INTRODUCTION

Are there times you wish you had more courage? Courage to face your fears, courage to stand up for someone who is being mistreated, courage to make things right? This Bible study is all about courage. We will look at six people in the Bible who each demonstrated courage in one situation or another.

The funny thing is none of these people would claim to have courage in and of themselves. Their courage was a gift God gave them, a gift born of the faith the Holy Spirit had created in them.

Today, we look at Jacob. His kind of courage probably isn’t the kind we often think of—like a firefighter charging into a burning building or a police officer running toward the sounds of gunfire. Jacob’s situation was a result of his own sin and guilt, and he needed courage to face up to a sin he had committed twenty years before—and had been running away from ever since.

OPENING PRAYER

Describe a time you destroyed or nearly destroyed a relationship.

We’ve all said or done things that made even our closest friends angry: blurt out a secret, spreading gossip about them, or saying something that harmed or ruined their reputation. Please be ready to share a situation from your life that shows we all make such mistakes.

How did you feel when you saw that person again?

Most of us get really worried and anxious as soon as we see the person as the memory of our sin floods back into our minds. Our guilty conscience screams at us when we see them coming our way—or even when we just think about the possibility of them coming around the corner.

We will often do anything to avoid having to face people we have wronged. We sit in a different seat in class or at lunch, walk down different hallways, and stop going to places we used to like to go together. Jacob in the Bible did something like that. He had made his brother so mad he had to leave home and wander hundreds of miles away. He stayed there for twenty years before he finally knew it was time to go home and face the music.

BACKGROUND

This happened pretty early in the Bible—way back in Genesis. Noah’s descendants had spread out after the flood. When they started drifting away from God, the Lord chose Abraham, sent him to live as a stranger in the land of Canaan, and promised that one of his descendants would be the Messiah.

Abraham had a son, Isaac. And Isaac had twin sons: Esau the firstborn and our guy, Jacob. Yes, they were twins, but they couldn’t have been more different from each other.


If you have brothers or sisters, are you similar to them or different from them? How well do you get along?

Each family is different. Some brothers and sisters have very similar interests and get along really well. Others are as different as night and day and fight each other all the time. The reverse can be true as well. Brothers and sisters with different tastes can get along fine while those with a similar way of thinking fight like cats and dogs.

Esau and Jacob didn’t get along well. Esau loved hunting and the outdoors with Dad; Jacob preferred staying around the tent with Mom. Esau seemed to love the freedom of hunting in the great outdoors and living
for the moment. Jacob was more cunning and plotted to turn things to his own advantage.

As firstborn, Esau had extra rights and privileges—which Jacob wanted badly. Especially Esau’s birthright.

READ GENESIS 25:29–34.

How were both Jacob and Esau in the wrong in this situation?

Esau should have valued his birthright much more as a precious gift of God. Not only would he have received a double portion of his parents’ estates when they died, he also would have been in the line leading to the Christ.

Jacob should have respected his brother’s privileges and waited patiently for God to give him his share at the appropriate time.

Finally, the perfect opportunity came.

READ GENESIS 27:1–45.

Esau was furious enough to kill Jacob for his treachery. Jacob ended up running for his life, and he really had no one to blame but himself. He should have trusted God to work it out. His mother told him to flee to her brother Laban until Esau calmed down. She would send word when the coast was clear to come home. But that word never came.

Jacob lived away from home for twenty years. He married Laban’s two daughters, Leah and Rachel. He had eleven of his twelve sons, and became extremely wealthy because of his father’s blessing. When Uncle Laban became bitter at Jacob’s wealth, he knew it was finally time to go home. But Jacob dreaded the thought of facing Esau.

READ GENESIS 32:1–8.

Jacob was terrified, especially at the report that his brother was riding out to meet him with an army of four hundred men! Jacob feared the worst. The only thing he could do was pray.

READ GENESIS 32:9–12.

What tips can you learn from Jacob’s prayer?

Jacob repeated God’s promises back to Him to encourage himself and to hold God to His Word. That is what we do in our church prayers. When you study and memorize your Bible, you can claim more and more of God’s promises in your prayers and find great courage.

Jacob prayed for God’s help, then prepared generous gifts for Esau. He carefully lined them up to arrive one after the other—hoping that would turn Esau’s anger away. He sent his family across the brook and stayed behind. All alone, he prayed for God’s protection. But in that dark night, he began wrestling with a stranger—could it have been Esau?


Jacob ended up spending the whole night wrestling with this man. Have you ever wrestled before? It is grueling and exhausting—especially when your life is on the line. High school wrestling matches are made up of three six-minute rounds, and the contestants are exhausted by the end of the match. Jacob wrestled all night long.

In time, Jacob came to realize this man wasn’t Esau or any other man. This was a messenger from God. By dawn, Jacob was wiped out, and the Stranger had put his hip out of joint. Soon after, Jacob would cross the Jabbok limping and in great pain—just how you want to meet your brother and his army! Seems like a good night of sleep would have done him better, huh?

But no, that wrestling was exactly what Jacob needed. God Himself (some think Jesus Himself) came down and wrestled with Jacob. He tested and strengthened Jacob’s faith. Jacob kept on wrestling and refused to let go until his Savior blessed him. He had to be right with God before he could face his brother. The Lord not only gave Jacob great courage, He also gave him a new name: Israel, which means “he strives with God.” Not against God, but with God. Wouldn’t that be a great description for our prayer life?

In the morning light, Israel saw Esau and his army coming from a distance. He went forward to face his brother’s wrath.
READ GENESIS 33.

What a beautiful moment. For twenty years, God had been working to humble Jacob, lead him to repentance, and build firm faith and trust inside him. But the Lord had also been working in Esau, giving him the heart to forgive his brother and welcome him home. Esau brought those four hundred armed men as an escort—not to attack Jacob’s family.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Facing someone you have wronged is extremely hard. All you want to do is avoid them, but it is so much better to swallow your pride and say you are sorry. But first, wrestle it out with Jesus in prayer. He will give you strength, peace, calm, and courage to be open and honest, not make excuses or shift the blame to someone else.

And don’t forget Christ has been working in their heart just as He has been working in yours. Pray for Christ to open their heart to you. Read His Word, worship in His house, receive His strength in His body and blood in Holy Communion—remembering the price He paid to restore you to your heavenly Father.

Then go in God’s peace. It wasn’t up to Jacob to make Esau love and accept him—that was between Esau and God. It is also not up to you to win back the friend or classmate you hurt—just confess your sin and ask their forgiveness. If they don’t forgive you, that’s between God and them—their refusal to forgive doesn’t destroy your relationship with God through Jesus.

Describe a time you sinned against someone and were afraid to face him or her again.

If it isn’t too personal, you can give an example from your own life. Also consider current events for an example.

How long before you two talked again?

Hopefully it wasn’t too long. The longer this separation takes place, the harder it is to get over it and restore your friendship.

What ended up happening?

Your experiences can be a great encouragement for others to seek reconciliation with their friends.

CLOSING PRAYER
Jacob—Courage to Face Someone You Wronged

Describe a time you destroyed or nearly destroyed a relationship. How did you feel when you saw that person again?

Describe a time you sinned against someone and were afraid to face him or her again.

If you have brothers or sisters, are you similar to them or different from them? How well do you get along?

How long before you two talked again?

How were both Jacob and Esau in the wrong in this situation?

What ended up happening?

What tips can you learn from Jacob’s prayer?

God’s power can help you make it right!