

Adventuring with God

By Jeanne Hedrick

May / June 2008

Ready for the Call

I love the fact that the Bible is a seamless letter from God to us. Yes, the New Testament scriptures give us a more complete picture of redemption and reveal the person of Jesus Christ more fully than do the Old Testament scriptures. But yet, we see no contradiction from one covenant to another. The truth of God with us, revealed in us, is sketched out, alluded to, and somewhat expressed in God's relationship with the men and women of the Old Testament as well as the New. And their experiences, it says in 1 Corinthians 10:11, still serve as examples for us in how we should relate to our Father God.

Recently I was reading about Jacob, the old trickster-turned-patriarch, in Genesis 35. By this time he was well up in age and contending with the sins of his adult sons and daughters. Like their dad, they often lived out of their fleshly nature rather than what they knew was right and honorable in the sight of God. But in spite of Jacob's dysfunctional family, the thirty-fifth chapter of Genesis begins with an invitation: God invites Jacob to come and meet with Him in Bethel. That was the place where God had so miraculously delivered Jacob from the wrath of his brother Esau years before (see Genesis 32). In his response to the invitation, Jacob recalls the faithfulness of God throughout his life: *"Let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone"* (v. 3).

That God would choose to be with Jacob – in all his years of treachery, deception, and selfish ambition – should speak volumes to us about His mercy and grace. As His children we can be sure that, even though we are far from perfect

representatives for Him, He is with us wherever we go. He is committed to the relationship we have entered into with Him. He is not going to abandon us when things get tough, and He will complete the work He has begun in us (Philippians 1:6).

Developing an enduring relationship that is also mutually satisfying with anyone is challenging. (For those of us who have been married for many years, we can shout a hearty "amen" to that truth.) In our relationship with God, however, I think we sometimes assume that process will be easier. But why should it be, considering how opposite we are in our natures? We can understand and predict to some degree the reactions and attitudes of other human beings. But how can we understand and relate rightly to the infinite God -- the One who is *"holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens"* (Hebrews 7:26)? How can we possibly forge a common bond from which we can commune and enjoy one another over a long period of time? It's a tall order! In fact, it is *impossible* without the initiative of God.

When Jacob was called to appear before God in Bethel, he had to get busy and do some major housecleaning. Surprisingly, this man of God had allowed some in his household to possess "foreign gods," idols of some kind. These they buried, along with the rings in their ears, under the oak at Shechem (v. 4) before heading out on their journey. As I read about his experience I wondered: What adjustments would I have to make if God suddenly called me to a particular task or place to serve Him? Would I be prepared to move out immediately, or would I have to do some quick cleanup in my lifestyle?

Jesus has become the common bond linking sinful man with a holy God. And by His nature coming to dwell in us through the Holy Spirit, we can finally understand to some degree the nature of God and participate to some extent in His plans for the world. The apostle Peter points out that through Christ we have received great and precious promises that enable us to *"participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires"* (2 Peter 1:4).

Those of us who are born again would readily admit, however, that this participation – while certainly possible and desirable – is often difficult for us. Some days we much prefer to do our own thing and indulge our flesh. And that has a dulling effect on the vibrant relationship that we enjoy with our Father God. His faithful and loving nature keeps Him in our lives, accompanying us wherever we may go. But our careless and disobedient attitudes keep us from experiencing the fullness of joy that awaits the obedient child who willingly pursues his Father's will and pleasure.

My relationship with my husband, Tony, will not dissolve with every argument we may have. It is not subject to annulment if we go our separate ways and don't take time to find things we can enjoy together. Our lack of affection and fellowship with one another is not necessary to the continuance of our marriage. But we miss out on much of the pleasure that can be ours if we don't consciously and persistently pursue a coming together, a fellowship of shared purpose.

In my relationship with God I need to return to Bethel often, to remember how faithfully He has worked in my life in times of need and to thank Him for His commitment to be with me in every circumstance I may face. As I "renew my

vows" with Him on a regular basis I am rewarded with the joy and peace that only He can give. Over and over again I have discovered the fruit of going my own way: My pleasure is fleeting and I am left with an emptiness that is profound. Lasting joy and peace is found only in His loving embrace.

As His children we can't dictate when or where He will call us. Those things are the business of our Father. But we can be *ready* for His call, whatever form it may take. We can already have our idols buried under the oak tree; we can immediately recognize His voice by constant communion with His spirit; and we can cultivate our love and devotion to Him by dwelling on His goodness and grace in our lives. Then we're ready to instantly obey when we hear His call.

Jacob didn't "deserve" to be the recipient of God's mercy and grace, any more than we do. And those who are in relationship with God (those whose names have been changed by Him) are not exempt from trouble, as many teach today. Following his trip to Bethel, Jacob had to go through some deep emotional waters – he lost both his beloved wife Rachel and his father, Isaac, to death. But God was "with him" in every circumstance of life, and He will be with us too. And out of their dynamic relationship the nation of Israel was advanced. God's purposes were fulfilled even in the life of a major huckster. That sure gives me hope! As I intentionally cultivate this greatest of all relationships, I can avoid wasting previous time having to houseclean when my next call comes. Readiness is the key. *"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ... Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks [you] can immediately open the door for him"* (Matthew 24:42, Luke 12:35-36).

Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult
Of our life's wild, restless sea,
Day by day His sweet voice soundeth,
Saying, "Christian, follow Me."

Jesus calls us from the worship
Of the vain world's golden store,
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying, "Christian, love Me more."

Jesus calls us: by Thy mercies,
Savior, may we hear Thy call,
Give our hearts to Thine obedience,
Serve and love Thee best of all.

