

2 STEPS FORWARD, 1 STEP BACK!

Title: *The REAL Big Bang, Pt 31*

Series: Perseverance, Pt 2; Gen 26 & 29

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Today I wanted to discuss a common mystery that we all seem to question in life. Something that we all go through, but can never quite get the answer as to why it happens. Even as Christians.

The question is...Why is it that whenever I take 2 steps forward in life, it always seem that I get knocked back one. That I can never just have something great happen without something bad happening immediately after. Does that sound familiar to anyone?

Well I think if you ever tried to accomplish something in life, something to grow either financially, socially or even spiritually, then you know exactly what I'm talking about!

In other words it's the "go getters" in life that experience this all too often. Those who take on that special word... **initiative.**

When we take initiative and try to reach for the next rung in life, we often fall down that ladder a few steps and then... we climb again, only to slip once more. And often times we ask ourselves...**Why try?**

"It probably would be better for me to just stay where I'm at. I mean after all...who do I think I am anyway?"

*I've said that to myself hundreds of times in the past (like when I started my business and wondered "who **am I** to think I could teach people to sing?" or when I was the young adult's director and faced setbacks and failures, or even this very job I have now. **"Who do I think I am?"***

Well the answer to that question I learned is simple...

You and I are children of the living God. And because we are a child of a living God, we know that there is design in everything in life. And it's not found in just

the good things that happen, but the seemingly bad things as well.

And if you really think about it, it does seem that those moments of setbacks were almost "thought out". That they were designed to happen. It's a life pattern.

In fact... That's why we say to ourselves... "*Maybe God's mad at me*" or the old time favorite... "*Maybe I'm just cursed.*"

All of those types of thoughts is really us admitting that there is an intelligence behind setbacks. And no matter how we slice it, whether it is the enemy or God, Ultimately it's God. He allows these things to happen because (as the word tells us) **what the enemy intended for harm God allowed it for good.**

So... to those who ever wanted to quit the goals that the Lord has placed in your heart (even this very moment)...this message is for you, because you are going to have setbacks proceeding victories in your life guaranteed. And I want us all to remember that to be successful in life, and in particular....our walk with Christ, We have to follow 2 important concepts...

#1 Take initiative- to act or take charge without being told or before seeing others do

#2 Persevere through the setbacks-- (continue in your goals even in the face of difficulty or with little or no guarantee of success.

So let's take a look at our 1st portion of scripture today from **Gen:29**

If you remember, **Jacob** had to flee from his home, leaving behind his father **Isaac** and his mother **Rebekah** because his brother **Esau** swore that he was going to kill him for stealing his birthright and blessing. So he took off to his uncle **Laban** where he was going to hopefully be protected. And in doing so, there would also be a dual purpose for him to be in **Paddam Aram**, which would be for him to find a bride away from the Canaanite people.

So we begin reading from Gen chapter 29... **2** Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples. There he saw a well in the open country, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. **The stone over the mouth of the well was large. 3** **When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep.** **4** Jacob asked the shepherds, "My brothers, where are you from?" "We're from Harran," they replied. **5** He said

to them, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?" "Yes, we know him," they answered.

6 Then Jacob asked them, "Is he well?" "Yes, he is," they said, "and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep." **7** "Look," he said, "the sun is still high; it is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Water the sheep and take them back to pasture." **8** **"We can't," they replied, "until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep."** **9** While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherd. **10** When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of his uncle Laban, and Laban's sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle's sheep. **11** Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. **12** He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father. **13** As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all these things. **14** Then Laban said to him, "You are my own flesh and blood."

Wow! Lots of good things happening here! First he finally arrived at Laban's which was no easy feat. He traveled about four hundred and fifty miles, and therefore it took Jacob fifteen days to perform the journey at thirty miles a day.

So he's joyful to finally reach his destination. And on top of that...he apparently met His bride to be... Racheal!

Now... I have to tell you, when I was reading this passage a few weeks back now there was a portion of this scripture that just jumped out from my Bible app on my phone **and punched me in the face** and I have dwelled on it ever since.

