

BIBLE STUDY: Jacob and Esau

by Beth Niggemeyer

Key Passages: Genesis 25-33, Hebrews 12:16

Opening Activity: Two Truths and a Lie

(If you don't want an activity, skip ahead to the questions.)

Have each person in your group tell two true facts about themselves, and one made up fact. After they have told their three "facts" the rest of the group must guess which is the made up fact.

Discussion:

- When did you last deceive someone, cover up something or lie?
- Why did you do this? How did it make you feel?

Study

In the story of Jacob and Esau we learn about two brothers, one who deceives and one who does not.

Read Genesis 25:21-26.

- What do we know about God's opinion even before Jacob and Esau are born?
- What is the meaning of Jacob's name? What is the meaning of Esau's? (If you do not have a Study Bible, you might have to tell youth that Jacob means "one who grabs the heel/deceives" and Esau means "covered in hair," and he is also referred to as Edom, which means "one who is red".)
- Draw a picture (either a mental one, or on paper) of both Jacob and Esau. Share this picture with the group.
- Generally when we hear the circumstances of a birth, it means that someone pretty special is being born. How do you think this birth story is similar to the most important birth story of Jesus?

Read Genesis 25: 29-34.

- What is a birthright? If your youth do not know, explain how it meant that you were entitled to the property of your father, and that you would become the master of his estate.
- Why do you think Esau was willing to part with his birthright so quickly?
- Do you think that this was a fair trade by Jacob?
- Read Hebrews 12:16-17 aloud to the group. What does this passage tell us about Esau and his birthright?
- Why do you think Esau regretted giving up his birthright?
- Does this change how we view Jacob?
- How might this point to God's plan in this story?

Read Genesis 27:1-27.

- Do you think what Jacob did was wrong? Why or why not?
- How do you think Esau felt when he learned that Jacob had taken his blessing?
- If you flip forward through the next few chapters, what consequences does Jacob receive for his actions? Do they seem fair?
- Jacob is mentioned again in Matthew 1:2 as an ancestor of Jesus. If Jacob is named as a member of God's family, despite his mistakes, what might this mean for us?

Read Genesis 33:1-4.

- In this story, which brother do you think has lived the better life?
- What do you think your reaction would have been if you were Esau being reunited with Jacob?
- Why do you think that Esau is so willing to forgive?
- Read Matthew 18:15 aloud to the group and then ask: How does Jesus tell us that Jacob and Esau should have acted? Is this done in the story?
- Can you think of anything that you need to forgive someone for? What about forgiveness you need to receive?
- What do we need to do receive forgiveness from God? (Be sure that youth know we must simply ask and have in Christ.)

Wrap-up Activity

Have your group pretend that both Jacob and Esau are running for student body president. If time permits have students split into two groups. Have each group draw up election posters for one of the brothers, and why you should vote for them. Then have students write their votes on a slip of paper and count them to see who wins. Then ask:

- Why did students vote the way they did?
- Who do you think Jesus would vote for?

Conclusion

Good news! God has elected each of us to represent him and be a part of his family. Jacob is an imperfect man, who God still favors, is part of Jesus' family, and part of our story as Christians. Jacob is a man who makes mistakes, but grows into a great man of God through faith. Jesus sacrifices His life on the cross so we can forever be a part of God's family, that no matter how our life stories look, in faith we will find grace and forgiveness.

As a group, close in prayer thanking God for a blessing they have been given, even though no person is perfect.