

MAKING PEACE WITH YOUR SHADOW

One person describes himself as “a walking civil war.” It is the same inner conflict that a man felt when he had the following sign directed at the McNeil Island Federal Prison: “I have had more trouble with John Smith than any man I know. Signed, John Smith.” Any serious introspection will surface the enemy we carry within ourselves. Paul understood very well this conflict and confessed it in his familiar statement: “I don’t do the good I want to do; instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do. . . . So I find that this law is at work: when I want to do what is good, what is evil is the only choice I have” (Romans 7:19, 21; TEV).

How do we bring harmony out of the civil war of inner conflict? The only route to take is total honesty with God. The more transparent we are with God, the less we need to play games with Him and others. Carl Jung called the adversary within each of us “the shadow” of each of us. Until we become transparent, we may try to hide this shadow so that we can be attractive to others. John Powell says that the reason we do not tell others who we *really* are is due to our fear of rejection. We cannot become whole persons until we learn to reconcile the two people we are.

Stan Mooneyham in *Dancing on the Strait and Narrow* describes the transformation of one’s personality into a more creative, honest, and dedicated Christian in the following way:

Or to put it another way, it means kissing the frog so he may become a prince. Do you remember the fable? Good looking but vain and mean, the prince

showed few character traits that befit his noble birth. A witch turned him into a frog, giving him a physical appearance to match his personality. The curse could be lifted only when the frog was kissed by a princess who would love and accept the creature as he really was.¹

Mooneyham calls this spiritual transformation “making peace with your shadow.”

JACOB’S BIRTH AND DECEPTION (25:19-34)

Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham’s son; . . . (25:19).

This important phrase occurs several times in Genesis. Some scholars believe that such a reference seems to be a heading for a new section of Scripture and may denote the various tablets which Moses used to write Genesis. Divine inspiration does not eliminate the idea of sources. For example, we know that Luke used sources to write his Gospel.

Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife (25:20).

Jacob came from revered stock. Abraham is Jacob’s grandfather, and Isaac and Rebekah are Jacob’s parents. One of the best things Isaac ever

¹Stan Mooneyham, *Dancing on the Strait and Narrow* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 98.

did was to marry Rebekah. Even though he may have been a fairly average person, she appears in Scripture to be creative, imaginative, gifted, and very strong. Grief, however, filled her life because she failed in the only way that women of antiquity believed they could fulfill themselves. She could not have children.

And Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived (25:21).

Sometimes we pray about a matter and give up after a few prayers. Isaac prayed for twenty years! Isaac knows that faithful prayer believes that God will fulfill His promise though it may take many years. In fact, people of faith may never see the fulfillment of God's promises while living on earth (Hebrews 11:39).

But the children struggled together within her; . . . (25:22).

Rebekah thinks this continuous struggle in her womb is crucial enough that she consults God. God says,

Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples shall be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger (25:23).

The rivalry between Jacob (later known as Israel) and Esau (later known as Edom) begins at their birth. The first child to be born had skin "like a hairy garment," so he was named Esau. Right behind him is a second son with his hand on the heel of the first as if he is tripping him. It is a sign of future events, and the second son is given the appropriate name of Jacob, "heel grabber."

Esau becomes an outdoors man, a hunter, and his father's favorite son. Jacob becomes a devious con man, deceitful, and his mother's favorite. An interesting story of deception unfolds.

And when Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished (25:29).

Esau comes in from a day of hunting and smells the aroma of Jacob's stew. Famished and unwilling to wait until dinner is ready, Esau's impulsiveness gets the best of him.

Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished" (25:30).

Some scholars translate this, "Let me gulp that red." Hebrews 12:16, 17 says Esau was sexually "immoral" and "godless" (not given to spiritual concerns), so his next move could be anticipated.

But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright" (25:31).

The birthright stands for the headship of the family and a double share of the estate. Included in this birthright are two additional things in the inheritance: the promised land and the promised seed. Only a spiritually discerning mind would have special interests in this birthright.

And Esau said, "Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?" . . . Thus Esau despised his birthright (25:32-34).

Esau lives for momentary satisfaction and gives up the eternal and the important. He decides to refuse everything God has for him and makes a tragic decision. On the other hand, Jacob has a more discerning spirit and sees the spiritual value of the birthright. Though deceptive, Jacob gets on the frequency of God. In short, this is one of the costliest meals ever served. Esau lost his future, though he probably thought he lost nothing. For a momentary experience of satisfaction, Esau turns his back on the plans that God has for his life. It is so easy to condemn Esau at this point in the story. But how often are we tempted to eat, drink, and sell out everything God has for us? What is the difference between Jacob and Esau? Though Jacob deceives his brother, his heart really seeks God's will for his life. He is hungry and thirsty for spiritual things while Esau loves stew.

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON (26:1-35)

Notice that the emphasis of this chapter is not on Jacob, but his father, Isaac. Chapter 27 will shift back to Jacob. Recall that chapters 25 through 37 are the history of Jacob including the important events in his spiritual development. Chapter 26 is not a detour into the irrelevant. It is the story of members of his family which allows us to understand more fully the life of Jacob.

Now there was a famine in the land, . . . (26:1).

Genesis will frequently mention famine as a test of the patriarch's faith. It was a famine which caused Abraham to leave the land of Canaan and go down into Egypt. Another famine now causes Isaac to also travel toward Egypt. In a spiritual sense, any barren, dry, and unproductive moment when God does not seem close can be properly called "a famine." Like Abraham and Isaac, we also go through these moments, and they try our reliance on God.

The Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, . . . I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, . . . and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; . . ." (26:2-5).

