

## Rivalry and Reconciliation

This week's chapter in "We Make the Road by Walking" tells the story of rival relationships over and over and over again in both the Old and New Testaments. Today I'm just going to draw on one of those stories to talk about what it means to be a rival and what it means to be a reconciler and what God calls you and I to be. The story is about Jacob. And here it is using the Boegli translation...

So, Jacob is Abraham's grandson. We talked about Abraham last week. The guy who was promised to be the Father of Nations and then supposedly told to kill his son Isaac. Well Jacob, Abraham's grandson, turned out to be a world class con-artist. He conned his father, he conned his brother, he conned his father-in-law, his wives and anyone else he could take advantage of for his own benefit. He was supposedly some kind of "chosen one" by God, but this "chosen one" was not really a good guy at all.

After conning one relative after another, his cons caught up to him. He had to flee his father-in-law's home because the tables had turned, and his father-in-law was taking advantage of him and Jacob didn't like that. So, he picked up all his assets, goats, cows, wives, children, etc... and snuck away in the middle of the night to go back to where he was born. That's what God told him to do, so he did it.

On his way back, he knew that he was going to run into his very, very angry brother. After all, it was his brother who lost the most out of all of Jacob's schemes and it would be natural to assume that his brother was going to kill him. Especially because Jacob learned that his brother came to meet him with an army that was far superior to Jacob's fighting men.

So, Jacob thought he might ease the retaliation from his brother by sending three huge gifts. Kind of like bribing his brother to let him live. The night before he met his brother face-to-face he had this dream where he was wrestling with a stranger. It turns out that this stranger was God. In the morning, the two continued to wrestle and the stranger (God) said "Let me go, it's morning and it's time to get up." But Jacob said, "No way! Not until you bless me!" So, the stranger (God) gave him one last super blow and dislocated Jacob's hip. Then Jacob let go.

That dream, that struggle was a monumentally life changing experience for Jacob. In many, many traditions across the globe, when one goes through a major life shift in perspective, they are given a new name. That is what happened to Jacob, he was given a new name and that name was "Israel," which means, "one who wrestles with God."

OK, so Jacob, now Israel, gets up and starts limping to his brother's camp, ready to bow down before him and offer himself as a slave, in order to escape certain death. But as Jacob limped toward his brother, his brother ran to him, embraced him, kissed him, and welcomed him back into his family. He even insisted that Jacob keep all those presents he sent because he had enough money and didn't need any more. The End.

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Wow. That's a twist. I didn't see that coming! Did you? Usually if someone wrongs me, I want some kind of revenge, some kind of justice. My anger doesn't lead me to embrace and hug and kiss the one who hurt me, my anger leads me to either ignore them or gossip about them or treat them poorly in some way. My nature is to remain a rival in opposition with someone who has hurt me.

But story after story in our scripture, we come upon tales just like this. The main character in the story deserves harsh punishment but is treated with uncompromising love. Sound familiar?

Let's be honest here, being a rival is an easier choice than being a reconciler. As a rival to someone, we see that someone as "other." Our perspective is an "us and them" mentality, like Seahawks verses every other team in the whole universe. Being a rival is US being right and THEM being wrong. Us being better than Them. An Us and Them mentality is all about Ego. I'm right. You're wrong.

I want you to think back to the earlier chapters we read about the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. Remember that if we draw from the tree of knowledge, our center is our ego and we pretend to be God. But if we draw from the tree of life, our center is God and we serve God and one another.

This story of being a rival or being a reconciler is about choosing which tree we want to live by. A rival attitude, an ego perspective, an I'm right you're wrong world view, is choosing the way of the world. Whereas a reconciling attitude, does not see the another as Other, but sees another as Brother.

As Israel was embraced and loved and accepted by his brother, Israel proclaims, "Today I have seen the face of God in you, my dear brother." Being a reconciler is God's way and it is choosing from the tree of life, and in those actions we are a reflection of God's image. We can be a rival which is the way of the world, or a reconciler, which is the way of God.

Choose the Tree of Life over the Tree of Knowledge Choose to be the image of God, reflecting love over hate. Choose to reconcile, to embrace and love the ones who we could view as rivals. Choose to be God-Centric rather than Ego-Centric. We wrestle constantly between the way of God and the way of the world, and in that struggle, we are blessed because the choice is always before us. Let us all choose wisely.