

Lessons From Leah

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I preached a sermon two weeks ago entitled Working for Rachel, but Waking up with Leah. It was a message about disappointment based on the story of Jacob from Genesis 29:14-30. Jacob cheated his older brother Esau out of his birthright. As a result, Esau wanted to kill him, so Jacob ran away to his uncle Laban's house for safety and to find a wife from his own people.

Jacob loved Laban's younger daughter Rachel and agreed to work for 7 years to marry her. After 7 years, he married her, but on the wedding night when it was dark, Laban brought Leah to Jacob rather than Rachel. When he woke up the next morning, Jacob was very angry that Laban had deceived him. Laban then agreed to give Rachel to Jacob if he worked another 7 years.

After preaching this sermon, Brenda Boerger gave me the idea of preaching a follow up message on Leah. I prayed and felt led to do it. So I'm preaching today on Lessons From Leah / Dealing with Rejection, Envy and Rivalry.

Let me begin by saying there was a lot of ungodly behavior in this story. Many people are surprised when they read the Bible and see the ungodly behavior of some people. They are especially surprised by behaviors like polygamy.

Let me just say that polygamy happened in the Bible – but it was not the will of God. The Bible says that God's original intention was for one man to be married to only one woman. We find this in Genesis 2:24.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

God created marriage and He created it to be monogamous – which means married to one person. And since God made male and female and created marriage for them – there are no biblical grounds for homosexual marriage. And since God said one man will be married to one woman and become one flesh – there are no biblical grounds for polygamy. Deuteronomy 17:17 says:

The king must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray.

God gave this command to save people from problems. This can be clearly seen in the life of Solomon. At one time, Solomon was the wisest man on earth, but disobeying God's command about polygamy caused him great harm and turned his heart from God.

It also caused great problems in the lives of Jacob, Rachel and Leah. It started with Genesis 29:30 which says:
Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah.

This was not wrong of Jacob. Rachel was the one he loved and the one he worked for. Leah was forced on him by Laban. And the results were not good for anyone involved. The first bad result that had to be dealt with was rejection. Genesis 29:31 says:

When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.

It would be hard to be unloved by your spouse. It would be hard to be rejected by your spouse. The Bible makes it clear that Rachel was the prettier sister. So, I'm sure Leah had thoughts like, "You aren't pretty enough. Your sister is loved but you will never be loved."

If you have ever felt rejected because you don't believe you're pretty enough or smart enough or whatever enough, you can relate to Leah. Rejection is something that affects everyone at some point in their life.

In sports you might get cut from the team. REJECTED
 In sales they could turn down your product. REJECTED
 In a meeting they might not like your presentation. REJECTED
 In a marriage they might tell you they want a divorce. REJECTED

The word rejection literally means "to throw back." It means "to discard as worthless, useless or substandard." That's how rejected people feel – worthless - useless - not good enough.

Many great men and women in the Bible experienced rejection.

- Joseph's brothers rejected him and sold him into slavery.
- David's father overlooked him when Samuel came to choose a king.
- Even Jesus the son of God was rejected. Isaiah 53:2-3 says:

There was nothing beautiful or majestic about His appearance, nothing to attract us to Him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

The fact that Jesus was rejected illustrates a basic truth – even if you're perfect, people will still reject you. But you don't have to live with rejection. The antidote to rejection is acceptance. We must accept God's love for us. God loves and accepts us no matter what we do. God says.... You've made a mess – I still love and accept you! You've failed, let me down, denied me – I still love and accept you! And that will never change!

You see God loves and accepts us no matter what we do and until we believe this, we won't be able to love ourselves or love others.

Leah had to learn this lesson. The names Leah gave her children reveals the miraculous faith God had planted in her heart. She was rejected by Jacob, but she

was remembered by the Lord. In spite of the polygamous marriage, she became the mother of 6 sons who were to become the fathers of six of the 12 tribes of Israel. The names Leah chose for her sons reveal the pain Leah went through and the faith she held on to. Genesis 29:32 says:

Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."

