

“The Lord is in this place.” My family was a mess. I was a mess. My twin brother and I grew up divided. My mom Rebekah loved me most, my dad Isaac loved my brother Esau most. I was jealous of my brother and how my dad loved him most. My brother had come out of the womb right before me and because of that he was the firstborn. He would get the double inheritance of the family’s wealth and he also had the love and attention of my dad that I wanted so desperately. One day, my brother Esau came in from hunting. He had been unsuccessful in his hunt and had been gone for days with nothing to eat. He found me cooking some lentil stew. He said to me, **“Give me some stew—I am dying of hunger!”** Instead of being kind and generous, I said to him, **“Then give me your first-born rights and privileges!”** He said, **“Look, I am starving to death, what good is that future wealth!”** I said, **“Swear to me that the first-born rights are now mine!”** And he did. He was hungry. He followed his stomach. And this is what our family had done for generations. When my grandfather Abraham was hungry, he had forsaken the promises of the Lord to find food in Egypt. When my father Isaac was hungry, he had forsaken the promises of the Lord to find food from Abimelech. Now Esau was hungry, and he had forsaken his birthright and the promises of the Lord to get a bowl of food from me.

Years later my dad Isaac was **aging** and getting close to death. My mother Rebekah came to me and told me that my father had just sent my brother Esau out to hunt and that he was going to give Esau the family **blessing** when he returned. It was common for my mother Rebekah to use her love of me—my status as her favorite son—to **manipulate** me. This time it was no different. My mother urged me to go and steal the family blessing from my father. She said she would prepare meat to give him and that I needed to put on animal skins to smell and feel like my brother. I was skeptical and nervous. But my mother insisted and promised to take the **curse** of my deception upon herself. I gave in and listened to her. I went before my father and repeatedly **lied** about who I was, even attaching the Lord’s name to my lies. Even though my father was basically blind, I had the feeling he knew from my voice, smell, and feel that I was lying. But he lied to himself, convincing himself that he had good and **honest** sons. So he gave me the family blessing of the Lord’s protection that the Creator had given to my grandfather Abraham. When Esau returned and learned what I had done, he was livid. He vowed to **kill** me with his own hands once our father Isaac was dead. My mother was terrified and wanted me to escape back to **her family’s house** in Mesopotamia. But she knew my father would need to be on board with it. So she manipulated him, telling him that she would die if I did not go back to her family’s house to find a wife. My dad gave in and made the same mistake as his father Abraham, sending me **back into Civilization** to find a wife. So I left my family and the land the Creator had urged us to live in. I headed to my mother’s family and **walked away** from everything my grandfather Abraham had lived and died for.

While I was running away, I stopped one night and fell asleep under the vast expanse of stars. There I had a dream and the Creator spoke to me. I knew the Creator had spoken to my grandfather Abraham many times. And he had spoken to my dad Isaac a couple times. But I had never heard the voice of the Lord before. The Creator said to me, **“Do not fear, I am with you and I will never abandon you.”** The Lord promised that he was going to be faithful to me as he had been to my grandfather and father before me. I woke up in shock and said, **“The Lord is in this place. And I did not know it.”** Then I said to myself, **“This is terrifying!”** I had no idea the Lord was with me—with us. Our family was a mess. We were divided in half. My mom was manipulative. My dad was passive and weak. My parents both played favorites. My brother wanted me dead. I had been deceptive and greedy. Yet **“the Lord is in this place.”** I did not see how he could be present here, but he was. Somehow he was walking with us, with me, in all our brokenness and dysfunction.

As I entered into Civilization and the land of Laban, my mother’s brother, I thought I was invincible with this promise—from the Creator behind me. I misused the Lord’s promise and became even more arrogant—further ruining my already messy life. I fell in love with Laban’s daughter Rachel and promised to serve Laban for seven years to marry her. But then my **own deceptive ways** came crashing back down on my head. Laban deceived me and gave me his oldest daughter Leah as my wife. I was furious, but Laban told me to wait a week and then I could marry Rachel as well if I served him seven more years. I was a **slave** to Laban. I was a slave in my desires and lusts. And things became crazy and dysfunctional. Rachel and I were **abusive** to Leah. But Leah got pregnant four times and had four sons for me—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Meanwhile Rachel was infertile and she was very **jealous** of Leah. So Rachel gave me her servant Bilhah, just as my grandmother Sarah had wrongly given her servant Hagar to my grandfather Abraham. I passively went along with it and Bilhah had two sons—Dan and Naphtali. Meanwhile Leah stopped having children and then she became **jealous**. So she gave her servant Zilpah to me and Zilpah had two sons—Gad and Asher. Then Leah got pregnant again and had two more sons—Issachar and Zebulun. Then finally, Rachel got pregnant and gave birth to Joseph. It was a mess of **drama**. Constant infighting, jealousy, hatred, and bitterness. I had made this **bed** and I was sleeping in it and it sucked.

Meanwhile, I had been a **slave** to Laban for years and years and I wanted out. I told Laban it was time for me to think about leaving and told him I would separate the flocks of animals we had been sharing. I would take the gray and speckled animals and he could have the all white animals. Laban had been lazy and I had been increasing his flocks and wealth over the years while he did nothing. I was frustrated and wanted revenge. So I began to breed the animals in such a way that **most** of the offspring were gray and speckled and almost **none** of them were white. My flocks **exploded** in number and Laban’s dwindled to almost **nothing**. Laban’s sons were furious when they saw what had happened and wanted to hurt me. So after 20 years of being a slave to Laban, I grabbed my wives and children and all our possessions and ran away. My brother Esau wanted me **dead**. My father-in-law wanted me **dead**. I had been deceptive, manipulative, and abusive. My life was an absolute dramatic mess. And I deserved every bit of it. Yet I remembered the Lord’s words, **“Do not fear, I am with you and I will never abandon you.”** And I reminded myself, **“The Lord is in this place.”** The Lord was with me. He was allowing me to suffer the consequences of my deceptions, my selfishness, my passiveness, my dysfunction, and my abusiveness. His judgment was falling upon me. And I was slowly learning how terrible I was. How little I knew. How dysfunctional my family patterns really were. And as the Lord allowed my life to collapse in dysfunction, he was patiently waiting on me to turn to him in faith. **“The Lord is in this place and I did not know it.”**

“The Lord is in this place and I did not know it.” The Lord is faithful. He attached himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not because they were worthy, but because of his own promise. Likewise, the Lord attaches himself to us, not because we are worthy, but because of his promise to us through Christ Jesus. Therefore, the Lord goes with us through life. Even when we wander and run from him and dive headfirst into drama and dysfunction, the Lord goes with us. He says repeatedly, **“Do not fear, I am with you and I will never abandon you.”** This does not mean our lives will be easy. This does not mean he will stop us from suffering the consequences of our disobedience and dysfunction. Instead, it means that he will go with us into the judgment, into the pain, and into the suffering. **“The Lord is in this place.”** The Lord is with you in your life. The Lord is with you in your disobedience. The Lord is with you in your dysfunction and drama. **“The Lord is in this place”** waiting for you to repent and turn away from the drama and dysfunction of your family system and the messy life you have made for yourself. **Amen.**