



SUSTITUTE

TO

Chosen

Leah

Genesis 29:1-30:25; 35:18-20; 49:29-33

If you were like me as a kid, you experienced the embarrassment and hurt of being picked last for a team or the pain of not being chosen at all. Your self-confidence and sense of self-worth took a nosedive.

Maybe you have a family member who excels at everything while you struggle to put a meal on the table without burning it (not that I would know anything about that). Our egos are fragile, and a strong will is a must in not allowing people or circumstances to determine our

worth.

This study takes us to the book of Genesis, to a pivotal time in the history of the Jewish nation. We will take a closer look at the life of Leah, the first wife of Jacob. Take time to read through the Scriptures above to reacquaint yourself with the story as we look at truths we can apply to our lives as women of faith.

New Man in Town

In Genesis 27-28, we find Rebekah, Jacob's mother, sending him to her brother

Laban in Haran. He was fleeing from the wrath of his brother, Esau, whom he had tricked out of his birthright as the eldest son of Isaac. Chapter 28 relates Jacob's dream of a ladder to Heaven, his encounter with the Lord, and his vow to return to his father's house in peace.

Jacob arrived in Haran on a spiritual high. Entering the town, he saw a covered well with flocks waiting to be watered. He asked those tending the sheep if they were familiar with his uncle's family. As they were speaking, Laban's lovely daughter Rachel arrived with her father's flock. Jacob rolled the stone off the well so Rachel and the others could water their sheep. Filled with emotion, he kissed Rachel and told her who he was. She immediately ran to tell her father, who invited Jacob to his home and eventually offered him a job. And so, the game began...

The Power of Love

Laban was happy to have a family member who was also a hard worker. Jacob labored without pay for a month before Laban asked him what he wanted for his wages.

Laban's daughter, Rachel, was exceptionally beautiful. Various translations describe her as having a beautiful figure and a lovely face. His older daughter Leah was described as having "weak" or "delicate eyes" with "no sparkle" in them. Maybe she had eyesight issues; we do not know. But we do know Jacob's eyes were all for Rachel, and he asked for her hand in marriage as his wages. He told Laban he would work seven long years for that privilege.

Laban recognized a good thing when it dropped in his lap, and also realized it would be sensible to marry her to a family member, the common practice in that day. The arrangement was set, and the pieces began to fall into place.

Ahh, young love...well, at least for Rachel. Most Bible scholars agree that Jacob was 77 years old when he arrived in Haran and 84 on his first wedding night. Scripture does not give us any definitive answer on the ages of Leah and Rachel when they met Jacob, but they were most likely in their late teens or early twenties. In any case, those seven years flew by for Jacob as he anticipated making Rachel his wife.

Poor Leah! She was probably used to living in Rachel's shadow. Everyone was drawn to the beautiful Rachel, and Leah could not compete. Even though she was the eldest and should have been married first, her father had not given a second thought to agreeing to Rachel's engagement—or so it seemed.

Application:

Have you ever been pushed aside? Maybe someone younger—and less qualified—got that promotion you had been working to get. Possibly your husband decided you were not enough for him anymore. A friend decided she liked spending time with someone else. How do we react to these rejections?

How did Jesus respond to rejection? Numerous times through His ministry, Jesus was rejected by the religious establishment and even His own family. John 5:43 says, "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not...." Yet, His unconditional love for them never wavered, and He sought to bring them into His eternal family. We must keep the love of God shining through us even in the most trying circumstances. When you are mistreated, give grace. When you are rejected, give love. When you are abandoned, give forgiveness.

Oh, What a Night!

When the time finally came for Jacob to marry Rachel, the story took a strange turn. Hidden under bridal veils in the darkened marriage tent, Leah slipped into her place beside Jacob as a substitute bride. Jacob, none the wiser and thinking Rachel was finally his, performed his husbandly duties. In the morning he had a rude awakening and demanded to know how Laban could do such a thing after his faithful years of service. Laban explained that giving the younger daughter in marriage

while the older daughter remained single was simply not done. He "pulled a fast one" and wronged Jacob, Rachel, and Leah. The *Barnes Commentary* says, "Let it be noted that this may be an instance of Jacob reaping what he had sown in cheating Esau."