Reuben means "Behold a son," and Leah praised God for looking favorably upon her. But her hope was that while Jacob did not love her because of her lack of beauty, he would love her because she bore him a son. Genesis 29:33 says:

She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, He gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon.

Simeon means "Hearing," and was given by Leah since God had heard her cry because she was rejected and unloved. Such a name as Simeon is a lasting monument of answered prayer. Genesis 29:34 says:

Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was named Levi.

Levi means "Joined" or attached. Leah hoped that through Levi's birth she would be more closely united to her husband. Genesis 29:35 says:

She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the Lord." So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.

Judah means "Praise." This reveals that Leah's heart is in a different place after this baby's arrival. The names over other sons reflect a desire to have her husband see, hear, and pay attention to her, but, when Judah comes along it seems Leah has *finally* realized that fulfilling God's purpose is *more satisfying* than the attention of any man. Leah had changed the focus of her heart and was able to say, "I will praise the Lord."

Later Leah had two other sons named Issachar and Zebulun, and a daughter, Dinah. When she had Zebulun, she said in Genesis 30:20

"God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun.

Leah was rejected by her husband, and she hoped birthing sons would acquire his love. By the time she gets to Judah, we see her mindset has shifted to giving God praise alone for His goodness to her. Then, when she births his sixth son, Zebulun, she no longer asks for love for her husband, just that he treat her with her with honor.

If you are ever rejected, it would serve you well to follow Leah's example. She went through deep, emotional turmoil but learned through it that God was faithful and worthy to be praised in spite of her circumstances.

The second thing Leah had to deal with was envy. Genesis 30:1 says:

When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she envied her sister.

This is a strange plot twist because Rachel was the beautiful sister. Jacob loved her. It seems Rachel would be object of envy rather than the possessor of it. But even though she won the beauty contest, Rachel was losing the baby-making contest.

In American culture where we value looks over everything, this doesn't make sense. But back then babies—especially sons—were the way a woman found worth. While Rachel's womb stayed closed, Leah cranked out boys for Jacob. Scripture shows that Rachel didn't take this very well. She became jealous. Another word for jealousy is envy.

Envy is wanting what somebody else has: it's the resentful or unhappy feeling of wanting somebody else's success, good fortune, qualities, or possessions.

It could be someone getting a promotion or a raise and you did not.
 It could be someone's family seeming to be more together than yours.
 It could be someone else having more money than you.
 It could be you think someone is more talented or better looking.
 (By the way – this story shows that good looks don't prevent problems!)

In the Old Testament sense, envy is coveting what someone else has – their home, job, spouse, possessions. Or - how many of you have ever said, "How come God answers their prayers but not mine?" Boom! Envy has planted its seed in your heart. If you don't deal with it, a root of bitterness can spring up and defile you and those around you.

Here's how you can tell if you are envious: by how you respond when someone else is blessed or promoted. Romans 12:15 says to *Rejoice with them that rejoice*. That's the envy test.

When you are envious – you cannot rejoice when others are blessed.

What's the antidote for envy? Love!

1 Corinthians 13:4 says: *Love does not envy*.

When you truly love someone, you are happy when they are blessed!

If you don't deal with envy in your heart, it results in rivalry. That's what happened to Rachel and Leah. The beauty contest ended and the baby-making contest began!

Sibling rivalry goes all the way back to the beginning with Cain killed Abel.
 Envy kills! Envy kills relationships! Envy kills our ability to enjoy what we have!
 Envy causes us to blame God rather than praise God!

And victory over envy only comes through the cross! Envy cannot be overcome through positive thinking or self-help. Why? Because self is the problem.

Envy is totally based on self – self-interest and self-promotion. Since envy is based on self– the only way to deal with it is to die to self. The cross must do its work in this area of our lives.

How do we die to self?

By saying no to ourselves and yes to God

By saying no to self and yes to others

By rejoicing when someone else is more blessed than us

All of these actions serve to bring the death blow to envy.

You can overcome envy by dying to self and choosing to act in the opposite spirit.

What's the opposite spirit of envy? Love – love does not envy.

