God’s Mercy to a Deceiver

Summary and Goal
In the last session we saw the foreshadowing of an escalating family conflict centered on Esau and Jacob. From the very beginning, the twin brothers struggled against one another, and favoritism from Isaac and Rebekah only made matters worse. In Genesis 27–28, we will see the mess Isaac and his family made and how it affected their relationships with each other and with God. We will see a family that was divided and forsaking God. We will also see that even with all of their failings, God used this family to advance His plan to provide salvation to the world—not by their merit but by His mercy.

Session Outline
1. God’s plan continues through a dysfunctional family (Gen. 27:1-10).
2. God’s plan continues through a deceitful son (Gen. 27:18-20,25-29).
3. God’s plan continues through His mercy and grace (Gen. 28:10-15).

Session in a Sentence
God is merciful to use even the most unlikely people to build His kingdom.

Christ Connection
Jacob’s story is a good example of why humanity needs a Savior. Like Jacob, we seek a blessing that is not ours, but we cannot lie, deceive, or trick to receive it. Instead, Jesus shared His blessing with us when He took the judgment we deserve so that we might receive the blessing He deserved.

Missional Application
Because God has shown mercy to us, an unworthy people, we look for ways God can demonstrate His mercy and grace to others through our struggles, flaws, and dysfunctions.
Group Time

Introduction

**SAY:** There’s nothing like enjoying a good meal, especially when it features a specialty of a city, region, or state.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members to share briefly some of their answers to the opening question on page 103 in their DDG.

**? What are some foods associated with localities, and which ones have you tried?** (Texas barbeque; Maine lobster; Nashville hot chicken; Chicago deep dish pizza)

**EXPLAIN:** Referencing the paragraph in the DDG (p. 103), highlight the danger of allowing physical impulses and various cravings to lead us through life, especially when it comes to making major decisions. Help group members see that we were created for more than the passing pleasure that comes from these desires. We were created to turn to God for all of our needs and live in dependence and trust in Him, the true source of joy.

Good food usually means a good time, but the pursuit of good food can become disproportionate in our lives, impacting our decision-making, our finances, and our relationships. The same is true for all of the various appetites and desires we struggle with. Why? Because we often fail to put them in their proper place—beneath our pursuit of God. Still, God is merciful. He knows our weaknesses and failings, and yet, He continues to love us and use us to bring blessing to the world.

**SUMMARIZE:** In this session, we will see the mess Isaac and his family made in their selfish pursuits, which affected their relationships with each other and with God. This family was a key building block for the people God was forming, but they certainly didn’t look like it. Yet we will see that even with all of their failings, God used this family to advance His plan to provide salvation to the world—not by their merit, but by His mercy.
Point 1: God’s plan continues through a dysfunctional family (Gen. 27:1-10).

SAY: In the last session we learned that while Esau was the oldest son and would normally have received the birthright and family blessing, God instead chose Jacob to receive the promises given to Abraham (see Gen. 25:23; Rom. 9:10-13). Jacob manipulated Esau to receive the birthright, but Isaac intended to bestow the patriarchal blessing upon Esau, not Jacob.

READ Genesis 27:1-10 (DDG p. 104), asking group members to circle words and phrases in the passage that relate to the senses or physical desires.

When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could not see, he called his older son Esau and said to him, “My son.” And he answered, “Here I am.”

He said, “Look, I am old and do not know the day of my death. So now take your hunting gear, your quiver and bow, and go out in the field to hunt some game for me. Then make me a delicious meal that I love and bring it to me to eat, so that I can bless you before I die.”

Now Rebekah was listening to what Isaac said to his son Esau. So while Esau went to the field to hunt some game to bring in, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “Listen! I heard your father talking with your brother Esau. He said, ‘Bring me game and make a delicious meal for me to eat so that I can bless you in the Lord’s presence before I die.’

Now, my son, listen to me and do what I tell you. Go to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, and I will make them into a delicious meal for your father—the kind he loves. Then take it to your father to eat so that he may bless you before he dies.”

EXPLAIN that we cannot know for sure what was going on in Isaac’s mind here because Scripture doesn’t record it for us. We can, however, determine from Scripture that Isaac was a man who lived by his senses. He allowed his physical desires to inform his spiritual decisions.

