

# FINDING YOUR NAME

group leader's guide

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This guide is to be used in conjunction with *Finding Your Name: From Insecurity to Inheritance—the Lives of Isaac and Jacob* by Jane Rubietta (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2015).

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# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The daily readings of *Finding Your Name: From Insecurity to Inheritance—the Lives of Isaac and Jacob* have been combined by weeks to form a twelve-week group leader’s guide. If your group is meeting for only six weeks, combine two weeks for each group session. There will be ample material to use during your meeting time. The questions in this guide work well in combination with the application elements at the close of each reading.

To get started, each group member should have a copy of *Finding Your Name*. It is helpful if they read the current week’s selections before the meeting. Individual group sessions are divided into two parts. “Digging In” contains icebreaker questions, non-threatening openings that invite people into relationship, story, and memories. “Digging Deeper” takes a more in-depth look at elements in the book’s chapters, related Scriptures, and application.

**Note:** At the beginning of each session, you might want to remind people that silence is uncomfortable but good and allows people time to process. Also, to honor confidentiality and to create a safe environment, adapt the motto, “What we say here, stays here.”

## GENERAL QUESTIONS TO ASK AT EACH SESSION

1. What stood out for you in these readings?
2. What Scriptures spoke to you? In what ways?
3. Where did you sense God tugging at your heart?
4. What emotional responses did you experience?
5. What will be different today? Tomorrow?

## CLOSING

Close by reading a selected “Traveling Mercy” aloud, either as a group, or in pairs to one another, so it is intimate for each person.

For more group ideas and resources, please visit [www.JaneRubietta.com](http://www.JaneRubietta.com). If your group is interested in a video conference call with the author, during or toward the end of your study together, please contact her at [info@JaneRubietta.com](mailto:info@JaneRubietta.com).

# WEEK 1

*June 1–7*

## DIGGING IN

1. The story of Sarah and Hagar is a classic case of “Be careful what you wish for.” What’s one of your stories? If you could reframe your wish, what would it be?
2. High profile people with enormous responsibility often end up being complex and sinful. What is comforting about Sarah’s inclusion in the big plan of God?
3. What parts of Ishmael’s story do you relate to? Why?
4. When are you a “wilderness people”? What are your symptoms?
5. Hagar and Ishmael met with an angel who turned out to be God in the wilderness. What’s one of your wilderness angel encounters?

## DIGGING DEEPER

1. We leap into enormous issues immediately in this section. What were you afraid of as a child? What fears might be plaguing Sarah? Ishmael? Hagar? How do fears control you today?
2. How do you recognize wilderness people, and how do you bless them, rather than avoid or merely tolerate them?
3. What disadvantages did Isaac have, growing up with his father (besides the obvious altar incident)? How about you? How are you sandwiched in your life with people of different personalities, professions, and proficiencies? How do you find peace with your makeup versus theirs?
4. Consider the idea of wounded people wounding other people. How do you see this played out in Isaac’s and the lives of his contemporaries? How do you stop the cycle in your own life?
5. God asked, “What is the matter, Hagar?” How do you answer it, and what do you do with God’s next instructions, “Don’t be afraid”? God opened Hagar’s eyes, and she saw the well. Sometimes salvation is right around the corner, and if we quit now, we lose the sustenance waiting for us. How do you hold on? When have you quit too soon?
6. “God . . . knows the fix he’s in,” *The Message* renders Genesis 21:17 about Ishmael’s situation in the desert. Wait with that truth; it is far larger and broader than just Ishmael. How do you access the reality that God knows the fix you’re in and hears you?

# WEEK 2

June 8–14

## DIGGING IN

1. Life is full of “if only” moments. What’s your biggest “if only” regret? Who in the sequences of Sarah-Hagar-Abraham-Ishmael might have the most “if only” moments?

2. How do you learn to live in the possibilities and promises of today with all its newness, rather than in yesterday’s regrets? There is a clear dividing line between the two (read Gen. 1–2) to help us separate them. Consider the statement, “Ishmael’s reality was much larger than his past mistakes and outrights sins. His reality was that God was with him. He didn’t deserve God’s presence.” Talk about that truth. Where does it lead you?