One of the things that fuels envy and rivalry is comparison. Leah compared her looks to Rachel's. Rachel compared her ability to bear children to Leah's.

But remember - there are no winners when we start comparing ourselves among ourselves. In John 21:18-23, Jesus told Peter:

When you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then He said to him, “Follow Me!”

Then Peter looked around and saw John.

When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?” Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow Me.”

The way God deals with someone else has nothing to do with how God deals with you! That's why it's foolish to compare yourself with others. That's why 2 Corinthians 10:12 says:

Those who compare themselves among themselves are not wise.

Why? You'll always find some who are better and some who are worse. Another reason it's not wise to compare is because it can cause jealousy.

Comparison has become an epidemic in our world. And, though we can certainly blame social media and cable networks for constantly allowing us to observe “better” lives, it's important to remember that comparison was a problem even in

Bible times.

There will always be someone to whom we can compare ourselves—friends, family members, people on the internet—but, we must consciously decide every day to believe God’s truth about comparison.

God made Rachel and Leah in the Bible look different on purpose. Why? Because he had different purposes for each of their lives. Likewise, God doesn’t ask us to be more like anyone we admire on television or Instagram; instead, He simply asks us to be more like Jesus. To try to be more like someone else distracts us from the unique plan He has for us.

When you feel like a “less than,” or wonder why God couldn’t have made you more like the “Rachels” in your life, it helps to remember Leah, and the mighty ways God uses those who feel like they don’t measure up.

Leah shows us what it looks like to drop out of the comparison game, while Rachel shows the crazy that comes when we won’t stop comparing.

When we strive for what we think will give us value (like Rachel) or work for what we think will bring us love (like Leah) we miss out on the opportunity to rest in contentment. We misplace our worship, chasing things like beauty or babies, hoping we’ll find peace.

But, as the story of Leah in the Bible shows us, comparison’s game has no winners, only wrestling sisters who keep score and stay miserable. Only by dropping out of the competition and determining, instead, to praise the Lord, regardless of their circumstances, can we find victory.

I think that’s what Leah would want us to know: satisfaction doesn’t come from winning the beauty contest, earning your husband’s love or bearing a house full of children. Instead it comes from finding fulfillment in God’s plan for your life!

Here’s the bottom-line results with Leah:

Leah may not have been as outwardly attractive as her sister, but what she lacked in beauty she made up for in loyalty to Jacob as a wife, a good mother to his children, and her faithfulness to God.

Leah eventually gave birth to six sons and one daughter and ultimately found her joy and favor with God. Her six sons became the representatives of 6 of the 12 tribes of Israel.

In the long run, Leah was recognized by the Jewish people as an important person in their history.

Here’s an amazing fact - at the end of Jacob's life, he told his sons in Genesis 49:29-31

Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite... There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah.

Jacob was not buried with Rachel, but with Leah. Where you were buried and with whom you were buried were huge then. This shows that Jacob came to recognize the virtue in Leah and he honored her in his death.

I close with the big lesson from Leah. The book of Matthew opens with a genealogy starting with Abraham. Verse 2 says:

Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

Remember – Leah was the mother of Judah. Verses 5-6 say:

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon.

So – the lineage of David and Solomon came through Leah!

And here's the big one! Matthew 1:16 says:

Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

It was Leah, not Rachel, who bore Judah through whose line the Savior came. For a mother in Israel, there could be no greater blessing!

Part of the beauty of Leah's story is that even though she was not the attractive star of the family – God used her in a phenomenal way.

Her son Judah was the father of the tribe that birthed both King David and Jesus the Messiah.

Leah's life shows us that God has an eternal purpose for each of us.

Other people may not see it, but God does!

Other people may not believe it, but God conceived it!

Other people might reject you – but God accepts you!

Other people might not love you – but nothing can separate you from God's love!

So instead of looking at others with envy, look to God in faith!

Instead of comparing yourself to others, start declaring what God says about you!

You are called! You are chosen!

You are loved! You are accepted in the beloved!

God began a good work in you and He will complete it, in Jesus' name!