Referring to Jacob's question of "why can't you water the sheep", the passage reads...**"We can't," they replied, "until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep."**

You see to Jacob, this was foolish. And because he's a "go getter" type of dude (sometimes for good, sometimes for bad), he starts to throw his opinion around too much.

He's like, "look guys, the suns still in the middle of the sky...it's hot, the sheep are thirsty, and you're probably thirsty. You have a way to go before the other

herds arrive. Roll the stone away and water your sheep.” And they say “No, that’s not how we do it.”

And this is what spoke to my heart. You see, **who do sheep often represent in the bible?**

Answer: US!

Sheep are mentioned over 500 times in the bible more than any other animal. And it’s amazing how many of those 500 are references to us as believers.

Mark 6:34 Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and **he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.**

John 10:26-28 But you don’t believe me because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me,

Psalm 23:1-3 *A psalm of David.* The LORD is my shepherd; I have all that I need. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, and he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake.

The word “**pastor**” is derived from the Latin and means “**shepherd**” or to lead to **pasture**, set to **grazing**, to **feed**.

Ever seen a “Beware of Sheep” sign posted outside someone’s door?

You see to me, when these men said to Jacob- “**when all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep.**”

This showed a common flaw in us.

You see we live in a world that increasingly is becoming dependent on what others do before we do it. We are trend driven.

“What’s everyone else doing? Then I’ll do that! What everyone else’s listening to? Then they must be the “in thing”. So now I have permission to listen to it too.”

Tell me...Where is the individuality? Where is the uniqueness? Where is the individual member of the body who has or has its own purpose in life?

Are we not all part of the body? Or are we all a bunch of arms or a bunch of eyes?

What good are we if we can be who God made us to be...SPECIAL?!

Jacob was a man of initiative! He didn't "go with the flow".

The philosophy of going with the flow is a life wasting way of thinking.

The problem with going with the flow is that things always flow downhill. Things don't naturally flow uphill do they? No, they flow down.

Matthew 7:13

13"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. **14** But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

We need to go against that natural tendency to do things simply because that's what everyone's doing.

And it's a problem we have even in our Christian faith.

We need to stop waiting on the church and its Shepherd's to open up the Wells in our lives. We need to take the initiative in our lives, to roll the stones away and drink of the water. To stop waiting to be fed. To stop waiting for our drink.

We don't need to wait for the Shepherd's (the church) to constantly remind us to open the wells to the world around us.

You see, what I have learned the hard way, and all so late in life is to get up, and roll the stones away that are blocking me from my value and purpose in life!

Example

We sometimes allow insecurities and fear of rejection become that stone that we allow to prevent us from spiritual blessings.

This is true when it comes to sharing our faith, which we can allow fear of

rejection or simply being uncomfortable to become that stone!

(Mention PB and the “Word for You Today” tracks)

Praying at a dinner table with new friends.

It can be in our relationships when we allow pride to become that stone...

-like waiting for our friend or spouse to say sorry before we do after you got into an argument, instead of taking the initiative to say, “Hey I was wrong...please forgive me?”

Complacency in our relationships can often become the stone- like why does it take an anniversary or birthday for us to buy a card or gift or make breakfast for the one we say we love.

Wouldn't it be nice to take initiative away from what others say is the day to show that we care, and just do it on a whim?

You see...living a life worthy of our promise and potential requires me to take initiative. I must choose to believe and take the leap in life and not let uncomfortably, or complacency or pride or fear keep me from being the go getter that God wants me to be. **The leader that Gods wants me to be!**

And it's not just in church or home type settings. It's in life in general.

The most successful and impacting people in the world are those who took serious initiative. They saw a need...and they took ownership of it.

- **Galileo Galilei** (1564-1642) – Galileo was willing to challenge the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church through his own scientific discoveries. This commitment to truth and science came despite personal threats to his well-being.
- **William Tyndale** (1494 – 1536) – Translated the Bible into English, which at the time was forbidden. For his controversial views and belief that everyone should be able to read the Bible in their native tongue, he was later arrested and executed.
- **Martin Luther King** (1929 – 1968) A symbol of the fight against racial discrimination. Martin Luther King passionately supported the civil rights movement, despite virulent opposition and discrimination in parts of America.
- **Rosa Parks** Her act of defiance and the Montgomery bus boycott became important symbols of the movement. She became an international icon of resistance to racial segregation.