Don't you imagine Leah felt betrayed as well? Even though she was now married to the handsome and successful Jacob, she was not his first choice. She knew he would resent her, even though her father was the one who placed the game pieces on the board. What was done was done, and she had to make the best of it. Maybe part of her was happy with the arrangement. She would have a husband—and Rachel would not.

After Jacob's angry outburst, Laban agreed to give him Rachel, as well, in exchange for another seven years of work. Again, Jacob consented to the terms, and Rachel became his betrothed—again. Just when Leah thought she had won, the rules of the game changed.

The Rivalry Continues

Leah was caught in a web of

deceit and lies perpetrated by her father and husband/cousin. She was married to Jacob, and she wanted their union to be a real marriage. Yet, Jacob ran to Rachel's bed as soon as possible, leaving Leah alone and rejected. Genesis 29:30 tells us Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah; Leah was definitely aware of that fact.

But God had no intention of leaving Leah in that state. "And when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb..." (29:31). When Jacob came to her, the Lord blessed her with a son whom she named Reuben. She said, "Surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me" (29:32b). More sons were born to her and Jacob: Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Throughout this time, Rachel was childless.

Can you imagine Rachel's anger to see her unloved sister giving Jacob healthy sons? In her jealousy, she blamed Jacob for not giving her children, so she told him to sleep with her maid so she could claim a child. Sound familiar? Abraham, Sarah, Hagar...the family dynamic stretched down through the generations.

Rachel's maid, Bilhah, gave birth to two sons, Dan and Naphtali. Rachel declared she had fought hard with Leah and was winning.

Leah, barren for a while, decided to send in a substitute, as well. Her maid, Zilpah, gave birth to Gad and Asher.

Now we encounter the odd interchange between Leah and Rachel about some mandrakes Reuben brought to his mother. (Mandrake is a plant the ancients believed had fertility powers.) Rachel begged Leah to share, to which Leah replies angrily, "Is it a small matter that thou hast taken my husband? And wouldest thou take away my son's mandrakes, also?" (Genesis 30:15) Apparently, the rivalry was still alive and well. So, Rachel struck a bargain with her sister. In exchange for the mandrakes, she would allow Jacob to sleep with Leah that night. That illustrates the power Rachel had over Leah and, in a way, Jacob, as well.

Leah must have been so desperate to spend time with Jacob, so she agreed to Rachel's offer. That evening when Jacob came home from the fields, Leah informed him she

had paid for his presence for the night. She conceived and gave Jacob another son named Issachar. Later, she had yet another son, Zebulun.

Leah also gave Jacob a daughter, Dinah. Then God opened Rachel's womb, and she gave birth to Joseph.

Application:

How desperate are you to feel loved? Sometimes, as the old song says, we look for love "in all the wrong places." Ultimately, our sense of fulfillment and acceptance must come from our relationship with Christ. No husband, boyfriend, best friend, career, possession, or money can give us that sense of wholeness and unconditional love only found in Jesus Christ.

I will be the first to admit, in some instances, I am not a very independent person. Several autoimmune diseases play havoc with my health, well-being, and self-confidence. My husband, God bless him, “stands in the gap” for me, and I love him more than any words could ever express. Still going strong in our 45th year of marriage, I cannot imagine life without James.

But and it is a BIG but, I cannot depend on him to fulfill me completely as a person, a woman, or a child of God. To find my identify and purpose, my complete faith and trust must be placed in God. Nothing on earth can do that for me.

Please do not think that a new house, new career, or bigger bank account will make you feel better about yourself. Those things may make your life a little easier, but they will not make you feel happier or more content. One version translates Ecclesiastes 5:10 like this: “Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness!”

On the Road Again

Sometime after Joseph was born, Jacob decided to take his family and possessions and go home. As he traveled, he learned his estranged brother, Esau, was coming to meet him. Jacob had no idea how he would be received, so he put the maidservants first, followed by Leah and her children, with Rachel and Joseph in the rear where they would be the safest.

