

The Book of Genesis, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 16: Isaac's Wells and the Stolen Blessing

Genesis 26:1–27:46

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

These two chapters cover the renewal of the covenant to Isaac, his peaceable digging of wells, his repetition of his father's sin, and the family's deception to seize the blessing. Doctrinally, the lesson teaches God's covenant faithfulness across the generations, the call to peacemaking and trust in God's provision, the reality of generational patterns of sin, the difference between God's good purposes and our sinful methods, and the sobering law of sowing and reaping. It also models how to hold together two truths that run through the rest of Genesis: human responsibility for sin and God's sovereign ability to accomplish His purposes even through flawed and sinful people.

Take particular care with the stolen blessing. God had indeed promised the blessing to Jacob (25:23), and in His sovereignty the blessing did come to Jacob. But this must never be used to excuse the deceit. Rebekah and Jacob sinned grievously; they did not trust God to keep His own promise but seized it by lying, and they reaped a bitter harvest. The lesson is emphatically not that the end justifies the means. God's sovereignty over the outcome does not sanctify the sinful methods, and the painful consequences that follow prove it. Teach both God's overruling providence and the genuine guilt and cost of the family's sin.

Formationally, this passage calls students to walk in integrity rather than manipulation, to pursue peace rather than fight for every right, to recognize and break harmful patterns inherited from their families, and to trust God's faithfulness across the generations, including the legacy they themselves are passing on. Lead them to sober honesty about sowing and reaping and to hope in the God who works even through broken families like theirs and ours.

Question 1

Student Question:

When famine came, God appeared to Isaac and renewed the covenant promises He had made to Abraham (26:2–5, 24). What does it reveal about God that He keeps His promises faithfully from one generation to the next, becoming the God of Isaac as He was the God of Abraham?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter twenty-six opens with God appearing to Isaac during a famine and renewing the very promises He had made to Abraham: 'I will be with you and will bless you... and in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed' (26:3–4). The covenant did not end with Abraham's death; it passed to his son.

Note the phrase 'for my servant Abraham's sake' (26:24). God's faithfulness reaches across the generations. The God of Abraham becomes the God of Isaac, and will become the God of Jacob, a title He will wear forever: 'the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' His covenant love endures to a thousand generations (Deuteronomy 7:9).

Draw out the comfort and the doctrine. God is faithful not only within a lifetime but across lifetimes. The promises He makes do not expire; He keeps them to the children and the children's children of those who love Him. This is the bedrock of generational hope.

Help students see that Isaac had to make the covenant his own. He inherited the promises, but God appeared to him personally, and he built his own altar and called on the Lord (26:25). Faith is passed down, but each generation must take hold of it for itself. The God of our fathers must become our God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's covenant faithfulness passing from one generation to the next (Genesis 26:3-5, 24).
- God's steadfast love enduring across generations (Deuteronomy 7:9).
- Each generation taking hold of inherited faith personally.
- The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: faithful across lifetimes.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it reveal about God that He renewed the covenant with Isaac?
- Why did Isaac need to make the covenant his own?
- How does God's generational faithfulness encourage you?

Question 2

Student Question:

Faith and influence pass down through generations. What kind of spiritual legacy are you passing on to those who come after you, your children, younger believers, or those who watch your life? What do you want that legacy to be?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns God's generational faithfulness toward the legacy the student is passing on. Faith, and the lack of it, tends to flow down through families and relationships. Isaac inherited both Abraham's faith and his fears. What we live shapes those who come after us.

Help students think about their influence. Parents shape children; older believers shape younger ones; all of us leave an imprint on those who watch our lives. The question is not whether we are passing on a legacy, but what kind. Are we transmitting living faith, integrity, and love for God, or compromise, anxiety, and sinful patterns?

Encourage intentionality. A godly legacy is not automatic; it is cultivated through deliberate faithfulness, teaching, and example. Like Isaac building his own altar, we must take hold of God personally so that there is real faith to pass on.

Invite a concrete reflection: who is watching the student's life, what legacy they are currently passing on, and one way to make that legacy more clearly one of faith and integrity.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The spiritual legacy we pass to the next generation.
- Both faith and sinful patterns tending to flow down through families.
- Cultivating a godly legacy intentionally, not assuming it.
- Taking hold of God personally so there is real faith to pass on.

Discussion Prompts

- What spiritual legacy are you currently passing on?
- Who is watching and learning from your life?
- What would you want your legacy to be, and how can you cultivate it?

