

NOVEMBER 14, 1993

DEALING WITH DISAPPOINTMENT

When we think we have things figured out and are sure what is going to happen next, then when it doesn't happen that way we wind up being either pleasantly surprised or disappointed. We are surprised when things work out better than we expected and disappointed when they are not as good as we expected. We are especially disappointed when we have worked to make something happen and were thinking all along that it would just be a matter of time. With the Christmas season approaching, families with younger children are likely to see hints being made about what they would like to have for Christmas presents. They leave the Sears catalog open to a certain page with a particular toy circled - hint, hint. If that toy is advertized on TV, they call Mom in to see it. You can imagine the disappointment on Christmas morning if that toy is not under the tree. They worked so hard to make it clear. It would be even worse if the parents had told the child that they would get him or her that particular item and then not follow through.

We all have been disappointed and usually we handle it pretty well. We may complain and fuss about it, but eventually go on with our lives. A few people never get over their disappointments and it this inability to "let it go" and move to the next challenge or to try a different approach to accomplishing the same goal that causes bitterness and resentment in their lives. On the other hand, if we can properly handle the disappointment and not give up nor lose our enthusiasm then we can be successful. Abraham Lincoln was born into poverty, was not very handsome, was a failure in business, and lost more elections than he won and yet he is recognized as one of the great people in the history of the world. He dealt with his disappointments by not giving up but continuing to try to reach his goals.

How should we deal with our disappointments? As we study the Bible, we can see examples of people that God used to accomplish His purposes. They experienced set backs and what appeared to be failures in their lives, but because they didn't just give up and give in they eventually found fulfillment in life and even greater success than what they had envisioned for themselves. We can see in the life of Jacob, how he encountered many disappointments and how he dealt with these. Because he didn't just give up he was used by God as a key person in the creation of the nation of Israel.

As Jacob was living out one of the disappointments of his life -- he had to leave home to avoid being killed by his brother -- he encountered God Who renewed the covenant that He had made with Abraham. God promised to be with him and bless him and it was faith in this promise of God that helped him through the disappointments that he would encounter while living as part of the household of his uncle Laban.

GENESIS 29:15-20 After about a month of living with his uncle's family, it became apparent that Jacob was not going home anytime soon. He was handy around the house or the tent in this case. Even though he was guest and probably helped out in the home and with the flock, it was strictly a voluntary situation. As such, Laban could not be sure how much Jacob would do and when. So he attempted to formalized the relationship by hiring Jacob to work for him. Jacob was given the option of making the first proposal for what he should be paid. I would imagine that Laban was expecting Jacob to want money, sheep, or cattle and was not expecting Jacob to ask only for room and board and his youngest daughter. Jacob's offer to work for seven years was so generous that Laban did not think twice about agreeing to the deal.

GENESIS 29:21-25 I would imagine that both men recognized the need for the older daughter to be married before the younger daughter and both probably thought that seven years was

adequate time for a husband to be found for Leah. But that didn't happen. To Jacob "a deal was a deal" and he thought that Laban's gamble hadn't paid off but that was Laban's problem. To Laban, "a deal may have been a deal" but tradition was more important than any deal to him.

It wasn't until morning that Jacob discovered that he has been deceived. He had worked seven years for Rachel and he was greatly disappointed and angry with the trickery that his uncle pulled. Here was a family member whom he had trusted using deceit to cheat him and deny him something that was his. I wonder if at this time Jacob thought about the trickery that he pulled on his own father to get the blessing that his father wanted to give to Esau. We can recognize the wrongness of such trickery when we are the victims but we have difficulty recognizing it when we are the ones doing the deception. Jacob was learning that when we live by our wits that someone will come along that will outsmart us. Such behavior leads to distrust and more deception as Laban would later learn in his dealings with Jacob. Jacob eventually paid his uncle back by increasing the number of his own flock at the expense of Laban's flock.

GENESIS 29:26-30 Laban thought that he had tradition on his side and although he rationalized his actions he was willing to appease Jacob by giving Rachel to him to be his second wife if Jacob would work for him another seven years. This apparently worked since Jacob was so much in love with Rachel. So he married Leah one week and Rachel the next.

I believe that it is nearly impossible to know if a particular event is good or bad at the time it happens. In retrospect, we can see that God used all the things that happened to Jacob to fulfill the promises that God had made to him. The sons of Jacob were to be the originators of the tribes of Israel. If Rachel had been Jacob's only wife, then there would have been only two sons because Rachel had difficulty conceiving and she died shortly after the birth of her second child. Instead there were twelve sons which was important for the rapid growth of this people into a great nation that was to happen over the next 500 years. One of the requests of Jacob was for God to give him material prosperity. If Jacob had not been compelled to stay an additional seven years, he would not have accumulated the great wealth that he had since all of that occurred during that period of time. Also, I would guess that during that extra time, his brother Esau had achieved some measure of prosperity and had come to forget about the loss of the birthright and the blessing which Jacob had gotten from him.

The important thing to remember is that even though things don't turn out as we expect them to, God can and will use whatever the situation and circumstances to accomplish His will in our lives if we belong to Him. The way we deal with disappointments will depend on our realization of the truth of that statement.