UPC Family Devotional

October – Week 1

Memory Verse of the Week:

“I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.”

-Genesis 31: 13

Oct 3 Monday Genesis 30:25-43

Laban does not fear the God of Abraham but even he can see that he has been blessed by the Lord because of Jacob. When Laban tells Jacob to name his wages, Jacob asks for livestock that are considered less valuable. This is a clear act of faith as Jacob knows that God will provide for him. When we live and work with industriousness and integrity, others will take notice and praise God because of us. This is one very important way we can act as the salt and light of the world. And when we trust in God sovereignty over our lives, we will be happy to live with less because we know our loving Father will take care of us.

How is God calling you to be salt and light in your workplace, school, or family? What do your financial decisions reveal about your faith in God's provision?

Despite Jacob’s humble request regarding his wages, the dishonest Laban schemes his way into making sure that Jacob comes out with nothing. Yet, God allows Jacob to breed a large herd of strong animals, which causes him to become more prosperous than ever. When God is on our side, we can take heart even when we are cheated or disadvantaged. Through Jesus, we are heirs to the new covenant, which ensures God’s protection and blessings over us. Though we may face opposition, we will go from glory to glory because of the promises we possess in Christ. In every struggle, the Lord will provide us with what we need to overcome.

What current opposition or hardship are you facing? How do God's promises give you confidence and hope in the midst of your struggles?

Oct 4 Tuesday Genesis 31:1-16

Laban becomes filled with jealousy toward Jacob, which only intensifies the trouble that Jacob must endure. In the midst of his mistreatment, God speaks directly to Jacob and tells him to return to his homeland. Rather than seeking vengeance against his corrupt uncle, Jacob immediately takes action to obey the Lord and follow his lead. When we focus on what others have and what we lack, our hearts become darkened with envy. But when we keep our eyes fixed on God and all that He has promised, we will not be held down by the people who have tried to take from us. We can move forward in faith, resting in God's protection over our lives.

Which people or situations cause you to feel envy? What might help you shift your focus from what you lack to what God has given you?

While Jacob has not been completely faultless in his dealings with Laban and others, the Lord has made it clear to him that he has taken notice of Laban’s actions and the difficulties that Jacob has had to endure. God appeared to Jacob in a dream and not only encouraged him with His presence but also provided a solution to overcome Laban’s attempt to cheat him. As Jacob recounts this experience to his wives, they also recognize that obeying the Lord's direction is the best option for them. This is a reminder to us that our all-powerful God is always watching over us and sees our struggles. Therefore, we can rely on Him to provide a way out.

When has God encouraged you with His presence during a difficult time? What divine promises give you hope amid your current struggles?

Oct 5 Wednesday Genesis 31:17-35

It's not clear why Rachel swipes her father's household gods. She may believe that they will bring her good luck, or perhaps she tends to sell them. Whatever the reason, this act demonstrates that Rachel does not yet fully trust in the Lord. Likewise, as we walk with the Lord, we may be tempted to hold onto idols- such as worldly success or financial security- as a type of insurance policy. But the folly of such “insurance” is that idols will surely fail us while God never will. Just as the Lord proved His ability to protect Jacob’s family by appearing to Laban and warning him, He will show in time and again that He is the only God worthy of our trust. Let us worship and serve Him alone.

What idol are you tempted to use as an insurance policy when things go bad? How have idols failed you in the past?

Laban catches up to Jacob and accuses him of stealing the household gods. The words of Laban’s accusation reveal the death of his godlessness. In one breath, he tells Jacob how the “God of your father” spoke to him, but then asks, “Why did you steal my gods”? Even after a supernatural encounter with the Almighty God, Laban is still concerned with his little gods that can be stolen and hidden in a camel’s saddle. While we may not worship small statuettes made of wood or stone, there are still many idols in today's culture that try to steal our devotion away from God. But just like Laban’s household gods, these idols will prove to be completely powerless.