• “Isaac loved Esau because he had a taste for wild game” (Gen. 25:28).

• Isaac acted impulsively when he lied about Rebekah being his sister to protect his life (Gen. 26:7-11).

EXPLAIN: Though it might be easy to blame Isaac for the calamity that followed (he does bear part of the responsibility), the dysfunction in this family ran much deeper. (Refer to the first paragraph on DDG p. 104.)

Isaac’s family was dysfunctional because of sin. As a family unit, they struggled with favoritism, deceit, self-control, and sensuality.
Commentary: In Genesis 27, Isaac once again gave in to his impulsiveness and physical appetites as he attempted to play favorites with his sons, which will lead to disastrous consequences. It began with Isaac calling for Esau and inviting him to make his favorite meal so he could bless his oldest son. Inviting only one son to a family blessing instead of the entire family went against custom. But more importantly, Isaac was intentionally acting against the oracle God had given years earlier (Gen. 25:23). The blessing conferred the right to rule over the family after the patriarch’s death. 1 But God had chosen Jacob for this honor, not Esau, though neither of them were worthy of it.

Esau too was driven by his fleshly desires and despised spiritual things. Rebekah joined her husband in playing favorites with their sons. And Jacob was a deceiver and swindler who was willing to take advantage of his brother and his father.

INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

What are some of the sins and struggles that plague many families today? (favoritism; divorce; adultery; physical and emotional abuse; financial stresses; conflicting values and priorities; lack of communication; busyness and distraction)

EXPLAIN that God is only referenced twice in the forty-six verses of this chapter, but this does not mean He was absent from this account. The sin and dysfunction of Isaac’s family did not hinder God’s plan.

- In verse 20, Jacob compounded his lie to Isaac by claiming the Lord helped him find wild game quickly, and then God is mentioned again in Isaac’s blessing of Jacob (vv. 27-29).
- God’s choice of Jacob was coming to fruition, even if it was coming about through the sins and dysfunction of this family.
- God is not the author of sin (1 John 1:5) and never tempts people to sin (Jas. 1:13), but He is sovereign over sin. God can use sin and dysfunction to bring about His will, as we see here, but we see this most clearly in Jesus dying on the cross for our sin—the greatest evil of all time producing the greatest good.

READ the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 104).

Many of us lament over the negative things we have experienced in our families and lives—whether because of our sin, someone else’s sin, or because of life’s circumstances. We wonder what our family might be like today if only we could go back and change or fix something. As humans, we tend to focus on the negative rather than rejoice over the positive. Yet we need to stop to consider that no matter what we’ve experienced or what errors we’ve made in our own family life, God is still merciful to us. He still blesses us with goodness and works through us, even when we fail to recognize His blessings.
Point 2: God’s plan continues through a deceitful son (Gen. 27:18-20,25-29).


18 When he came to his father, he said, “My father.” And he answered, “Here I am. Who are you, my son?”
19 Jacob replied to his father, “I am Esau, your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may bless me.”
20 But Isaac said to his son, “How did you ever find it so quickly, my son?” He replied, “Because the LORD your God made it happen for me.”

25 Then he said, “Bring it closer to me, and let me eat some of my son’s game so that I can bless you.” Jacob brought it closer to him, and he ate; he brought him wine, and he drank.
26 Then his father Isaac said to him, “Please come closer and kiss me, my son.”
27 So he came closer and kissed him. When Isaac smelled his clothes, he blessed him and said: Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed.
28 May God give to you—from the dew of the sky and from the richness of the land—an abundance of grain and new wine.
29 May peoples serve you and nations bow in worship to you. Be master over your relatives; may your mother’s sons bow in worship to you. Those who curse you will be cursed, and those who bless you will be blessed.