Question 3

Student Question:

When the Philistines seized his wells, Isaac did not fight back but kept yielding and moving on until God gave him room, which he named Rehoboth (26:17-22). What does this teach us about peacemaking and about trusting God to provide and make room for us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The episode of the wells reveals Isaac's remarkable spirit. As God blessed him and he prospered, the Philistines grew jealous and stopped up his wells, then disputed each new well he dug. Isaac's response is striking: he does not fight. He yields the contested wells (naming them Esek, 'contention,' and Sitnah, 'enmity') and moves on, digging again, until at last there is room, which he names Rehoboth, 'for now the Lord has made room for us' (26:22).

Draw out the peacemaking. Isaac had the strength and the right to fight for his wells; instead he chose to yield rather than quarrel, trusting God to provide. He valued peace and trusted God's provision more than he valued winning. This is a beautiful picture of the disposition Jesus would later bless: 'Blessed are the peacemakers' (Matthew 5:9).

Note the trust underneath the peace. Isaac could yield because he believed God would make room for him, and God did. His peaceableness was not weakness or mere conflict-avoidance; it was faith that God would provide what others tried to withhold. He did not have to grasp, because he trusted his God.

Help students see the balance. There are times to stand firm, but many of our conflicts are over wells we could yield without loss, fought because we will not trust God to provide or vindicate. Isaac shows a better way: pursue peace, yield what can be yielded, and trust God to make room.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Peacemaking: choosing to yield rather than quarrel (Genesis 26:17–22).
- Trusting God to provide and make room ('Rehoboth').
- Peaceableness as faith, not weakness or mere conflict-avoidance.
- Jesus' blessing on the peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).

Discussion Prompts

- How did Isaac respond to the disputes over his wells?
- What trust in God made his peaceableness possible?
- When is yielding an act of faith rather than weakness?

Question 4

Student Question:

Where are you tempted to fight hard for your rights, your turf, or the last word, rather than yield for the sake of peace? How might trusting God to provide free you to let some things go (Romans 12:18)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question applies Isaac's peaceableness to the student's conflicts. We all face disputes over 'wells', rights, turf, recognition, the last word, in our families, workplaces, and even churches. The flesh insists on fighting for every one; faith asks whether this is a well we could yield.

Help students discern their patterns. Some of us fight every battle, unable to let anything go, driven by a need to win or be right or be treated fairly. The result is often broken relationships and exhausting conflict over things that did not finally matter.

Offer the freedom that trust provides. When we believe God will provide for us and vindicate us, we are freed from the need to grasp and fight for every advantage. 'If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all' (Romans 12:18). We can yield the lesser things because our security rests in God, not in winning.

Invite a concrete application: a specific conflict where the student is fighting for a 'well' they could yield, and what it would look like to make peace there, trusting God to make room for them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Discerning which conflicts are 'wells' we could yield.
- The flesh's drive to win, be right, or be treated fairly.
- Trust in God's provision freeing us from grasping and fighting.
- Living peaceably as far as it depends on us (Romans 12:18).

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you tend to fight for your rights or turf?
- What would yielding for peace look like in a current conflict?
- How does trusting God's provision free you to let some things go?

Question 5

Student Question:

Isaac repeated the very sin his father had committed, lying about his wife out of fear (26:7). What does this teach us about the way sinful patterns can pass from one generation to the next, and about our need to be watchful?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In the middle of his blessings, Isaac falls into the very sin his father committed: out of fear, he tells the men of Gerar that Rebekah is his sister (26:7). The echo of Abraham's failure is unmistakable. The pattern passed from father to son.

Draw out the reality of generational patterns. Sinful tendencies, fear, deception, anger, addiction, favoritism, often run in families. We absorb them by example, sometimes without realizing it, and step into them as if by reflex. This is not the inherited guilt of Adam's sin, but the very real influence and modeling that shapes us.

Be clear about responsibility. The fact that a pattern is inherited does not excuse it. Isaac was still responsible for his own lie. We cannot blame our families for sins we ourselves choose. But recognizing the pattern is the first step toward breaking it rather than passively repeating it.

Help students see the call to watchfulness. Because these patterns operate almost automatically, we must be alert to them, naming the tendencies we have absorbed and consciously, prayerfully resisting them, so that we do not simply hand them down to the next generation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Generational patterns of sin passing by example and influence (Genesis 26:7).
- The distinction between inherited patterns (influence) and inherited guilt (which Scripture denies).
- Personal responsibility for sins we choose, even inherited ones.
- Watchfulness to recognize and resist absorbed patterns.