How has God proven Himself more powerful than idols in your life? Which idol is He calling you to let go of so that you might experience more of His provision?

Oct 6 Thursday Genesis 31:36-42

Jacob angrily confronts Laban for pursuing him and accusing him of theft. He takes this opportunity to defend his innocence by detailing all the injustices he endured during the 20 years he worked for his uncle. Unfair treatment and the denial of justice are evils that most of us will experience at some point in our lives. But when the world offers no sympathy or solution, God knows and understands our sufferings. He will not allow even a single tear to fall from our cheeks in vain. Because of His promise to vindicate us, we can resist the temptation to repay evil with evil for God to bring about perfect justice at the appointed time.

When have you had to stand up for your own innocence? Why must we resist retaliating against evildoers?

As Jacob looks back on the hardships he had endured, it would be easy for him to become bitter at all the evil that was inflicted upon him. But instead, he declares that the loving hand of God was providing for him and guiding him all the way. This is a wonderful guarantee we have as children of God who have been bought by the blood of Christ. Along with our eternal inheritance stored up in heaven, God promises that all things we experience in our lives on earth work toward our ultimate good. As we struggle through the ups and downs of life, our spirits are being renewed each day as we draw closer to our final rest in the presence of God.

What blessings have you received that came out of a season of hardship? How can you share your story to encourage someone in a similar situation?

Oct 7 Friday Genesis 31:43-55

Laban’s conflict with Jacob could have easily escalated but realizing that he might never see his daughters again, Laban makes the wise decision to offer a truce in the form of a covenant. Jacob agrees and sets up a pillar in a heap of stones to serve as witnesses. As Christians we should seek peace with all people where possible, especially with other believers. When we settle a conflict with a brother or sister, we must remember that God is a witness to that agreement and it will hold each party to account. Therefore, our repentance must be genuine and our forgiveness unconditional. There is no aspect of life that lies beyond the gaze of our heavenly Father. In all our dealings in the world, God watches over us.

When have you had to settle a conflict with another believer? Why is it important that conflicts between believers are resolved peacefully?

When Laban and Jacob make their vows according to ancient custom , it becomes clear that Laban does not, in fact, worship the same God as Jacob. He mentions the God of Abraham but also includes the deities of Abraham’s brother and father - the household that Abraham left behind when the Lord called him to Canaan. Jacob, on the other hand, knows better: he takes his oath in the name of the God of his father, Isaac. We might find ourselves in similar situations where people acknowledge our God as just one of many other gods. Though our beliefs may not be popular, let us hold fast to the truth of Scripture and confess that we serve the one, true God.

How does your culture view the Christian God? How does this view compare to what the Bible says about God?

Oct 8 Saturday Genesis 32:1-12

On his way to the land of his brother, Jacob is met by a host of angels. This is certainly a sign of God's presence as he prepares to face Esau, who may prove to be a greater foe than Laban ever was. But instead of trusting in the God who has just confirmed His presence, Jacob acts in fear and relies on his wits to secure a good outcome for himself and his family. As much as we talk about trusting in God, we are often just like Jacob and go about our lives trying to achieve the best results with our own power. This might work for a while, but we will soon realize our limits. Let us rely completely on God and allow Him to lead us into the wonderful things that He has in store.

When have realized the limits of trusting in your own abilities? What principles does the Bible teach us about how to deal with uncertainties?

After Jacob has done all he can to prepare for Esau’s impending attack, the only thing left to do is pray. He repeats the words and promises of God, recounts his blessings, and shows humility in recognizing that he is unworthy of God's favor. When we humble ourselves before God and remember the great things he has done for us, he will surely listen to our cries and act on our behalf. Instead of approaching God with an attitude of entitlement, let us come before Him with a broken and repentant heart. The prayer of genuine faith acknowledges our desperate need for God and relies on His powerful provision.

With what attitude or mentality do you usually pray to God? How can you develop more humility and trust in your prayers?