UPC Family Devotional

September – Week 4

Memory Verse of the Week:

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.”

-Genesis 28:16-17

Sep 26 Monday Genesis 28:1-9

Although the conflict under Isaac’s roof has divided the family, we see glimmers of hope as they now seek to obey God. This obedience is first shown as Isaac accepts that the Lord has chosen Jacob to inherit the promise He first gave to Abraham. Isaac’s second act of faithfulness involves sending Jacob away to find a wife from among their kin. Just like Abraham, Isaac does this to protect his covenant heir from being spiritually compromised by the culture of the Canaanites. We all make mistakes, but it just takes a few small steps of faith and obedience to get back on track with God. Trusting in God's promise that He will be with us the whole way, let us continue to move forward in our journey with Him.

What fears prevent you from trusting God with your future? What examples of faithfulness from past generations inspire you to live for God?

After realizing how much his Canaanite wives displeased did his father, Esau tends to reestablish favor with Isaac by marrying an Ishmaelite. Esau's actions reveal how little he understands about the situation at hand. He shows no concern for the will of God and only takes steps to improve his own position within his family. God cannot be fooled- he always knows whether we are acting in genuine obedience or in self-interest. In the presence of an all- knowing God, let us carefully check our hearts and ask Him to remove all pride and worldly ambition. Only when we humble ourselves before the Lord can we sincerely pursue His will.

How can you keep the true motivations of your heart in check? What temptations try to steer you away from God’s will?

Sep 27 Tuesday Genesis 28:10-22

When Jacob lays his head to rest on his way to Harran, the Lord personally reveals Himself to him through an incredible dream. The God of his grandfather, Abraham, and the God of his father, Isaac, now becomes his God, too. The promises of God are no longer just words passed down from generation to generation; but the LORD makes a personal promise to Jacob and establishes the course of his future. In our Christian walk, there may have been times when God felt like a distant deity and His promises seemed like nothing more than fine-sounding words. But as we encounter God personally in prayer, in His word, and in community, we come to learn that He is our God, and He has a perfect plan for each of our lives.

How has God revealed Himself to you personally? How do you seek His presence when He feels distant?

Jacob realizes that his dream is no ordinary event; He has seen the Lord! So, he takes a stone and sets it up as a memorial pillar, vowing to serve the Lord *if* He provides for his journey. Jacob’s conditional vow reflects an immature faith, but it is a step forward nonetheless. We all have a long way to go toward spiritual maturity, but God is faithful to meet us in moments along the journey when God brings us to new heights of revelation and intimacy. Marking these moments and looking back on them will help remind us that God is who He says He is and will do all that He says He will do.

Take some time to look back on your walk with God. What were the spiritual milestones in your life, and how has God continued to be faithful until now?

Sep 28 Wednesday Genesis 29:1-14

Jacob, while on his journey, stumbles across a well which just happens to be the place where his uncle Laban’s daughter comes to water her sheep. He has traveled to this land on a mission to find a wife, but the woman God has chosen for him unexpectedly shows up before he even reaches his destination. As a man who was used to scheming and deception to get what he wants, Jacob was probably ready to use some of his old tricks to find himself a bride. But God makes clear that he wants Jacob to leave that life in the past. As God leads Jacob up to Rachel, He shows Jacob that He is faithful to keep His promises and will provide for him every step of the way.

When has God answered one of your prayers in an unexpected way? Why is it so difficult to stop striving and simply trust in God's provision?

Perhaps seeking to impress Rachel, Jacob rolls the heavy stone away by himself and then greets her with a kiss. Though Jacob has a long way to go in his relationship with God and will make many mistakes along the way, he has enough discernment to recognize that meeting Rachel is a blessing from God and responds with joyful weeping. We can sometimes fall into the myth that God gives more favor to those who are spiritually mature, as though our faith were some part of meritocracy. But Scripture is filled with examples of deeply flawed individuals being richly blessed by God simply because He has chosen them. Let us receive God's blessings with a grateful heart and respond with praise.

In what ways did God bless you when you were very young in your faith? How did those blessings influence the rest of your spiritual journey?

Sep 29 Thursday Genesis 29:15-30

At first glance, Jacob’s desire for Rachel may seem romantic, but on further reflection, it becomes clear that his attachment is unhealthy and obsessive. Desperate to earn Rachel's hand in marriage, Jacob offers to labor for seven years. When the years are completed, he demands that Rachel be given to him that he might satisfy his desire for her. Jacob turns God’s beautiful gift into an idol that consumes his heart. Romantic desire is not sinful in itself, but it is all too easy to become so entangled in this pursuit of this love that we forget our calling to love the Lord our God above all else. When we put God first, He equips and strengthens us to love others well.

Has your pursuit of romantic love ever gotten in the way of your pursuit of God? What other temptations cause you to neglect your first love?

Laban takes advantage of Jacob’s impatient desire and deceives him into marrying Rachel’s older sister, Leah. Thus, Jacob the deceiver reaps what he has sown and gets duped in a humiliating fashion. He has already thrown away seven years of his life and will now serve seven more in order to win the wife he desires. It is a humbling experience through which God wants to teach Jacob to stop relying on his own devices and instead depend on Him. Got works in the same way in our lives as he refines our character for his greater purposes. It may take some time, and for many it is a lifelong journey, but God promises to simplify us into his likeness.

How has God confronted your pride and humbled your heart? How has your character changed since you first started believing in him?

Sep 30 Friday Genesis 29:31-35

Imagine being Leah, whose younger sister attracts the gaze of every man while she is married off by her father to a man who has no interest in her. The Lord sees Leah's misery, so He blesses her with a child. When Leah gives birth to Rueben, she acknowledges God but is still desperate for her husband’s affection. Amid the heartbreak of rejection and loneliness, we can sometimes feel that God's love is not enough. It is only natural that we crave companionship and care from others because God created us for relationship. But no one can love us like God can. When we feel unwanted or unloved, let us draw near to our Father in heaven who calls us precious in His sight.

When have you felt rejected or unloved? How has God encouraged you with His perfect love and tender care?

During Old Testament times, a woman’s worth was largely based on her ability to have children. Therefore, Leah places her hope in this ability- which her younger sister Rachel lacks- to win Jacob’s affection. Yet each time she gives Jacob a son, she is disappointed because he still does not love her. It is only when she gives birth to Judah that she shifts her focus from her unloving husband to her faithful God and praises Him for all He has done for her. Like Leah, we are often blind to God's gifts because we can only see what we lack. But when we take the time to praise Him for what we have, our hearts will be satisfied, knowing that He is the true source of our joy.

In what area of life do you feel lacking? How can you reorient your focus toward the good gifts that God has given you?