

Cyber Truths By E-mail

22. Are You a Maneuverer? (August 22, 2006)



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Dear Friends,

The whole concept of what it means to maneuver people and circumstances became clear to us recently, and we were impressed to share this with you. When you read about Jacob in the Older Testament, there's a certain satisfaction in watching him out-manuever the shrewd Laban. But we need to remind ourselves how he ended up living with his uncle in the first place.

First, Jacob's parents, Isaac and Rebekah, showed favoritism. Isaac had a heart for his firstborn Esau while Rebekah was partial to Jacob (Genesis 25:28). Jacob learned how to maneuver people to his advantage at an early age. He tricked Esau into giving up his birthright (Genesis 25:29-34). With his mother's guidance he deceived his father Isaac into giving him the blessing of the firstborn. Needless to say, he incurred the hatred of his brother Esau (Genesis 27) because of this. So Rebekah again intervened on Jacob's behalf, convincing his father through dishonesty to send him to live with his uncle Laban.

While Jacob was with Laban, he experiences deceptive maneuvering on the receiving end. His uncle tricks him into marrying his older daughter, Leah, after seven years of labor. Then, at the cost of seven more years of toil for his uncle, the young man ends up with the woman of his heart's desire, Rachel.

God prospers Jacob, enabling him to out-trick his conniving uncle. All throughout Genesis 29 through 32 you see several people at work maneuvering others to achieve personal gain (Genesis 30:14-16). The whole account of Jacob's adventures in Haran offers clear insight

into human maneuvering.

Even though God blessed Jacob during his time in Haran, He couldn't at this point entrust him with the responsibilities of being a patriarch—the man who would bear the promise the Lord had given to Abraham: *"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"* (Genesis 12:2,3).

God needed a specific, unforgettable event to change the very character of Jacob. Remember, He had chosen Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, *"...so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him"* (Genesis 18:19). God didn't need Jacob role-modeling cunning and shrewdness to future generations. Remember, Abraham was considered righteous because of his absolute trust in God (see Romans 4:3).

¶The Patriarch's trust in God was the foundation for the covenant our Lord established with him: *"...you must keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come"* (Genesis 17:9).

So the night prior to Jacob encountering Esau after so many years, we find the seemingly strange account of him wrestling with someone (Genesis 32:22-30). Now, you need to realize that a name in the Hebrew language and culture is much more important than it is to many today. A name carried meaning about the individual. (As an aside, when

I was 49 my Mom told me why she named me "Michael". "I knew someday you would be a "messenger of God."")

After fighting all night with this mysterious holy stranger, Jacob ceased to be the "Jacob" who had "grasped the heel" of his brother and supplanted him: "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome" (Genesis 32:28). Jacob marveled at this life-altering incident: "So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared" (Genesis 32:30). The man experienced a direct encounter with God. And through this event God was changing Jacob's life from being 'horizontally' oriented, that is, leaning on his own mental reasoning, to living 'vertically', that is, being God-dependent. [See our October-November 2003 Newsletter: Love the Lord Your God with All...].

Many have speculated about the person with whom Jacob wrestled. Was it an angel? Jesus? Our perspective focuses instead on God's purpose. He needed a representative who would deal squarely with Him as Abraham and Isaac had. God didn't want someone who trusted in himself and take pride in his own success (Philippians 3:8). He needed a man who would wholeheartedly serve His purposes in obedient trust.

This had to be a man who had no confidence in himself. A man whose righteousness was completely dependent on his trusting obedience in God. Isn't this what Paul is affirming for each of us as followers of Jesus? *"For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who*

put no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:3).

Our Own Pilgrimage Into Covenant Trust

"Mike, you're a survivor". A close friend who had a gift of prophecy spoke these words to me back in the 1980s. God had sent him to warn me that I lacked intimate dependence on Him. In Nicolaitan terms of worldly standards you would have considered me successful. A thriving retreat ministry—a trusted counselor to clergy—a Christian worker reported around the nation in an article by the Associated Press.

But that which man considers success even in ministry has ABSOLUTELY NOTHING IN COMMON WITH WHAT GOD ESTEEMS—*"The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart"* (1 Samuel 16:7).

Yes, my friend's words were true. I was a **"maneuverer"**. I relied a lot on my own mind to make things work for what I thought was the good of God. My pride was blinding me, because I had minimal God-dependence if any. The pre-wrestling Jacob and the Mike of those days had a kindred spirit. After Sue and I left the retreat center to go to Israel, another prophetic friend said of our time at the center, "Even a place can become an idol."