Discussion Prompts

- How did Isaac repeat his father's sin?
- What is the difference between inheriting a pattern and inheriting guilt?
- Why is recognizing a pattern the first step toward breaking it?

Question 6

Student Question:

What sinful pattern or tendency from your family or past do you recognize at work in your own life? What would it take, with God's help, to break that pattern rather than pass it on?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the matter of generational patterns into the student's own life. Each of us has inherited tendencies, some good, some harmful, from our families and upbringing. Naming the harmful ones honestly is essential to breaking them.

Help students identify their patterns. Perhaps it is a quick temper, a tendency toward anxiety or control, a habit of deception or escape, a way of handling conflict or money, a coldness or a favoritism. These often feel like 'just how I am,' but many are learned and can, by grace, be unlearned.

Offer hope of change. In Christ we are not doomed to repeat the family pattern. The gospel breaks chains; the Spirit produces new fruit; and deliberate, prayerful effort, often with the help of the church, can interrupt a cycle that has run for generations. We can be the link where a harmful pattern stops.

Invite a concrete step: the inherited pattern the student most needs to break, and one practical action, confession, accountability, a new habit, prayer, toward breaking it rather than passing it on.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honestly identifying harmful patterns we have inherited.
- Patterns that feel like 'just how I am' often being learned and changeable.
- The gospel's power to break generational chains.
- Becoming the link where a harmful pattern stops.

Discussion Prompts

- What harmful pattern from your family do you recognize in yourself?
- What makes it feel like 'just how you are'?
- What step could help you break it rather than pass it on?

Question 7

Student Question:

Although God had promised the blessing to Jacob, Rebekah and Jacob seized it through elaborate deception (27:1–29). What does this teach us about the difference between God's purposes and our methods, and why trying to accomplish God's will through sinful means is never justified?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter twenty-seven presents a tangle of sin. God had already promised the blessing to Jacob (25:23), yet rather than trust God to bring it about, Rebekah and Jacob seized it by deception: disguising Jacob as Esau, lying to a blind old man, even invoking God's name in the lie ('the Lord your God granted me success,' 27:20). They aimed at a good end (the blessing God intended) by thoroughly sinful means.

This is the crucial lesson: God's purposes do not justify our sinful methods. Yes, the blessing was God's will for Jacob. No, that did not make the deception right. Rebekah and Jacob did not need to lie; they needed to trust God to keep His own word. Their scheme was unbelief dressed up as helping God, the same error Abraham and Sarah made with Hagar.

Expose the dangerous reasoning of 'the end justifies the means.' It is a lie that has wrecked countless lives and consciences. We tell ourselves that because the goal is good, even God's will, the wrong we do to reach it is excusable. Scripture never allows this. We are called to do right and leave the outcome to God, not to do wrong and call it faith.

Help students see the contrast with God's own way. God did not need Jacob's deceit to fulfill His promise; He is fully able to accomplish His purposes by righteous means. When we lie and manipulate to bring about even good ends, we reveal that we trust our scheming more than we trust God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's good purposes never justifying our sinful methods.
- Seizing by deceit what God had promised, instead of trusting Him (Genesis 27).
- The lie of 'the end justifies the means.'
- Doing right and leaving the outcome to God, rather than scheming.

Discussion Prompts

- Why was the deception wrong even though the blessing was God's will?
- What does 'the end justifies the means' get wrong?
- How does manipulation reveal a failure to trust God?

Question 8

Student Question:

Where are you tempted to use manipulation, half-truths, or deception to get something you want, even something good? Why is it so dangerous to tell ourselves that the end justifies the means?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question applies the deception to the student's own temptations. We are all tempted, at times, to use manipulation, half-truths, spin, or outright deception to get what we want, sometimes even things that are good or that we believe God wants.

Help students recognize the subtle forms. It may be shading the truth to win an argument or close a deal, manipulating people's emotions to get our way, exaggerating or omitting to manage others' impressions, or rationalizing dishonesty because the cause feels worthy. The flesh is endlessly creative in justifying crooked means.

Press the danger of the rationalization. The moment we tell ourselves 'the end justifies the means,' we have stepped onto Jacob's path, and it leads to broken trust, wounded relationships, and a defiled conscience. Integrity means our methods must be as clean as our goals.