3. Laughter turned to tears pretty quickly for some people in Abraham’s household. What messages did you get about crying growing up? How do they impact you now? What messages have you sent others about tears, and do you have the same standards for men as for women?

4. What do you think about the treaty of Beersheba? Wells of course are necessary to survival in the desert or any place without fresh water. This is the first treaty made in the Old Testament, and later God would order the Israelites to make no treaties with the occupants of the land (see Ex. 34:12, 15; Deut. 7:2; 23:6). Why?

5. After solidifying the treaty, Abraham planted a tree, and called on the name of the Lord, the “Eternal God” (Gen. 21:33). This tree would serve as a reminder for him and all his kin who passed of God’s presence and of God’s provision of water in the desert. What sorts of “trees” do you have?

## DIGGING DEEPER

1. The angel stated in Genesis 16:11 that “the LORD has heard of your misery.” In the original language, the word for *misery* means “affliction, suffering, distress, grief, and hardship.” This word is used multiple times in Scripture in the context of God’s attentiveness to Israel’s anguish (Gen. 29:32; Ex. 3:7, 17; 4:11) and is associated with deliverance. What does this communicate to you about God, and your own situation? Do you think it transfers to you? Why or why not?

2. Abraham is naturally distressed about sending his son Ishmael off into the wilderness. What do we learn about God from the interchange in Genesis 21:11–13? And what application do you make in your own circumstances?

3. “Do not be so distressed,” God says. What do you make of that? And do you think when we are in anguish over someone’s difficulties, that God says, “Don’t be so distressed; I will take care of that child”? It’s easy to imagine God saying that of Abraham, but what about you?

4. It seems as though God is particularly sensitive to our cries. See Numbers 20:16, where the same word is used as in Genesis 20:17. Deuteronomy 33:7; 1 Kings 17:22; and Psalm 130:2, 6 all use the same Hebrew word. What similarities do you see?

5. The Scriptures tell us that God heard Ishmael, heard him crying, heard his needs, heard his heart. And “Do not be afraid” because “God has heard” (Gen. 21:17). Where do you go with this truth? How does this comfort you, or how doesn’t it?

6. In what ways can the wilderness bring out your gifts (Gen. 21:20)? When has this happened for you? How might you, in your current wilderness, expand your giftings or your talents or your knowledge base, like Ishmael, who became an archer?

7. Consider the cultural and political context of Paul’s instruction to Timothy, to “fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you” (2 Tim. 1:6). For many, saying yes to following Jesus the Messiah in those days was the equivalent of saying yes to a death sentence, and developing individual giftings during times of persecution even more so.

# WEEK 3

June 15–21

## DIGGING IN

1. What's your take on time? On timeliness? Are you panting to beat the clock, do you care if you're late? How did you grow up? How do you feel about God's timeline and timeliness?

2. Ishmael and Hagar were ready to give up, but hope waited around the bend. When have you nearly quit too soon? Or when did you quit too soon? What regrets do you have?

3. Who would guess how often abandonment issues are possible? Abandonment issues begin at birth, when babies are forced from the warm and only home they've ever known, and expected to function well in the cold, learn to cry themselves to sleep, and wait to be fed. Review the passages this week. Where are there abandonment situations?

4. What's the biggest sacrifice you've made for someone? Or someone has made for you? What was it like? How did you feel then? Now?

5. What is God asking you to break with when you consider the Hebrew word *lekh lekha*? Break with your past in what ways? Break with your hopes for the future in what ways? How is that a sacrifice for you?

## DIGGING DEEPER

1. Compare Ishmael's time under the bush with that of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:1–9. What parallels do you find? Encouragement?

2. Jewish rabbis make note of God's words to Abraham to take his son. We tend to hear this as though Abraham had only one son, Isaac. But Abraham had two sons, and when God told Abraham to put his son on the altar, the man isn't sure which son. "The one you love." Well, which one is that? He loved them both. "Your only son." But he had *two* sons. What do you think about God in this context? About Abraham? How is this relevant to you?

3. Look up the hymn "Here I am, Lord." Sing or read through the words as a group or individually. How do you answer? How has God called you? What is the invitation, and how do you respond?