Later, when the family was traveling from Bethel to Ephrath (Bethlehem), Rachel went into labor and died, giving birth to Benjamin. Jacob buried her there, and they continued on their way.

Leah then became the single matriarch of this pivotal yet convoluted family. We do not know where or when Leah died, but we do know Jacob gave his sons specific instructions to bury him with his ancestors in the cave at Machpelah where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Rebekah were buried, and where he had also buried Leah (Gen. 49:31). At the end of her life, Leah was remembered and given a place of honor beside Jacob. Even though the marriage was full of

rivalry and bitterness, Jacob did share a family with Leah and the closeness of intimacy that, hopefully, gave her a sense of his caring and love.

What's in a Name?

It is always interesting to look at the meaning of names, especially in biblical times, since names played a significant role in ancient families.

When Leah named her first son, Reuben, she said it was because the Lord had noticed her misery, and now her husband would love her since she had given him his first heir. Simeon's name reminded Leah the Lord had heard she was unloved and had given her another son. Levi was a celebration of the third son, while Judah was an acknowledgment of praise to the Lord. Zebulun's name conveys a reward from the Lord and, if not love, a hope for respect from her husband for bearing him six sons. It seemed Leah tried to use her sons' names to petition Jacob to give her his love.

Lessons to Learn

Leah's story is one of manipulation, deceit, rivalry, and perseverance. Hers was a heart that longed to please her God and to be loved by her husband.

But Leah's story is also the ultimate comeback. From substitute to chosen, she believed in the goodness of her God and her love for her husband. She was given the honor of burial in the "Cave of the Patriarchs," and her sons became tribes of Israel.

**"Our hope
must be tied
to the unchanging
promise
of God."**

Undoubtedly, there were times Leah was brokenhearted and hopeless, but she continued to honor God and her family.

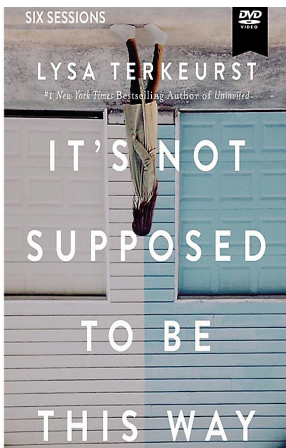
No matter how hurt and betrayed we may feel, we are never without hope. God's goodness can light up the darkest valley, His peace can calm the most anxious heart, and His love can mend the most broken spirit.

Take heart today, dear sister. The same God who heard Leah's anguished pleas for children, and who saw Leah's broken heart and her desire to be loved, is the same good

Father who sees you today.
Trust in the Lord; stop trying to
figure it out yourself. Believe
He is working even when you
cannot see it.

*You could be His next
“comeback kid!”* 

I love this quote from Lysa
Terkeust in her book, *It’s Not
Supposed to Be This Way*:
“Our hope can’t be tied to
whether a circumstance or



another person changes.
Our hope must be tied to the
unchanging promise of God.
We hope for the good we know
God will ultimately bring from
our situation, whether the good
turns out to match our desires
or not. And sometimes that
takes a while. The process will
most likely require us to be

persevering. Patient. Maybe
even longsuffering...I’ve got to
walk through the low places of
the process before I’m perfectly
equipped to live the promise.
(See Psalm 40:1-3) Keep crying
out to Him, friend. Keep hoping
in Him. And know God will
take every cry you’ve uttered
and arrange those sounds into
a glorious song.”

Note: I highly recommend
Lysa’s book. I found it while
dealing with a devastating
family situation where I could
do nothing but pray. The truths
she states from God’s Word
kept me sane. My husband,
James, and I are still dealing
with this situation, but, after
reading and doing an online
Bible Study with Lysa, we feel
much better equipped to keep
our emotions in check and
keep our focus in the right
places.

About the Writer:

Amanda Kilgore and her husband,
James, live in Bristol, Tennessee.
Amanda sings with the worship team,
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disasters.