

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND

by Carol Duerksen and Billie Jo Warren

KEY VERSE:

Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You have deceived me, and carried away my daughters like captives of the sword. Why did you flee secretly and deceive me and not tell me?" Genesis 31:26-27a.

FAITH STORY:

Genesis 27, 29:1-30, 30:25-43, 31

FAITH FOCUS:

"What a tangled web we weave when we set out to deceive!" Today's stories of Jacob, Esau, and Laban are full of deception—deception that steals birthrights, marries the wrong woman, breeds sheep dishonestly, and steals a father's household gods. Jacob's name even means "deceiving one," and he lived up to the name, but he was also on the receiving end of some mighty mean tricks. Despite this family's ability to be nasty to each other, there were also moments of hope and a covenant of peace.

SESSION GOAL:

Students will learn that deceiving others is hurtful to everyone, including the one doing the deception.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

Students will learn about the deception that happened in the lives of Jacob, Esau, and Laban and they will see that people in the Bible weren't perfect. They will also learn that hope and peace can grow out of bad situations like deception.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Chalk board or newsprint and markers.
- 2 Bibles for everyone.
- 3 Ball of yarn or string

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–10 minutes)

Have students sit in a circle and ask them to think of two things about themselves that are true and one that is not true. (The one that isn't true should be something that COULD be true about them.) Go around the circle and have each student state their three things, after which the group tries to guess which statement isn't true.

At the end of the stories, say: *We had some fun lying to each other, but lying isn't usually a very fun thing to do.*

CONNECT: (5–10 minutes)

Write the word DECEIVED on the chalk board or on newsprint. Ask students to use the word

as part of a short story they tell about themselves—a time when they were deceived by someone or someone else deceived them.

When everyone has shared an incident, ask students to respond to the following: True or false: *In general, people in the Bible were better than people are today. Stand up if you think that's true, remain sitting if you think it's false.*

Ask students to explain their answers.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (30 minutes)

Make sure each student has a Bible. Divide students into four groups and assign each group one of the following passages: Genesis 27, Genesis 29:1-30, Genesis 30:25-43, Genesis 31:1-42. Give each group newsprint and a marker. Ask students to read their texts silently to themselves. After they have finished reading it, ask each group to answer the following questions and write the answers on their newsprint.

- 1 What happened in your passage?
- 2 Who deceived who?

When everyone is done, bring the groups together and have them share what they wrote on their newsprint. Make sure the whole story is getting told in order during this time.

APPLY: (5 minutes)

Write this phrase on the chalkboard or newsprint: "What a tangled web we weave when we set out to deceive."

Ask the class to stand up in a circle and throw the ball of yarn or string to each other until everyone is connected. (They will need to hold onto the string or wrap it around part of their body before they throw the ball to the next person.) When they are all connected, ask: *How does lying and deceiving each other create a tangled web? (We don't know what to believe and what not to believe, the lies get spread around, people get revenge by continuing the deception, etc.)*

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Ask students to sit down and listen as you read Genesis 31:43-55.

Say something like this, in your own words: *What a wonderful, hopeful, chapter in this story! Despite all of the lying and cheating and deception, Laban and Jacob come together and make a covenant—a promise to be at peace and not to "do each other wrong." They have gone from doing horrible things to each other to saying "The Lord watch between you and me, when we are absent one from another." Wow! That is powerful stuff!"*

Ask students to think of someone with whom they are at odds—perhaps lying or cheating was involved, or something else that put them at odds with each other. Ask them to take a minute to pray for that relationship, and to ask God to "watch between _____ and me, when we are absent one from another." Challenge them to pray this prayer for that person every day for the next week.

Close with a short prayer.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

From the moment they are conceived, Jacob and Esau seem destined to disagree. Their mother Rebecca felt them struggling within her womb and prayed “Why do I have to put up with this?” When they were born, their differences were immediately obvious: Esau the firstborn was red and hairy, and Jacob was holding on to Esau’s heel. They grew up with each parent favoring one of them: father Isaac loved his outdoorsy son Esau and mother Rebecca loved her quiet son Jacob.

Jacob may have been quiet, but he was sneaky. He tricked Esau into selling him his birthright, and then he conspired with his mother to get his father’s blessing—the blessing that Isaac intended for Esau. Needless to say, Esau was not happy about this, and Jacob had to get out of town fast to escape his brother’s wrath. He heads for Haran, where his mother’s brother Laban lives.

Jacob arrives in Haran, promptly falls in love with Laban’s daughter Rachel, and agrees to work for Laban for 7 years in exchange for the privilege of marrying Rachel. Their wedding day arrives and this time it’s Jacob who’s on the receiving end of a huge deception—Laban has given him his older daughter Leah in marriage rather than Rachel. Jacob is quite upset, and agrees to work another 7 years for Laban if he can take Rachel as his wife as well.

Jacob has now been on the giving and receiving end of deception, but he hasn’t learned his lesson yet. While managing a herd of sheep that belong to both him and Laban, he manages to set up a breeding program that produces more, better sheep for himself. Laban finds out Jacob is getting rich off of him, and Jacob knows it’s time to leave and head back to his home country. Without telling Laban, he rounds up his wives, children and livestock. And oh yes, his wife Rachel steals the household gods. When Laban catches up with the runaway troupe, and he confronts Rachel about the gods, she won’t allow him to search her saddlebags because she says she’s having her period!

The web of deception in this family goes on and on. And yet, woven into the story, is the covenant that Laban and Jacob make with each other. They agree to go their own ways and to stop the harassment; they build a stone pile to commemorate their agreement, and they pray “The Lord watch between you and me, when we are absent one from another.”