4. When God called Abraham in the night, Abraham answered, “Here I am.” Perhaps we can present ourselves and say for this moment, “Here I am, Lord.” When has this been asked of you? How did you respond? How will you respond?

5. The binding of Isaac, called the *akedah*, is a sacred moment and highly revered by Jews. When the sacrificial offerings were instituted by God, the binding of the sacrifice brought to mind the great sacrifice Abraham—and Isaac—were willing to make and gratitude for the substitutionary offering on the altar before them. How does this translate for you in application or reverence?

6. In some way, Isaac’s heart became an altar, an offering place, where he willingly gave himself up to his father. How is that a possibility for you? In what ways have you experienced being a “living sacrifice” (see Rom. 12:1–2)?

7. The Scriptures invite us into inscrutable events and hard-to-explain circumstances and expectations. Whether or not we understand the sacrifice God asked Abraham to make, and Abraham was willing to make, we still have to decide if we will follow God, even if we don’t understand.

# WEEK 4

*June 22–28*

## DIGGING IN

1. Did (or do) you have a list for the “perfect mate”? Traits you were (or are) looking for in another that would create absolute perfection in a relationship? What were (or are) they?
2. Eliezer created quite a list for God, in order to know for certain that the woman he would find for Isaac was the woman chosen by God. God isn’t always that clear in answering our requests or requirements. How do you best hear from God?
3. Why was it important for Eliezer to bring gifts to Laban? How do you feel about hospitality versus entertaining, and what do you love or dread about them? What’s an unusual hospitality opportunity you’ve had?
4. How do you wait? Patiently, impatiently, irritated? How do you wait on God? What spiritual practices help you to wait?
5. What’s the most amazing interruption-turned-interception you can remember?

## DIGGING DEEPER

1. Eliezer’s reaction to God’s faithfulness models immediate praise. But that’s not always our habit. How do you watch for God’s faithfulness? What about if that faithfulness doesn’t look like immediate answer to prayer?
2. It wasn’t a dark place for Eliezer—after all, God answered all his prayers very clearly and specifically. In the places of non-answer and the ensuing dark it’s harder. Focusing on God in dark places, trusting God’s leading in spite of the dark, even finding that leading—how do you do that?
3. In what ways do you isolate yourself, when you land in darkness? When has someone reached into your aloneness and accompanied you? What has prepared you to do the same for another?
4. We live in a world and culture that values comfort and pleasure above many other elements—and those two values have never defined Christianity. When are you distracted by the trappings, and when and how are you able to reroute? What trappings have you relinquished in order to live tighter with God, to follow God’s lead more clearly?

5. Eliezer knew that God had granted success because of the to-the-letter answers. How would you define success? What about failure? When has failure actually been successful? How do you think God defines success?

6. How do you respond to a stranger? What does Jesus say about strangers? Might his words be related to the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in terms of taking care of them? How do you rethink and reconsider interruptions? When has God interrupted you in surprising ways, turning them into intersections?

# WEEK 5

*June 29–July 6*

## DIGGING IN

1. What yes have you said that changed your life? How about someone else's life? Is it far-fetched to imagine that your yes could change the world?
2. When has fear answered the door for you? How do you work around fear?
3. What temptations lure you to stay, say no, or say yes to the wrong invitation? How do you know which invite needs a yes and which needs a no?

## DIGGING DEEPER

1. Talk about the circle of hope that looks like a blessing. When has someone surprised you with a blessing in an unexpected way, an unexpected source? And when have you done the same? What stops you from blessing another in the way of officially praying over them aloud?
2. What's your own personal Negev? How did you end up there?
3. A watering hole is essential if you land in a desert. Essential for you and for anyone traveling with you, not to mention your camels and livestock. What are your watering holes, spiritually speaking? And when does a watering hole become a stumbling block?
4. Who mentors you in desert wisdom? How can you find someone to be a mentor for you?
5. Deserts are inevitable, some because of our choices and some because we live in a world that has a large percentage of desert brokenness. Predators are inevitable as well. How do you recognize the Enemy's face? And how do you combat the Enemy? When does shame or blame keep you from maximizing the desert journey?
6. Isaac had many reasons for blame and likely for shame as well, but he still chose to find God. Keeping track of our grievances gives all our power to the past. How do you avoid that trap? And if life is like a constant rush hour, how do you dwell or meditate well? Compare your possibilities with Psalm 37.