Invite honest reflection: where the student is tempted to manipulate or deceive to get something they want, and a renewed commitment to walk in integrity, trusting God to provide good things by good means. 'Whoever walks in integrity walks securely' (Proverbs 10:9).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Recognizing subtle forms of manipulation and half-truth.
- The temptation to use crooked means for good ends.
- The danger of the 'end justifies the means' rationalization.
- Integrity: clean methods as well as clean goals (Proverbs 10:9).

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to manipulate or deceive to get what you want?
- What 'worthy cause' do you use to justify it?
- What would walking in integrity look like there instead?

Question 9**Student Question:**

The deception set off a chain of painful consequences: Esau's murderous hatred, Jacob's flight into exile, Rebekah's loss of her favored son, and later Jacob himself being deceived by Laban. What does this teach us about sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7), and how do we hold together human responsibility for sin and God's sovereign ability to work out His purposes anyway?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point, and it holds together two great truths. First, the law of sowing and reaping. The family's deception did not end with a successful blessing; it unleashed a bitter harvest. Esau's hatred burned to the point of plotting murder; Jacob had to flee for his life into exile; Rebekah said goodbye to her favorite son and, as far as Scripture records, never saw him again; and Jacob, the deceiver, would soon be deceived again and again by his uncle Laban. 'Whatever one sows, that will he also reap' (Galatians 6:7).

Make the reaping concrete and personal. Sin has consequences that grace forgives but does not always erase. Jacob would spend twenty hard years in exile, would be tricked into marrying the wrong sister, would be cheated of wages ten times, and would be deceived by his own sons about Joseph's 'death', the very sin of deception he had practiced now practiced on him. God forgives, but what we sow we often still reap. This is a sober warning to take sin seriously.

Now hold the second truth alongside the first: God's sovereign ability to accomplish His purposes even through human sin. The blessing did come to Jacob, as God had said it would. God was not thwarted by the family's sin, nor did He need it. He overruled their mess to advance His plan, while the guilt and the consequences of the sin remained entirely theirs.

Teach how these two truths fit together, because this is the very pattern that will dominate the Joseph story to come. God's providence does not erase human responsibility, and human sin does not derail God's purposes. We must never reason, 'Since God works all things for good, my sin doesn't matter,' nor 'Since I sinned, God's purposes are ruined.' Both are false. We are fully responsible for what we sow, and God is fully able to weave even our failures into His good plan, by His grace and not by our deserving.

Land it in hope without minimizing the warning. The warning: do not sow deception, favoritism, and manipulation, for the harvest is bitter. The hope: even a family as broken as this one, with not a clean character among them, was not beyond God's redeeming purpose. The same God who worked through Jacob's tangled story works through ours, calling us to sow to the Spirit and reap eternal life (Galatians 6:8).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The law of sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7).
- Grace forgiving sin without always erasing its consequences (Jacob's exile, being deceived in turn).
- God's sovereign ability to accomplish His purposes even through human sin.
- Holding together full human responsibility and God's overruling providence.
- Rejecting both 'my sin doesn't matter' and 'my sin ruins God's plan.'
- Hope that God redeems even broken families, calling us to sow to the Spirit (Galatians 6:8).

Discussion Prompts

- What bitter harvest did the family's deception produce?
- How can God's purpose stand while the sin remains fully the family's guilt?
- How do we hold human responsibility and God's providence together rightly?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the whole passage. Name one specific way God is calling you to walk in integrity, to make peace, to break a harmful pattern, and to trust His faithfulness across the generations.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this capstone to bring the passage to a personal point. We have seen God's faithfulness across the generations, the beauty of peacemaking, the danger of inherited patterns, the folly of crooked means, and the law of sowing and reaping. The question is what God is forming in this student.

Press for the specific. For one it is walking in integrity instead of manipulation; for another, making peace instead of fighting every battle; for another, breaking a harmful family pattern; for another, trusting God's faithfulness rather than scheming to secure good things.

Close with hope grounded in God's faithfulness. The God who kept His covenant with Isaac, and who worked His purpose even through this broken family, is faithful to us across the generations and able to redeem our tangled stories. To be formed by this passage is to walk in integrity, pursue peace, break the chains we have inherited, and sow to the Spirit, trusting the faithful God who keeps His promises and brings good even out of our failures.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Walking in integrity rather than manipulation.
- Pursuing peace and breaking harmful patterns.
- Sowing to the Spirit in light of the harvest to come.
- Trusting God's faithfulness across the generations.

Discussion Prompts

- Which call is God pressing on you: integrity, peace, breaking a pattern, or trust?
- What harvest do you want to be sowing toward?
- How does God's faithfulness across generations give you hope?