

**Icebreaker:**

Do you like family reunions? Have you had a really good one or bad one you could tell about?

**Questions:**

1. In verses 1-4, we read again of Jacob's prepared approach to Esau: How does this approach differ from his previous orchestrations (Genesis 32:13-21)? How might you explain this difference?
2. How did Esau approach Jacob? Do you think Jacob was surprised by his brother's approach? Why do you think so? How do you understand their tears?
3. How was it that Jacob saw the "face of God" in Esau's face?
4. Do you think Jacob did not want to travel with Esau for the reasons he gave? If not, why do you think he preferred to travel on his own?
5. Do you think the brothers were truly reconciled? Are there relationships in your own life that are "ambiguously reconciled?"
6. *Only when we forgive will we be forgiven and healed.*  
*Only when we know we have been forgiven will we find healing and become able to forgive.*  
Which of these statements resonates more with you? Are there parts of these statements that you agree with? Disagree with?
7. If you can, tell a happy story about forgiveness in your family, especially if the forgiveness was unexpected or unsolicited.

**Prayer:**

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

- > Prayers of healing for Joan Gall, Dan Krajnovich, Ken Miller, and Bob Steinmetz.
- > Prayers of comfort for the Qua family in the death of Doug's father and for the victims in the car accident involving students from Western Boone High School.

Requests from ZPC's March Prayer Calendar:

- > Pray for guests and team members at the Men's Great Banquet taking place in our building this weekend and also for our partner church in Quintana Roo, Mexico.

**Leader's, please add this question to your discussion:** Do you think it made a difference in how Esau related to Jacob because he was limping and bowing as he approached Esau? In what ways do you see vulnerability as a way of inviting people into relationship? Do you find this quote by Karl Barth to be true? "When we speak of our virtues we are competitors, when we confess our sins we become brothers."

**Notes:** Jacob is no longer a young man, but a middle-aged man with a limp. His vulnerability possibly made Esau approach him with compassion. When we see others' vulnerability, it can increase our compassion and intimacy.

**Notes on Genesis 33:** Twenty years earlier, Jacob (with his mother's help) had deceived Esau to acquire Esau's birthright and blessing. Jacob is still afraid Esau might kill him, while Esau apparently forgives Jacob. They embrace each other and weep when reconnecting. Still Jacob seems suspicious, or feels guilty, as he goes his own way despite Esau's invitation to travel with him. This is a continued story of family dysfunction, but also a story of forgiveness and some level of reconciliation.

**Notes on this week's questions:**

**[Question 1]** Jacob put the maidservants and their children in front, then Leah and her children, then Rachel and Joseph. He went ahead and bowed down 7 times to Esau. This is a change as Jacob has not divided the family into 2 groups, with himself in the back group. He takes the lead (after all of the animals). It appears Jacob is making himself more vulnerable, more humble.

**[Question 2]** Jacob bowed down 7 times on his approach to Esau, what a subject would do for a king. Esau runs ahead to meet Jacob, embraces and kisses him, and they both weep. Jacob was probably surprised by the approach, thinking that Esau was coming with 400 men, he might want to kill him. Esau's tears might be for reconciliation. Jacob's tears might be for reconciliation but also for relief that his brother hugs him and doesn't kill him.

**[Question 3]** Jacob had seen God face to face in the man he wrestled in Genesis 32. Perhaps he sees God's face in Esau because of the great forgiveness and emotion Esau shows. Esau's bitterness and hatred seem gone, replaced by tears and kisses.

**[Question 4]** Jacob may have still had some fear of Esau. Could he really trust him? Jacob knew his own heart still struggled with running away (he had just run from Laban) and deceit. He probably went his own way out of fear, and maybe wanting independence from his brother.

**[Question 5]** There is some reconciliation after not seeing each other for 20 years. They embrace, kiss and cry. Esau accepts Jacob's generous gifts – which may provide some relief for Jacob. Yet they don't seem fully reconciled as Jacob separates from Esau. Perhaps they are only "ambiguously reconciled."

**[Question 6]** These statements get at whether we can choose forgiveness as an act of our wills or if it is really God acting through us to forgive someone. The first statement suggests that it is through our own strength we forgive people. This scenario enforces the idea that we can control everything and we get the credit if we succeed and the blame if we fail. The second statement suggests that it is through re-storying that we are able to forgive. When we put our story into the context of Jesus's story, who forgave his enemies and even died for them, we are also able to forgive.

**[Question 7]** Jacob wondered (or even expected) that Esau might want to kill him. Esau's forgiveness seems real and emotional, and totally unexpected. Do you have a happy story about forgiveness in your family – either receiving or giving forgiveness?