# WEEK 6

*July 7–13*

## DIGGING IN

1. What's your birth order and how has it been significant for you? Where do you (or don't you) fit into some of the stereotypes (for example: oldest means the responsible one; middle child means the lost child; youngest means the funny one)?
2. What's your most recent invitation into "the new," into an unknown land or destination or occupation or relationship? What resistances did you experience, considering that "new"?
3. Abraham's legacy and obituary are detailed in fairly significant length in Genesis 25:1–18. What do you learn here about him in terms of his taking care of business, his personal relationships?
4. With so many blended families in our world today, how does it feel to single out one heir?
5. We only learn in Genesis 24:67 how brokenhearted Isaac was about his mother's death. What do you make of the statement that Isaac found comfort in his grief once he married Rebekah? And how have you handled grief? Where do you seek comfort in places and times of loss?
6. What handing-over of the reigns have you experienced in your life? Or instituted? How hard is it to relinquish control?

## DIGGING DEEPER

1. It's difficult to pass along an inheritance in standard fashion when barrenness again presents itself. Rebekah was childless (Gen. 25:21)—like her mother-in-law, Sarah. (This will continue into the next generation.) What significance do you see to this barrenness?
2. When Rebekah finally conceived after twenty years, there was war within her womb (Gen. 25:23). How do you see the outworking of this prophecy in her life? Are you more of an Esau or a Jacob, and why?
3. Who do you make out to be the principle antagonist in Jacob and Esau's story? Why?
4. Sibling rivalry is as old as Eden, or at least Eden's gate, and anyone growing up with siblings likely experienced it. In what ways might this be your story, especially if the family is the family of God? And what about the parental favoritism? How do you handle this part of the story? And what do you know to be true about God, based on the Scriptures?

5. When have you been truly hungry? How do you empathize with the hungry, and how do you come alongside them?

6. Birthrights are not common in our culture where we laud fairness and equitability. But in the era of Esau and Jacob, once the patriarch died, the matriarch was destitute because she wasn't able to own property. The birthright allocated a double portion of the material inheritance to the firstborn in order to assure the care of the widow and any unmarried women in the family. God continued to instruct the Israelites throughout the Scriptures to tend to the orphans and widows clear into the New Testament. Where is this a challenge for you, and how do you and your church care for those who are without provision (see Matt. 15:3–6)? Consider also the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:34–40). What is the birthright for us in this era and culture, considering the Scriptures?

# WEEK 7

July 14–20

## DIGGING IN

1. What's your go-to, beat-the-blues-or-boredom food? Are you a stress eater or non-eater?
2. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a fairly recent diagnosis. At least, they've begun to name it only recently; the disorder has probably been around since the beginning of time. Looking at Isaac's life, what evidence do you see that Isaac might have suffered from PTSD?
3. Rebekah had to feel pretty abandoned and betrayed by her husband in the Abimelek encounter (Gen. 26:7–11). How might this event have laid the groundwork for the upcoming blessing fiasco? When have you felt absolutely betrayed or abandoned by another? How did you respond or react? What did it do to your relationship with that person? With God?
4. Pain can lead to passivity or to passion. How have you directed the pain in your life?
5. God told Isaac to stay in the land, to not run off to satisfy his hunger elsewhere. Where do you run with your fear? Your hunger? What are you really hungering for? And how do you see God's faithfulness in your own life when you stay?
6. What does drought look like in your life?

## DIGGING DEEPER

1. Jacob's name means "deceiver," a moniker given at birth and one that he lived into for years. As you consider your own life, what names have been forced upon you, and which ones have you taken upon yourself that haven't been positive? How have you chosen to rise above your name into a new inheritance?
2. Isaac's only recorded words from God were in Genesis 26:2–5, 24. Which means that he lived for long stretches of his 180 years seldom hearing from God. He exemplified for us what it is to live by faith, to live with the assurance that God promised and God will see to it. At some point, he must have relinquished his own timetable, putting aside his questions: "Is this it? Now do we go to the bank and buy this property? When do we stake our claim?" Who have you known who has lived in this uncertainty well? How do *you* live believing and never seeing?