This is the first time that Genesis records God speaking directly to Isaac. Isaac's faith in God probably comes from the example of faith he saw in Abraham. Now God speaks directly to Isaac and confirms the covenant which He made with Abraham. Unlike Abraham who went down into Egypt, Isaac obeys God and stays in Gerar. For Isaac, Gerar has the memories of childhood. Here is where Abraham dug wells, where Isaac grew up, and where Philistines respected Isaac's family.

When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," . . . (26:7-11).

Isaac seems to forget that God is providing special and personal care for him. He deceives Abimelech and his men. Isaac lies about Rebekah out of fear that he will be killed and she will be taken. His fear surpasses his faith in the divine promise that God would be with him and build a great nation from his descendants. Where did Isaac learn to lie like this? From Abraham, his father. Children almost always deal with their problems in the same way that their parents meet their problems. This is a powerful example of the influence of parents and the way in which children imitate their own parents.

. . . Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out through a window, and saw, and behold, Isaac was caressing his wife Rebekah (26:8).

When Abimelech looks through a window and watches Isaac, he sees Isaac caressing Rebekah. Some scholars believe that the word translated "caressing" is based on Isaac's name. If so, Isaac may have been causing his wife to laugh.

So Abimelech charged all the people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death" (26:11).

How strange that a pagan king holds to a tighter moral code than a believer in God! Abimelech rebukes Isaac and prohibits any man from taking Isaac's wife because it would be adultery. Genesis clearly reveals city-states which have laws protecting family relationships and prohibiting adultery. It is inaccurate to think of Israel as a tower of moral strength surrounded by immoral nations who know nothing of God or of

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His life. True, many of the people of Canaan rejected God's way, but several of the nations who have contact with Israel demonstrate a higher sense of morality than the ancient patriarchs. As Paul will later claim in Romans 1, God's truth has become available to all men everywhere. Abimelech has a high sense of morality and chastises Isaac for his lack of faith and moral courage.

Now Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And the Lord blessed him, . . . (26:12-35).

Isaac reopens wells to which he has rights through treaties between Abraham and Abimelech. No doubt, Isaac has a title to these wells and the surrounding lands. While these wells are his by right, he chooses not to claim them by his rights. When the herdsmen of Gerar quarrel with Isaac's herdsmen, he abandons the well and calls it "Esek" meaning "oppressed, contention" (26:20). A second well is contended, and Isaac

calls it "Sitnah" meaning "adversity" (26:21). He moves about twenty miles away from Gerar and names his new well "Rehoboth" meaning "wide spaces" (26:22). He names his last well "Shibah" meaning "oath" (26:33). Isaac could have fought for rights, for he had every legal argument on his side. Instead, he follows the direction of God and allows God to take care of his problem.

And they brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah (26:35).

Esau's godless marriages break his parents' hearts. Not really concerned with faith and spiritual matters, Esau marries unbelievers. Such marriages became a major source of family pain to believing parents.

JACOB'S FAMILY EACH HAS A SHADOW (27:1-46)

It is often tempting to elevate patriarchs above where the Bible really places them. We see the faith of Abraham and forget how he deceived others. Genesis records the humanity, the shadowy side of each of the members of Jacob's family. In the following story, Isaac seems spiritually unaware; Rebekah is manipulating for her own interests; Esau is spiritually impulsive; and Jacob is deceptive. One can take consolation from this story by realizing all of the above are used by God to develop His mysterious providential plan in ancient history.

Now it came about, when Isaac was old, and his eyes were too dim to see, that he called his older son Esau . . . (27:1).

Isaac is a man of great trust in God; he is the product of Abraham. But now we see how he yields his faith to the pressure of doing things his own way. He calls Esau to him and tries to manipulate his favorite son into a situation so he may bless Esau, whom he deeply loves.

And Isaac said, ". . . prepare a savory dish for me such as I love, . . . so that my soul may bless you before I die" (27:2-4).

Isaac tells Esau to go hunting and to prepare his favorite stew as a special moment for receiving his father's blessing.

And Rebekah was listening while Isaac spoke to his son Esau . . . (27:5-17).

Somebody overhears Isaac's instructions to Esau. The somebody is Rebekah. And she has her favorite son too. She devises a plan which includes preparing a special meat dish for blind Isaac and dressing Jacob in Esau's clothes. The goatskins will make Isaac think that he is blessing Esau, the hairy one. Jacob begins a long series of deceptions: "I am Esau your first-born." Next he says, "I have done as you told me." Then he says, "Eat of my game, that you may bless me." Even though he is old and blind, Isaac is skeptical because of Jacob's voice, but he feels the goatskin and smells Esau's clothes. Rebekah and Jacob have totally deceived Isaac.

. . . he blessed him and said, ". . . may God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, . . . May peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you; . . ." (27:27-29).

Isaac gives Jacob the land, the great seed promise, and domination over his brother. Ancient blessings such as this one were final, unrepeatable, and definite. Ancient records indicate that such blessings would stand up in a court of law and could not be overturned for any reason.

Now it came about, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had hardly gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting . . . (27:30-40).

What a marvelous story! Just as Jacob leaves in the nick of time, Esau comes in to Isaac's tent as if on cue. He brings his own stew and is ready to receive his father's blessing. In Hebrews 12:17, Esau seeks his favor and tries to get Isaac to change his mind, but Isaac cannot. The only blessing Isaac has for Esau is the bleak future of living around the Dead Sea, living by the sword, and being dominated by his brother.

So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; . . . (27:41-46).

Knowing that Esau will kill her favorite son, Rebekah again uses her imagination and sends Jacob away to marry in her family. Jacob leaves home in fear and runs away from his problem. Rebekah will never again see him. Jacob will later have to face his own shadow and learn to make peace with it, but that is another part of the story.

—Prentice A. Meador, Jr.