EXPLAIN: Fill in the gaps of Rebekah and Jacob’s complex web of lies and deceit to deceive Isaac.
- Jacob brought to his mother two goats from the flock, and she prepared the meal Isaac requested from Esau. She then gave Jacob Esau’s best clothes to wear, put the goats’ skins on his hands and neck, gave him the meal, and sent him in to see his father.
- Although Isaac was very old and could not see, he was immediately suspicious. The timing felt off. The voice of his son was off. So twice Isaac directly asked Jacob if he were Esau, and twice Jacob outright lied to his father. Moments later, Jacob also gave Isaac a bitter kiss of betrayal.
- More troubling than those blatant lies was Jacob’s blasphemous claim that the Lord had provided the game for him. Jacob’s heart was so hardened by his sinful desires that even this failed to elicit repentance.

READ the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 105).

Deceived by his younger son, Isaac ate, drank, and then blessed his son Jacob. The aging father bestowed a four-part blessing on him, including an abundance of grain and wine, dominion over other nations and his family, and curses for those who cursed him and blessings for those who blessed him, echoing God’s covenant with Abraham.
EXPLAIN: Jacob’s ruse worked, but with disastrous consequences (see vv. 30-41). Although God’s prophecy was fulfilled through Jacob’s actions, we must remember that there are always repercussions to ungodly behavior.

Commentary: Once the blessing was given, Jacob left Isaac. Then Esau arrived, missing the blessing ceremony by mere minutes. When Isaac and Esau learned of Jacob’s deceit, Isaac reacted visibly, trembling uncontrollably in his distress. Esau cried out bitterly for a blessing that his father could not give, and he determined in his heart that he would kill his brother after their father died (v. 41).

SAY: Jacob’s elaborate deception reminds us he was unworthy of the promises God was giving him, but God is still gracious and merciful to His people.

READ the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 105).

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

? How have you experienced God’s mercy and grace in your life? (answers might include: receiving light to recognize my sinfulness and God’s answer in Jesus; receiving forgiveness from God and others; being welcomed into a local church community; seeing change in sinful habits; observing dramatic responses to prayer)
**Point 3: God’s plan continues through His mercy and grace (Gen. 28:10-15).**

**SAY:** In Genesis 28, Jacob is sent away to live for a time in exile on account of his brother’s wrath and the desire of his parents that he not marry a Canaanite woman but someone from within their extended family in Haran.

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 28:10-15 (DDG p. 106).

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10 Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. 11 He reached a certain place and spent the night there because the sun had set. He took one of the stones from the place, put it there at his head, and lay down in that place. 12 And he dreamed: A stairway was set on the ground with its top reaching the sky, and God’s angels were going up and down on it. 13 The Lord was standing there beside him, saying, “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your offspring the land on which you are lying. 14 Your offspring will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out toward the west, the east, the north, and the south. All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. 15 Look, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”
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**EXPLAIN:** God extended mercy to Jacob through a vision in his time of uncertainty. Compare the tower of Babylon with the stairway of God, which revealed His mercy and grace in reaching down to humanity. God made Himself known to Jacob through His promises that would ultimately lead to blessing for all the families of the earth. (Refer to the first paragraph on DDG p. 106.)

These verses record the first time God spoke to Jacob. Here we might expect to see God’s thundering wrath given Jacob’s past, but instead, we see God’s gentle mercy. He gave Jacob exactly what he needed to know in this moment of uncertainty.

**Commentary:** The stairway with its top in the heavens reminds us of the tower of Babylon (Gen. 11:4). But this stairway is not made by human effort; it is a revelation of God. Rather than humanity working their way up to God, “Jacob’s stairway” reminds us that God reaches down to us to make Himself known. Furthermore, the people who were building the tower of Babylon did so to keep themselves from being spread out over the face of the earth. But God’s revelation to Jacob reaffirmed with him the threefold promise of the covenant first made to Abraham—land, descendants, and blessing—and God promised that Jacob’s descendants would be like the dust of the earth and spread out all over the world.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

> Why do you think it was so important that God spoke directly to Jacob in this passage? (God had spoken His promises directly to Abraham and Isaac; to reassure Jacob that God was with him regardless of his location; so Jacob knew the God of Abraham and Isaac was real, not just a story)
**EXPLAIN:** Connect Jacob’s vision of the stairway to Jesus with Jesus’ conversation with Nathanael in John 1.