3. Large sections of our world live in famine, and while many organizations exist to help feed the hungry, how does famine show up in your own life? How do you cultivate a God-focused approach to the many social problems (including hunger) that riddle the world?

4. Talk about Isaac creating space for God when he trusted God's words in Genesis 26:2-5, 24. How does his trust appear in the text? And how did God honor Isaac's intent? How do you see this in your own life? How do you create space to experience God, for him to act in unexpected ways?

5. How much space does fear occupy in your life? How do you combat that fear? What Scriptures come to mind? Where do you see fear operating in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and their companions? How do you complete this sentence: "Do not be afraid, because \_\_\_\_\_"?

6. Isaac began to lose his eyesight. Some Jewish tradition believes this happened when the angel's tears fell in his eye at the sacrificial altar. What are your blindsides? What were Isaac's? He lived many more years after this moment of "I'm dying." And how did communication or the lack thereof play into the drama that unfolded at this sudden desperate blessing moment? Into your moments of desperation?

7. In what ways are your actions revealing your own longing for a blessing? Where have you experienced blessing? Where haven't you? How might you begin to live into the blessing of God? What is that blessing?



# WEEK 8

*July 21–27*

## DIGGING IN

1. What's the story behind your name or nickname?
2. Having perfectly pure motives is pretty tricky. Where do you see mixed motives in Genesis 27? In your own life? If you return to God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–4, in what ways does that help with your motives or challenge you?
3. Where do you hear the hope in Isaac's blessing of Esau in Genesis 27:39–40?
4. Esau's anger seems justified on many levels. In fact, anger is frequently justified. In what cases *is* it? And when isn't it? What is beneath anger much of the time? How do you feel around someone who is angry? When are you angry?
5. What does the Bible actually say about anger in terms of managing it?

## DIGGING DEEPER

1. Do you think Jacob knew more than Rebekah thought? Because according to the Bible, she didn't tell Jacob the original words.
2. There are so many questions without answers in this family saga. Why did Jacob cooperate with Rebekah and lie? Why did Isaac cooperate with the trickery when he knew and even stated that the voice was the voice of Jacob? What for you is the saddest takeaway from this story? Where does your sense of justice rise up?
3. Esau's sorry is heartbreaking. His pain is a deep cry, echoed in our souls for all of history, this plaintive wail for blessing. What blessing—or curse—have you experienced?
4. What elements of blessing in Genesis 27:27–29 speak to you? How might you translate them for your own life or for people you love in today's context and culture? How might the blessing you long for be spoken over you in legitimate ways? Or by God?
5. What do you need to hear deep in your soul in terms of who you are and how God feels about you? What Scriptures back that up? Take some time now to formulate that blessing.

# WEEK 9

*July 28–August 3*

## DIGGING IN

1. What's the most memorable moment of forgiveness you've experienced?
2. If you could plan a going-away party, what would you do? What food, festivities, memory-devices, party favors would you have? When have you done something like that? And when do you wish you'd taken a little more time to savor someone's pre-departure time? How about at church? How does the church honor people who move away, pastors included? How could the church strengthen that into a rich blessing?
3. Jacob's leave-taking is moving and beautiful, full of forgiveness and blessing with a complete absence of bitterness evident on Isaac's part. This alone seems miraculous, given the tension simmering in that house with murderous Esau, scheming Rebekah, deceiving Jacob, and blind Isaac (physically and perhaps also emotionally). Talk about what it takes to overcome such dynamics and offer a profound blessing or even a blessing at all.
4. When it comes to traveling, what things have you hauled with you that you could have left behind if you'd been able to detach from them? This could be physical or emotional stuff.
5. Hopefully, since Abraham lived until the twins were fifteen, he helped lay a moral and spiritual foundation under those boys. Who has done this for you? Put down a good and godly foundation for you to build your life upon? And if you can't think of anyone, in what ways do you see God preparing that foundation for you to begin to build?

## DIGGING DEEPER

1. Blame is partly about control. What are some things you've tried to control? What do you really have control over?
2. How does blaming impede growth? When do you blame? Why? When do you choose growth, and what makes the difference in choosing for you?
3. "Learn to bless in spite of the mess" could be our motto. How do you do that?
4. Why do you think God permitted Jacob to leave when God forbade Isaac to leave during the famine? (Isaac never even left the country, so for him to send his son off to Harran seems far-fetched.) There wasn't a famine at this point; in fact, things seemed to be fairly profitable for the family.

