

Learning To Lean

Hebrews 11:21

Faith is about leaning! To lean means...

- To be **inclined** in a particular direction or opinion— “The post is leaning to the right.” “I lean to vote Republican.” John 13:23—*Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.*
- To **rest** against something for support as leaning against a wall or a staff.
- To **rely** or depend on something or someone— “I lean upon my wife to handle our finances.” Proverbs 3:5—*“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”*

We need to lean / depend on the Lord. It is a “learning” experience. How do we “learn to lean”? Let’s look at Genesis 32 and see how God taught Jacob to lean.

Jacob didn’t always lean upon a staff. Jacob was independent, self-sufficient, self-confident, resourceful, and capable of handling matters by himself. God put him in a situation where he was forced to lean on a staff as a reminder not to lean on his own understanding.

Jacob’s name means supplanter... deceiver... conniver... usurper. Jacob was a con-man who leaned to his own understanding. He plotted how to cheat his brother out of his birthright.

Fast forward twenty years. Now a confrontation with his angry brother is imminent. Jacob had reason to be fearful (Gen. 32:6-7). Last thing he heard about Esau was his oath to kill him (Gen. 27:41-42). Now he gets word that Esau coming out to meet him with 400 men!

➡ What does Jacob do?

- He **PRAYS** (vs. 9-12).
 1. **Affirms** his obedience (v. 9 cf. 31:3).
 2. **Admits** his unworthiness (v. 10).
 3. **Acknowledges** his fear (v. 11).

4. **Asserts** God's promises made to him at Bethel (v. 12 cf. 28:12-15).

- He **PLOTS** (vs. 13-20). But after praying, Jacob still does what he has always done. He strategizes a plot to appease Esau's anger by sending him a gift of 550 animals.

➡ Jacob is still not fully leaning upon the Lord. He wants to "help God" to deliver him. [This is a picture of how people try to help God to save them through their good works.]

God was going to teach Jacob to lean on Him instead of trying to work things out according to his own resourcefulness. What did God do to teach him to lean on Him? God used five things:

I. God used SOLITUDE (Gen. 32:24a—"and Jacob was left alone...").

- A. Jacob had been independent, self-sufficient, self-confident and capable of handling matters by himself.
- B. God had to bring Jacob to the end of himself. Now Jacob is facing a problem that is bigger than himself.
- C. Sometimes we need to be pushed to the place where we realize there is only one person who can help us— God.

II. God used SUBJECTION (Gen. 32:25).

- A. God must bring us into subjection. Sometimes this process could be painful.
 - God's breaking is God's making. God had to break Jacob to bring him to the point that he would lean on Him.
 - It is not pleasant to have your leg dislocated at the hip! Subjection makes us hurt, but it does not harm us.
- B. God crippled Jacob to force him to realize he was helpless without God.
- C. God did the same thing to the Apostle Paul in the matter of his thorn in the flesh to teach Paul that His grace was sufficient for Paul's weakness.

III. God used STRUGGLE (Gen. 32:26, 30).

- A. God will protect us, but not pamper us.
- B. Jacob kept hanging on. He would not be denied. He wanted a blessing. He would later pass that blessing on to his grandsons (Heb. 11:21). You cannot pass on a blessing you don't have.

IV. God used SEARCHING (Gen. 32:27-30).

- A. The angel didn't ask Jacob's name because he didn't know what Jacob's name was. The angel was forcing Jacob to tell the truth about what his name was—"I am Jacob, the cheat, the swindler, the supplanter, deceiver." (cf. 27:18, 19, 24).
- B. God wants you to tell the truth about yourself. (I am *weak*... I am *wretched*...). You must admit you can do nothing apart from God.
- C. "*Israel*" = "God commands" (Bullinger). Now God was in command in Jacob's life instead of Jacob being in control his own life.
 - Because Jacob acknowledged his dependence on God he prevailed (v. 30).

V. God used STUMBLING (Gen. 32:31).

- A. The STUMBLING was a reminder for the rest of his life that he needed to lean of the Lord every step he takes.
- B. The STAFF was a constant reminder of his need to trust God. He could not walk without it.

SUMMATION: From that time on we see a new Jacob—A man of faith. He came to understand what it meant to walk by faith and lean on the Lord.

What does this lesson in Jacob's life teach us? It is only when we come to the end of ourselves—our resources; our wisdom; our abilities—that we will lean upon the Lord.

Are you leaning on God or leaning on your own understanding... your own resources... your own abilities... you own ingenuity... your own strength?

- Are you learning to lean?

- Are you inclined in God's direction, or are you directing your own path?
- Are you resting on God's promises for your support or the government or your place of employment?

➡ To what degree are you leaning upon the Lord? If God were removed from your life, would you fall over?

Are you fully leaning on the Lord to save your soul?