

**Icebreaker:**

What was one meeting you dreaded? Angry boss, in-laws, sibling, other?

**Questions:**

1. Jacob was “greatly afraid and distressed.” When did you last feel that way? Is that a common feeling for you or not?
2. Verses 9-12 reflect Jacob’s prayer: How did he address God, and what is telling about this address? How did he characterize the Lord, and what then did he ask? Upon what promise did he make his plea?
3. Do you ever find yourself working too hard at prayer? Is there a way you can let go and pray from your heart?
4. From this passage, what is the relationship between prayer and planning, planning and prayer? Is it possible to place too great an emphasis upon one or the other of these? If so, how so?
5. Twenty years ago, Jacob had greatly wronged his brother and now sends hundreds of goats, sheep, cows, and camels ahead. When you have wronged someone and want to be forgiven, how do you show that you are truly sorry?
6. Were Jacob’s gifts more about his fear, guilt, or restitution? Have you ever given gifts out of fear, guilt, or restitution?

**In your group and for homework:**

Each person in worship this week received a card that said:

“God, I believe. Help my unbelief. Help me in my doubts.  
Help me in my fear. Help me.”

Pray this prayer aloud as a group before you finish. Ask: When was a time you could have prayed a prayer like this? Do you have something now in your life that this prayer touches?

Use the prayer this week as needed.

As your group closes in prayer, please pray for the following needs in our church family.

- > Prayers of healing for Ken Miller.
- > Prayers for the team and guests for the Boys Awakening that is taking place at ZPC this weekend.

**Practical Tips** - Sally, Jerry, and Scott offer 2 tips this week:

**Encourage everyone to speak**—Don’t overdo it, but watch in your group if someone is not sharing. When you notice that, you might ask, “Bill, what do you think about that question?” “Sarah, any thoughts on that?” A simple, non-threatening follow-up question will give permission and a gentle nudge to get all group members to share.

**Pray**—Group members tell us they grow closer when they share prayer requests (real life problems), and when they pray for each other. We encourage you to share requests and to pray aloud together. This helps build trust, intimacy, and closer friendships.

**Leaders Notes:**

Since we last met, Jacob has worked for Laban for 20 years, and just recently Jacob’s flocks have greatly increased. Jacob hears from God to go back home. So he sneaks away with all his flocks and all his family, including his 2 wives, Laban’s daughters. Laban chases after him and catches him, but gives Jacob his blessing. Now Jacob is preparing to meet his long-lost brother Esau, and is afraid Esau will kill him! He both plans and prays. He is afraid. When faced with big problems, we too fear, plan, and pray.

**[Question 1]** Jacob was truly afraid his brother would come and kill him. Esau is coming with 400 men – a typical number for a raiding party, meant to cause havoc. Have you recently felt great fear or distress? Is that something that plagues you?

**[Question 2]** In his prayer, Jacob calls him LORD and addresses him as God of his fathers, Isaac and Abraham. He claims God to be who he says he is – and shows he trusts God. He repeats God’s promise to bless him and prosper him – thus reminding God of what God said!

**[Question 3]** Jacob’s prayer in vss. 9-12 seems pretty heartfelt. Almost a little desperate. The Bible says David is a man after God’s own heart, who prays with passion. Don’t make your prayers more difficult than they should be – pray from your heart, conversing with God with respect but also with intimacy.

**[Question 4]** It’s good to balance planning and prayer, prayer and planning. Jacob is being shrewd by sending ahead gifts to Esau – maybe to soften Esau’s heart. He also prays to God. We can’t just pray and just sit. Neither can we just act without prayer. We need to ask for God’s help, and then plan and act where we feel led.

**[Question 5]** Jacob sends gifts ahead. Massive gifts of livestock. We don’t need to always give gifts. We can say we’re sorry from the heart. We can ask forgiveness. Often this is best done face to face so the other person knows we care. You might look at Psalm 51 where David gives a classic example of repentance, asking forgiveness, and moving forward with God.

**[Question 6]** It seems that Jacob’s gifts are out of fear or guilt. Perhaps though these gifts do show Esau that Jacob wants to make things right, even without pure intentions. Sometimes we can act not with pure intentions, but with the idea of giving to someone. May our gifts most often be given for the right reasons, out of love or appreciation for the receiver.

**In your group or homework:**

Use the prayer card from worship or the words in the prayer above as a way to pray aloud together to close your group. Then you can use the prayer card during the week to truly ask for God’s help, even when you feel afraid or have doubts.