpose for which we are designed to fulfill.
 - At times we have to leave as Jacob realized
 - Yet he did endure for 20 years for a greater and longer lasting cause
- Having purpose and privilege in being involved in that which has eternal value...
 - does not make it easier for you or me to find the courage we need to face our detractors;
 - those who dislike us; critics or cynics;
 - and those who say disparaging things about our faith and play the bully in the name of tolerance.

Jacob is no innocent, perfect man.

- He's under pressure, and obedience to God will often involve going against the flow.
- He is learning to not be bullied by the restrictive attitudes of others.
- Once, he had his manipulating mother to push him past his problems using deception, but now he will find other allies and a different courage inspired by faith instead of fear.

It's time to become a returnee and brave the journey to the land of promise.

But is he prepared to lose his job to pursue his destiny? Are you?

HOW DO WE FACE THE TOXIC WORKPLACE?

FOCUS ON THE PROMISE NOT THE PROBLEM.

FOCUS THROUGH THE PROBLEM.

“The sun's rays do not burn until brought to a focus” (Alexander Graham Bell).

- The problem was his father-in-law and brother in laws.
- There was no future in this place.

- He worked through the problems.
- He doubled the labor to make a future bright for him.
- He did right by his father-in-law in working the flock.
 - Yet he was opposed and had his wages changed ten times.
- Laban had said he could take the striped and spotted, yet moved them far away so there were none to be had.
 - So, within the framework of the work environment he arranged things to benefit himself.
 - We cannot escape the miracle that God did in having only strong spotted and striped sheep born.
- Jacob did not focus on the problem but he held onto a promise.
- Jacob had a promise from God with a ladder from heaven that he held onto.

FOCUS ON THE PROMISE

- His steps would involve courage, but he has seen a vision of a stairway to heaven.
- He became aware long ago that he was a bonded servant toward the undertaking becoming the man that was foreseen.
- He involves his wives and family, and they are all in agreement.
 - He meets with his wives in secret in the fields over a strategic coffee.
 - He shares the compulsion he has for leaving secretly.
 - He shares how God has engaged his attention and pledged to be with him.
 - He wants desperately to believe in that promise.

Jacob is intimately acquainted with broken promises.

- He was pledged to marry Rachel and Laban had given him Leah.
- His wages have been changed 10 times.
- He has been cheated just as he has cheated others.

Somehow this promise and pledge from God is different and gives him every indication to expect fulfilment.

T.F. Hodge said, "To conquer frustration, one must remain intensely focused on the outcome, not the obstacles." (*From Within I Rise*)

It might get messy with emotions, and timing most likely won't be what anyone wants. But you must work toward the promise and move through and then away from the problems.

Someone said, "The successful man is the average man, focused."

Jacob is focused.

He breaks away.

He buries anything that was ungodly under a tree of remembrance!

And then he goes to make peace with His brother who he had cheated 20 years earlier.

He holds onto a promise and then after breaking away and facing to fallout he brokered a Peace.

CHALLENGE

If you are an employer: practice righteous behaviors

God is calling you to practice righteous behaviors toward your employees: that they might make a living or have a road to advancement for a future.

If you are an employee:

Do not forget the promise of God to bless you if you follow Him.

Do not be ashamed of Him and he will watch over you.

Do work for the future that he has promised you.

Do be faithful in your place of employment.

Do leave when the toxicity is beyond what can be tolerated.