



Keepin' it All in Perspective

By Charlton Hiott

KEEP GENESIS WEIRD! That's my new slogan for the first book of the Bible. Ever read any of it? Creation, Adam and Eve, Garden of Eden, an ark full of animals and a flood; stuff that's hard to believe! Twists and turns in relationships, lying and cheating, sordid schemes and freaky dreams, murder and miracles, all right out of the starting gate of God's story to us about His relationship with us. Heck of an introduction! Weird.

But for me, one of the weirdest stories is found in the 29th chapter of the book. It's the story of Jacob, Rachel and Leah. One man, two wives. Never mind that Jacob tricked and cheated his brother and father and is on the lam with the help of his mother. Never mind the polygamy. Never mind these wives are his cousins. Never mind that Jacob has to serve his uncle 14 years just to marry the girl he loves. Jacob is married to two sisters: one he loves and one he doesn't.

One is described as beautiful and the other as weary with weak eyes. One he wanted to marry and one he was tricked into marrying. One he desires and one he resents. Can you imagine? What kind of marriage was this?

Now, I'm not making any of this up. Read it for yourself. And get this: God is watching all of this happen. Actually, He's intricately involved in this story. Look:

Now the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Gen. 29:31

God cared for Leah when Jacob didn't and allowed her to conceive and have a son. In those days and in their patriarchal culture, when a woman bore a son, she was highly esteemed and valued. Leah had given Jacob a son to help in the family vocation, to carry on the family name and inheritance. Time to celebrate! Not exactly.

We can't be sure how Jacob reacted to

being the father of a son by Leah, but one thing is for sure, it didn't make him love Leah. As a matter of fact, Leah spends the next few years of her life desperately trying to get her husband to love her, connect with her, move toward her emotionally. But Jacob doesn't budge. God sees and blesses Leah and Jacob with three more sons. All the while, Rachel, the one Jacob loves, is barren. Are you catching all the relational dynamics going on in this marriage?

So, like out of an episode of *Desperate Housewives*, here's this weird marriage: Jacob loves Rachel, but she has no children. He does not love Leah, but she has given him four sons! With each birth, Leah tries to get Jacob to love her, but he does not. Leah was forced into this marriage by her father and it was an awfully dirty trick on all three of them. Rachel loves Jacob; but it's her unloved sister who's providing for their future. This is

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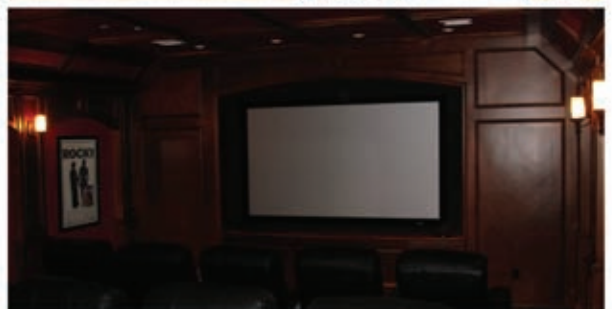
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not the way you want to start a marriage! I feel badly for all three of them. None of them expected marriage to be like this, yet here they are living it out and now there are children. Life can be complicated!

So, what can we take away from this ancient soap opera? These were ordinary people, like you and me, in extraordinary circumstances. But, that's life! That's marriage! Like Jacob, you fall in love with the person of your dreams: he or she is the One! It's Rachel and it's wonderful! Then, at some point in the midst of marital bliss, Leah shows up and it's not good. Leah represents the surprises in marriage that come from getting to know our spouse at what I like to call the 'warts and all' level. Warts are not pretty and, if we're not careful, we spend a lot of effort and energy trying to get rid of them. So, we react. We feel confused at best, downright duped at worst. If it goes on too long without much if any change, our hearts can grow cold. Patience thins and we're tempted to give up.

Or maybe in your marriage you identify more with Leah; you see your spouse as disconnected, cold and indifferent. So you try desperately to get an emotional response. Something! Anything! You do whatever it takes to try to make them love you. Sweet and nice or mean and demanding; it seems like manipulation. After a while, you can weary of trying. You feel hopeless. You no longer want to have anything to do with the person you've married. It's just too hard.

So, what do you do when you come to a place in your marriage when you realize that it has not turned out the way you thought it

would? Well, in the midst of her complicated marriage with real hopes, hurts and heartaches, Leah makes an amazing, yet simple choice that may give us a clue to what might help us get through.

And she [Leah] conceived again and bore a son and said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

After a while, you can weary of trying. You feel hopeless. You no longer want to have anything to do with the person you've married. It's just too hard.

For that moment, Leah sets aside all the heartache and disappointment of her loveless marriage and chooses to praise the One who sees, hears and truly understands her marriage. She praises God and names her child "Judah" which actually means "my God is praise." Leah stays in her marriage, but her ultimate focus changes from her needs and changing her spouse to praising God.

Here's the hard realization: marriage as God designed it, isn't all about what we want. God wants us to be happy and fulfilled in our marriages. But He also has a greater purpose working out in all our relationships. It's about the depth, grace, mercy and love around and through us broken, imperfect people. In

the same way God was working in the weirdness of this marital relationship to bring about an incredible and magnificent plan, He desires to work in every marriage to bring healing and fulfillment. Unfortunately, in the midst of the unexpected circumstances of marriage, we often fail to see that God is at work.

Leah got it right. And God used her choice in an incredible way that no one could have imagined. Hundreds of years later in the Gospel of Matthew it was recorded:

The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Matthew 1:1-2.

The line of Jesus Christ came through Judah, Jacob and Leah's son! God chooses to provide ultimate blessing, healing and salvation to all who believe from this weird and crazy marriage!

So if you're struggling in your marriage, remember that God sees and may be using the situation to teach you to love the unlovely and lead you in the way of higher blessing. Or if you feel like you are Leah in your marriage and your needs are not being met at all, be patient. Seek out whatever assistance you can. But, along the way, find peace in praising and following the God who desires to save you and lovingly lead you down the unexpectedly weird and wonderful path of blessing.

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