

The Jacob Model

Money Models for Believers:

Genesis 28:12-15, 20-22

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Did you know that the number one issue precipitating the dissolution of marriages is money management? A business owner teeters near bankruptcy because of his wife's spending. A wealthy woman wears rags because of her husband's hobbies. People suffer job disruptions and lose sleep over ebbing debt and looming bills, and then confess such shame and embarrassment over their insolvency. I've seen Christians do unethical and destructive things because of their need for money. Christmas season becomes stressful and a time of dread for too many because of money.

Putting your faith in Jesus as savior doesn't magically solve financial problems; but if you embrace Jesus and his word in the area of finances, you will experience healing and financial blessing. Jesus is the way! These past four Sundays have been dedicated to helping you understand Jesus and his teaching on money. The series, *Money Models for Believers*, is to help you embrace Jesus' counsel. We've spent much time in the Old Testament because it is difficult (no, impossible) to fully understand and apply Jesus' teaching unless you are aware of the Old Testament's witness regarding finances. The Old Testament was Jesus' Bible. He meditated on it, prayed over it and taught its meaning. When Jesus spoke about money, he relied on the Old Testament teaching: all financial blessings come from God, flow to people and flow through people. That is why he called us in Luke 16 to be purposeful, skillful and accountable in managing money. We are managing blessings, and Joseph and Daniel are relevant as models.

Today, I want us to look at the life of Jacob. His choices will help us understand the role of giving in Jesus' teaching about money.

Financial blessings flow through people: from nations to individuals, parents to children and leaders to followers. Jacob experienced this flow. He had the Rockefeller blessing. His grandfather Abraham and father, Isaac, were very rich, so Jacob grew up with a lot of money and the mentoring of successful managers. However, the money wasn't enough. Jacob exploited his brother gaining his birthright and stealing his blessing. Although we can't explore this now, it is important to understand that Jacob did not fear God in this. Instead, he used his wits to gain financial advantage at his brother's expense. Isn't this what we are afraid of when we purchase big ticket items like cars? How much are they trying to make off of us? How much is reasonable? Listen to James, the brother of Jesus, comment on this:

Your gold and silver have become worthless. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh in hell. This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment. For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The wages you held back cry out against you. The cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every whim. Now your hearts are nice and fat, ready for the slaughter. You have condemned and killed good people who had no power to defend themselves against you. (James 5:3-6, NLT)

Jacob did not continue on that path. His theft of his brother's blessing put his life in danger so that he left his father's riches behind and fled. It was in these desperate circumstances that God revealed his greatness and love to Jacob. Jacob was destitute and vulnerable, but God provided Jacob with a vision that unveiled God's great influence on the affairs of earth. God also spoke promises of blessing to Jacob. Jacob then made a conditional covenant. If God would be with him, protect him on his journey, provide his food and clothing, and bring him safely back to

his father, he would (1) make the Lord his God, (2) create this spot of encounter as a place for worshipping and (3) return a tenth of everything God blesses him with.

God did protect and provide for Jacob, and Jacob found shelter in a distant land with his Uncle Laban. Yet his uncle was as exploitive as he had been. A family trait, do you think? He swindled Jacob repeatedly. Jacob agreed to work 7 years in order to marry Laban's daughter. He worked 14 years because of trickery. Afterwards, Jacob worked for the speckled sheep and goats; but his uncle hid them all so that Jacob tended only the white ones. How would they produce speckled? Jacob took fresh dark shoots from three different kinds of trees, stripped the bark so that there would be white streaks on the shoots. Set them up by the watering troughs where the sheep and goats would see them as they drank and mated, and they produced speckled offspring. I've checked. There is no biological mechanism for this. Jacob did this as a prophetic act like Moses later did when he raised his staff and the waters of the Red Sea parted. The shoots and the staff didn't produce the outcome. They couldn't. God produced the outcome responding to the faith and obedience expressed in the shoots and staff. Jacob explained this to Laban's daughters:

You know how hard I have worked for your father, but he has tricked me, breaking his wage agreement with me again and again. For if he said the speckled animals were mine, the whole flock began to produce speckled lambs. And when he changed his mind and said I could have the streaked ones, then all the lambs were born streaked. In this way, God has made me wealthy at your father's expense. During the mating season, I had a dream... The angel said, "...I have seen all that Laban has done to you. I am the God you met at Bethel, the place where you anointed the pillar of stone and made a vow to serve me."
(Genesis 31:6-10, 12-13, NLT)

Jacob was trapped financially. His uncle used his might and wealth to exploit Jacob, but Jacob succeeded because of God. God was his partner. They shared in a covenant. Jacob wasn't idle. He didn't sit back and wait for his ship to come in. He worked hard, with the skill

and ethic he learned from Abraham and Isaac, and he was directed by God in that work.

Although Jacob's skill was important, God's protection, direction and intervention were even more decisive.

How sad it would be if this partnership was available only to Jacob! The good news is that isn't confined to him. God made the same covenant of financial partnership with Jacob's descendents, and they suffered financially when they ignored it. Malachi confronted them:

"You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me. You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the LORD Almighty, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Let me prove it to you! Your crops will be abundant, for I will guard them from insects and disease. Your grapes will not shrivel before they are ripe," says the LORD Almighty. "Then all nations will call you blessed, for your land will be such a delight," says the LORD Almighty. (Malachi 3:8-12, NLT)

God wanted to protect and bless the work of Jacob's descendents. He wanted to flood them with blessings. He wanted to bless them so abundantly that **ALL** nations would notice. He wanted them to notice because he wanted the peoples of the world to believe and be blessed as well. Now, who is going to fulfill that purpose today and be a channel for God's blessing to flow? Who wants to partner with God?

Many Christians say, "I don't have to tithe because I'm not a Jew. This is Old Testament teaching. It doesn't include me?" It doesn't? Don't you realize that the reason the old covenant was replaced was that people broke it and were condemned by its words? The work of Jesus was to give people a new heart where they would walk passionately, obediently, with trust in God. If Jesus has given you a new believing heart, wouldn't you want to enter into such a financial partnership if it and its blessings were available to you?

Jesus never nullified the promise of the tithe. He said that he didn't come to end the law but fulfill it. He told his followers to give and it will be given to them. He assured them that their Father cared for sparrows and flowers and much, much more for his children. "Seek first God's kingdom and righteousness," Jesus taught, "and all these things you need, that unbelievers sweat over and run after, will be provided." Jesus called us to financial and life partnership with God our Father. The promises were still available to us who believe. Paul wrote:

No matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 1:20, NIV)

God did not remove with Jesus the blessing that he poured out through the old covenant. He restored it for some and extended it to others. We can say "Amen!" We can say, "So be it!"

Do not look at the tithe as your plan of giving. Look at it as a basic part of managing God's blessings that flow to you. You return a tenth automatically as you receive it. It is a sign of your partnership with God. You have a partnership. Your affairs are also his affairs. Expect direction, protection and provision as a matter of promise, not a matter of mercy. Expect also the opportunity to give beyond the tithe as God blesses you financially and fills your heart with his generous, divine love.

Jacob modeled a partnership with God that Jesus extends to us and bids us to embrace. Fear and unbelief make people back away from it, not Jesus' love. Of those tithing to today, only 3 percent did so by slowly stepping up their giving to a tithe. Some 97 percent of tithers just made the commitment. I'd encourage you to test tithing for a year rather than trying to step up a percent or so of your income at a time. Just check it out and see if God remains faithful to his word. Don't ignore the other teaching on management, but first and foremost determine to be God's partner.