- When Jesus first encountered Nathanael, He described him as an Israelite in whom there was no deceit (John 1:47). This is notable because Israel is another, later name for Jacob, who was marked by deceit in both his actions and his name. When pressed about how Jesus knew Nathanael enough to describe him so, He told Nathanael that He saw him under the fig tree, revealing His supernatural knowledge, and Nathanael responded with faith (vv. 48-49). Jesus concluded their conversation by telling him that he would see “heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (v. 51). God reaches down to humanity to bring about His redemptive purposes, and the stairway is the Son of Man—Jesus.

**READ** the following paragraph in the DDG (p. 106), establishing that God extends mercy to us through Christ in our time of need.

God came into the world through Jesus Christ, providing blessing for all—salvation as a means of restored relationship with God. And He did that for us: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). It is true that God extended mercy to Jacob in abundance, yet through Christ, He has showered us with mercy in superabundance. Jacob’s story should not elicit jealousy in our hearts but a humble gratitude, knowing that we are just as undeserving and have received unmatched mercy and grace in Christ.

**FILL IN THE BLANKS:** Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 106).

**God Is Merciful:** Mercy refers to God’s **compassion**. Both mercy and grace are **undeserved**, meaning humanity can do **nothing** to earn God’s mercy and grace. If one could, then it would no longer be the **free gift** of mercy or grace.

**Essential Doctrine “God Is Merciful”**: Mercy refers to God’s **compassion** and is often expressed in God withholding something, such as punishment for sin (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:5). Both mercy and grace are **undeserved**, meaning humanity can do **nothing** to earn God’s mercy and grace. If one could, then it would no longer be the **free gift** of mercy or grace.
My Mission

EXPLAIN: Throughout the story of Jacob and Esau, we encounter a dysfunctional family full of deceptive, self-serving, sensually driven men and women. This is hardly a family we would expect God to use to bring about His redemptive plan. And yet, He does. And in doing so, God reminds us of the vital role mercy will play in blessing all the families of the world. The fulfillment of God’s promise to provide redemption came through One who did not need redemption—Jesus Christ, the sinless Savior who lived in perfect obedience and righteousness. Through Him who did not need mercy comes the mercy that we so desperately need. In Him, we are a people through whom God communicates His salvation, and yet, we are also the ones for whom God provides salvation.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 107), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because God has shown mercy to us, an unworthy people, we look for ways God can demonstrate His mercy and grace to others through our struggles, flaws, and dysfunctions.

- What are some of your flaws and weaknesses that cause you to think God couldn’t save you or work through you? How does the gospel address each one?
- How can your small group grow deeper in relationship with one another to be the family God intends?
- How can you reveal God’s mercy and grace to someone in the coming days?

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, You are merciful for sparing us from Your righteous judgment and gracious in using us toward Your glorious purpose of blessing the world. Convict us where sin and deceit might be present in our lives so that we might live as a holy people who declare Your mercies to the nations. Help us to tell others the truth about Your Son, Jesus, so that they might receive the blessing that is Your mercy and grace in Him. Amen.

PACK ITEM 13: GOD’S MERCIES: Cut out these bookmarks and pass them out to group members to remind them that only God’s mercies in Christ can deal with sin, whether our own or in the world.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 108-110), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 111) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 108-110) help group members get into God’s Word for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 111) helps group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

**Daily Study**

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 108-110) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.

- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 1 as a part of point 1 in the session: *We must remember that reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel—reconciliation between us and God, but also between spouses, parents and children, and siblings in broken families.*

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- **Day 3:** “As broken and sinful as we are, God still uses us to bring blessing to this world, not because of who we are but because of who He is.”

- **Day 5:** “How often have we missed God at work in our lives because we have been too busy, too distracted, or too blinded to Him?”

Visit [www.GospelProject.com/blog](http://www.GospelProject.com/blog) for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

**Encourage One Another**

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the DDG (p. 111) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- **Encourage group members to support one another with truth from God’s Word in the midst of personal, family, and societal dysfunction.**

- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

Point 1: God’s plan continues through a dysfunctional family (Gen. 27:1-10).