5. Before Jacob left, his father reminded him in the blessing of the temporariness of his present residence (Gen. 28:4). In what ways is this comforting? And how does this make sense, before Jacob leaves, to talk about temporary? How does the blessing in Genesis 28:3–4 speak to you? What application do you make? (Imagine these words being said over you.)

6. For Jacob, his best chance for perspective occurred after he left the red-hot embers of his household's emotions. How do you gain perspective? How long does it take for you to recognize that *imperfect* is the best word to describe everyone, and helps to resize our expectations of them?

7. In commemoration of the travels of Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob, all of them trusting God (either initially or eventually) to lead them, what are some of your favorite "following" or "guidance" hymns or worship songs? Consider closing with one of those, in anticipation that the journey you will make as you leave this time, will be covered by God's presence and kindness.

# WEEK 10

*August 4–10*

## DIGGING IN

1. When have you found yourself exhausted from trying to run in the desert, metaphorically speaking? When do you experience the dangers of running too long and too far without rest and sustenance? What are those dangers?
2. Where do you experience God's presence? How often do you get to that place?
3. What are some of your recurring dreams? Nightmares? How do those impact your daytime hours, your work ethic, your balance between sleep and wake and work and rest?
4. Talk about the stairway to heaven. What longings about heaven does the stairway/ladder represent for you? What do you believe about accessing heaven? What efforts have you seen in the Scriptures or in your surroundings of people trying to reach heaven on their own? How did that work? How do you attempt it?
5. What is an angel story that you know or have experienced? And what do you believe about them?

## DIGGING DEEPER

1. Would you share a dark night of the soul? What was going on for you, where was it painful, how did you hear God's voice in the middle of that night? Or did you?
2. Whose voices do you hear in your dreams? Shaming voices or voices calling you upward?
3. Consider the promise God made to Jacob: "I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you" (Gen. 28:15). What does mean for you? What did it mean for Jacob? Would God leave Jacob after fulfilling those promises?
4. Where do you fit into the faith lineage in your family and how does that impact you? What do God's words to Jacob in Genesis 28:13–15 have to say to you? How has God found you? How have you tried to hide or run away?
5. What is your real heritage from God? Your legacy to others? How is Isaac's blessing in Genesis 28:3–4 a surprise? How is God's blessing to Jacob also a surprise? What do these speak into you? What will you carry with you? What is your long-term plan?

# WEEK 11

*August 11–17*

## DIGGING IN

1. When does your past wake you up, give you nightmares, or keep you from moving forward? What do you do in those times?

2. Regrets surely hounded Jacob. Regrets turn to shame in the blink of an eye unless we deal with them. How do you deal with your regret? You're under no pressure to talk about your regrets, but if you feel free to do so, others might be helped to realize they are not alone in their own regrets.

3. In Genesis 28 when Jacob meets Laban, what do Jacob's tears tell you about the state of his soul?

4. Jacob longed for home. How do you experience home? Is it wherever God dwells? If so, how do you pay attention wherever you are to home?

5. Laban's assessment of Jacob's situation is evident from the fact that he puts Jacob to work. Jacob brought no riches from the birthright he stole and would not be able to offer a bride price. In what ways does Laban take advantage of the situation?

6. Who do you most relate to in the interactions between Jacob and Laban? Between the two sisters and Jacob? Why? How are you like any of these characters, whether positively or negatively?

## DIGGING DEEPER

1. God said, "I am with you" (Gen. 28:15). Not *I will be* or *I might be*. *I am*, the God who is called I AM is with Jacob. With you. When is it easy for you to believe this and when is it hard?

2. In what ways was the angel intersection, the dream, a turning point for Jacob? What is a turning point for you and what changed after that? Where do your encounters with God offer you "fresh legs" of faith to propel you on your journey?

3. What is your position on tithing, on offerings? Are those terms interchangeable? Where have you experienced God's blessing you as you tithed?