I thank God for His wonderful words of grace, "Mike, you're a survivor". They opened my eyes, and I didn't like what I saw in me. I was not only a survivor, but all the clergy I was counseling were sur-

vivors too. While we were in Israel, Sue and I attended a prayer conference. I met about 40 other men who had been torn out of their ministries like we'd been, and God had steered them to Jerusalem. During a group discussion we realized we were all "survivors" who maneuvered by relying more on our reason than on ABSOLUTE TRUST.

Perhaps I'm indicting you:

"You're a survivor if you can't immediately come up with one or more things that you are absolutely trusting God for.

Things that your heart and soul are hanging on Him to answer on your behalf.

Things that you value more than your next breath."

Many of you have admitted you can't trust Him this way. We know this from experience over the years we've shared the Hebraic foundations. You may not be a shrewd and cunning maneuverer, but you rely more on reason than you do on trust.

- You may maneuver yourself into feeling good about your Christianity by not evaluating yourself in light of God's word (Hebrews 4:12); rather you look at people around you and conclude in your heart, "I'm not as bad (as arrogant, as worldly, as...) as they are."
- You maneuver by hanging on to a particular denomination or congregation out of habit pattern or dullness. You're too fearful or too lazy to ask God how HE would have you fellowship in a way that brings Him glory.

- You maneuver when you choose to fellowship based on parameters that suit you—lively worship, great youth group, entertaining preaching, enjoyable social gatherings—even opportunities of service, like a week of short-term mission that makes you feel good about what you've done.

Every key decision in your life that you make or have made that suits you but doesn't flow from God's will for you makes you just as ugly a maneuverer as I was. For anyone who doesn't have at least the trust Abraham chose to live by is falling short in trust to be in Covenant with our Father. Just look at Abraham's life and the life-changing circumstances he trusted God for...even to the point of willingness to sacrifice his own son in obedience to God's command!

If you're a maneuverer, trusting in your own mental reasoning to decide how you should live, you need to let God's words rebuke you:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD.

'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:8,9).

Man present and past has constructed his Nicolaitan practice of man-centered religion through the constructs of his mind and ego. Any person who believes that his "religious comfort" is pleasing to God needs to heed Jesus's warning on earth to forestall His rejection at the Judgment Throne: *"Thus you nullify the word of God by your [man-made] tradition*

that you have handed down. And you do many things like that” (Mark 7:13).

My own pursuit of God led Sue and me to pursue His outstretched arm together. I hated the thought that I was only a survivor—a man who trusted in his mental maneuvering. Our despising ourselves is what led us to the trust-based faith of the Hebrew, Abraham. He was and is the role model of anyone who would claim to be a follower of Jesus (Romans 4:16).

If you are Abraham's child, you can never be complacent in your relationship with God. If you're married, you can't rest until your marriage shines collectively with the character of Jesus between you. Ask your children and those close to you in the faith what they're observing in your pursuit of Christ's likeness through the work the Spirit would do in you. You may find that they only see two survivors, doing that which they think they're expected to do as Christians but not emanating from the heart of God in their motivation.

If you're not married, is your life hanging on your ABSOLUTE TRUST in God? It needs to be more than a mental attachment that acknowledges His existence but keeps Him at arm's length except in crisis situations. Your very being must be dependent on His direction! Jesus is still speaking to you today: *“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God”* (Matthew 4:4). And, God is still speaking through His Spirit and the Bible today....

What words of life are you hearing from our Lord and from His human instru-

ments that guide your life? Are you hearing anything? Remember, from the Hebraic perspective, to "hear" is to "obey". If the answer is "No", then you're a maneuverer. If His Spirit isn't guiding you through your spirit, then you're relying on your soul, that is, your mind, will, and emotions. You're a maneuverer, surviving as a "Christian" and going through "Christian" motions.

As we did, we encourage you to repent until you despise your independent self and your enactment of that way as much as a man who is caught in adultery must do if he wants to save his marriage. Because that is what you are: a spiritual adulterer! You're allowing something to come between the intimacy of spirit our Lord wants with you.

“The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me.... I gain understanding from Your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path” (Psalms 101:3; Psalms 119:104).

Our heart's desire is that each person who reads this teaching would walk hand-in-hand with the Spirit in the trust-based faith of Abraham—the minimum requirement of our Father for those who would follow His Son, Jesus.

Mike & Sue