“Following Near Eastern tradition (18:9-10), Rebekah could not be in the immediate company of males—even family members—who were conducting business. However, she was listening to the men from nearby. After learning of Isaac’s intentions for Esau, Rebekah came up with a scheme to overturn the plans. Perhaps she did it because she remembered the decades-old prophecy about Jacob dominating his older brother (25:23). With this the Bible paints a picture of a troubled family: Rebekah using her son (not ‘their son’) to destroy her husband’s plans, and Jacob agreeing to lie to his father and cheat his brother. A curse of an unexpected sort did result for both Jacob and Rebekah: their scheme forced Jacob to leave his father and mother (28:5); the Bible gives no indication that Rebekah ever saw her favorite son again.”

“that my soul may bless you before I die. The paternal blessing that Isaac wishes to give to Esau is important because it will establish the identity of the heir to the divine promises given to Abraham and Isaac. In light of this, the ‘firstborn’ line will eventually lead to a royal descendant through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed. This link between firstborn and blessing is emphasized in a wordplay involving both terms. In Hebrew, ‘firstborn’ is bekorah, whereas ‘blessing’ is berakah. Much of the story involving Esau and Jacob centers on these concepts and how the younger twin, Jacob, acquires both the firstborn birthright and the related paternal blessing.”

Point 2: God’s plan continues through a deceitful son (Gen. 27:18-20,25-29).

“Completely deceived, Isaac ate and drank (27:25) and then said, Come here, my son, and kiss me (27:26). Jacob went and kissed him, and then when Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him (27:27a). The blessing took the form of a prayer, for Isaac acknowledged that only the Lord can make any blessing effective. The key blessings he gave to Isaac were

- Satisfaction: the smell of his son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed (27:27b).
- Provision—material wealth: heavens dew … earth’s richness—an abundance of grain and new wine (27:27b).
- Promotion—greatness: may nations serve you … and may the sons of your mother bow down to you (27:29a).
- Protection: those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed (27:29b).”
“Jacob entered his father’s room with an opportunity to tell the truth but instead continued with the lie, claiming to be Esau. Jacob did not claim God as his own yet but instead called him your [referring to Isaac] God. Jacob was not committed to Yahweh at this point. He knew about the God of his father Isaac but had not entered into a relationship with Him. God had already determined that Jacob would be blessed, but Jacob’s deceitfulness was never suggested or sanctioned by God.”

**Point 3: God's plan continues through His mercy and grace (Gen. 28:10-15).**

“Jacob started northward on the approximately five-hundred-mile journey to Haran. At the end of one of his first days he stopped in central Palestine and camped outdoors. That night God appeared to him, Perhaps the stairway (a better translation than ‘ladder’) he dreamed of was a supernatural version of humanity’s Tower of Babylon (11:4), with God’s angels—and not sinful humans—using it to commute from heaven to earth. In the dream the Lord transferred to Jacob all the essential elements given originally to Abraham and Isaac.”

“Because Jacob’s vision at Bethel was his closest encounter with God up to this point in his life, he was convinced this place was unique. For him it was ‘the house of God,’ (the literal meaning of Bethel), and ‘the gate of heaven’ (v. 17). At this stage in God’s progressive revelation, he could not see that no earthly spot could play this role (Acts 7:48-50). Like his brother Esau, Jacob had not been a man of faith. But, even though the conditions he states toward the Lord (Gen. 28:20-22) fall short of true faith, they represent a step in the right direction.”

References
For a story to be great, it must include a great beginning. The story of the Bible, which tells the true story of our world, is no exception.

In the Book of Genesis, we see God the Creator in all His majesty and goodness as He spins the world into motion and lavishes His image bearers with love. We have an “inciting incident” that introduces conflict into this good world, as the first humans raise their fists in defiance toward their loving Father and bring havoc into this peaceful paradise. But even here, we have a promise—God will make things right again. God will cover His people’s sins and crush their adversary. The rest of Genesis shows how even though sin spread throughout the world, God remained faithful to His promise to Eve, His promise to Noah, and His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Book of Genesis is a glorious and earthy tale of rebellion and redemption, of sin and salvation, of failings and faith. Here is a book that shows us who we are in our sin and who God is in His grace. May this study lead you to express gratitude for God’s love toward you and then extend His love to everyone who inhabits this world He has promised to restore.