4. Laban proved to be a rather bad sort, but then again, Jacob didn't have a real strong résumé either. How do you handle the Labans in your life, the people who make promises and then deliver only what they see fit?

5. Names in the Scriptures are significant and often convey the circumstances surrounding the child's birth. What do you learn of importance about Leah based on her children's names? And

how might you live into, for instance, Judah's name, "God be praised"? And if you trace Judah's line of descendants, what do you find remarkable, especially considering that his mother was the unloved wife?

6. "God sets the lonely in families," the psalmist declared in Psalm 68:6. Where do you find this to be true, and where does it set off a longing for you? How do you relate to the dysfunction of Jacob's family? How do you live into Romans 12:10, in spite of family dynamics?

7. In what ways does Jacob's honesty testify for him or does it (see Gen. 30:33)? What about "in the future"? Why does he add that?

# WEEK 12

*August 18–31*

## DIGGING IN

1. When you consider going home, where is home? Childhood, your first adult living place, the place you live right now? What feelings arise when you think about going home? Why?

2. When have you left home? And what does that mean, spiritually, for you? Did you grow up in a household of faith, or non-faith, or “do as I say not as I do” faith? When have you left your home in God’s heart, and why?

3. What’s your version of Rachel’s household gods? How does it look like “ancestor worship”? What do you need to give away? In what ways is your life overstuffed?

4. Scanning the Scriptures for unity problems, what surfaces for you? When have you seen a miraculous display of unity? What did Jesus say about unity? How can you foster unity and what is at stake?

5. What childhood nickname follows you? Who calls you that and how do you feel about that nickname? Was it positive or negative? In what ways did you live into that name and how have you chosen to outgrow it?

6. Think over your family lineage. What kind of family reunion would you love to have? Who would come? And who wouldn’t? Why? What legacy of faith would be around the table at your reunion?

## DIGGING DEEPER

1. When Rachel stole the household gods and her father tore after the fleeing family to reclaim the statues, Jacob promised that if the idols were found in anyone’s possession, that person would die. No one found them under Rachel, so we heave a sigh of relief. But elsewhere in Scripture God says not to make a vow to another and fail to uphold it. Sometime after Jacob’s vow, we learn that Rachel dies in childbirth. Jewish tradition believes that Jacob’s pledge and Rachel’s death are linked. What do you think about that?

2. Jacob’s reencounter with God in Genesis 32 is one of the longest in the family history. This meeting is moving on many levels. In what ways are Jacob’s past, present, and future all on the altar before him? What happens in this time for Jacob regarding his identity? How do you enter into the story? And what about his limp? What about yours?

3. What is significant about God asking Jacob his name in Genesis 32:27? How is this important as he moves forward? If your whole life flashes before you, what does your name mean for you? If God were to say, “You are no longer \_\_\_\_\_, you are \_\_\_\_\_,” how would you fill in the blanks?

4. What events from your past continue to hold you captive and would even inspire fear in you if you were to meet someone again after a passage of time? What does the biblical account of reconciliation here do for you? How does Esau’s reception speak to you? And Jacob’s words in Genesis 33:10? Anger, bitterness, hatred . . . these are indeed a yoke. When have you cast them from your neck?

5. What did Jacob promise Esau (Gen. 33:13–19)? What do you make of the revised itinerary when Jacob rerouted and moved toward Shechem where he bought property? In the tragedy and ensuing revenge in Jacob’s family (Gen. 34), what part does silence play? And given the history of insecurity in the family, where does Jacob live into his inheritance? How about his sons?

6. God again intervened and rerouted Jacob’s life and the lives of his family members when calling the family forward (Gen. 35:1–5). These pivot opportunities are many for most of us. What are some of yours? How did you release the past and move forward? What value is there in attaching a physical spot to a place of divine encounter and rebooting and restarting?

7. Many people live with the accumulated grief of a lifetime. How about you? What are they and how can you be relieved of them? Jacob and Isaac before him would have a long list of grievances, but their record of faith is their great legacy. What does it take to live without regrets? Compare Laban’s prayer in Genesis 24:60 to other promises of God (for instance, Eph. 3:20). Where have you seen the multiplication of God’s kindness as you consider your journey from insecurity to inheritance? What are your greatest insecurities? What do you hold as your greatest inheritances?