And in our modern times we have someone like...

- **Steve Jobs**— had vision for the way we integrate technology into our world that were unheard of and laughed at as being impractical and impossible and even was fired from Apple for those very reasons that made Apple the successful company they are today.

Now of course not all initiative is good, as it may sometimes lead us off the path God has for us. We as Christians have to be discerning that our motivations are aligned with the Word of God and should be bathed in prayer. If not, you may motivate yourself in the wrong direction.

Mark 8:36 what does it prophesy a man to gain the whole world but lose his soul?

But those who took initiative like the people I just mentioned, had to do the next most important thing... **persevere!**

Because when you take the initiative in life, you may have a periods of success, but mark my words, it will be followed by getting knocked back.

Let's look on to Jacob. Remember he just met the love of his life, and He knew that this was of the Lord! He knew it! In fact scripture tells us that he kissed her....and wept out loud!

Then he meets his uncle, soon to be father in law, and He seems like a great guy! And a month later, they start talking marriage!

For seven years he was to work for Laban. But he didn't care. It seemed like a few days because that's how much in love with her he was.

So he does it! And time flies! He took initiative by asking Laban to set his wages...Jacob of course accepts, and here comes the payoff! **Marriage!!!** And what happens immediately after that?

Laban slips Leah, his other daughter (who apparently was not that attractive) into Jacobs tent, and Jacob unknowingly sleeps with her.

OH NO! Now he's being told that he has to work for another seven years???

What happened to his blessing? Why is it now being all distorted and tainted? It's not the fairytale anymore. Now, some person who he thought legitimately cared for him as a son, totally betrays him.

25 When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn’t I? Why have you deceived me?”

And that’s what happens. We go two steps forward...only to be set back 1! Why does God allow these things to happen this way? Can’t we just enjoy our blessings for more than a month? More than a day?

Let me tell you a story... (Talk about the machine shop in PA.)

I wondered for years why God did this to me and although I never got mad, I always was confused. Until recently.

You see, I realized that God put my brother down the road from me to tell me, there was purpose. There was design for me to be there. But what was it? (Mention the introduction to creationism.)

And there was one other thing...the migraines and unhappiness. I was not fulfilling my real purpose in life... Ministry and music.

You see, what I thought was good for me, a well-paying job doing military contracts as a mechanical inspector in the engineering department of a respected aerospace company, was not my true heart’s desire. God had more for me.

And that was literally the last time I ever worked in that field again and shortly after, became a full time voice instructor and music producer. And just 2 years later, started speaking in churches throughout PA and NJ on the subject of creation science.

My brother being up the road showed me that God was in on this, and you may not understand now Steve, but trust me...

Please understand, it’s not that you’re being targeted. God cannot allow us to just live thinking we’ve arrived. You see, we start to think that “now that this happened... I’m home free.” That’s not true. Heaven is home and our freedom is found in Him. Not my blessing. If we didn’t have setbacks in life, wouldn’t we start to think that we have a grip on life in our own strength? Would I eventually

forget God and BECOME COMPLACENT IN MY FAITH?

The answer is yes!

I can't tell you how many times in all the different ministries I had in our church where I would be so thankful and praising God for blessing me with the position and then when things would go wrong... I would then question if God wanted me to in the ministry at all.

I couldn't believe that I was offered the position of director of sound here at the church. I just was thrilled to death. And then just a few short months into it we had a passion play and all our wireless microphones would not work because the United States government sold off the frequencies that we used for the microphones and so they no longer would work. I was never so humiliated and embarrassed in my whole life. I personally ruined all the hard work that went into that passion play.

Just because you are on a mission from the Lord... where it's obvious that this is what the Lord wants me to do...where He wants me to be...where He wants me to go... that things will work out perfectly.

The average person crumbles and says "this must not have been what God wanted." And walk away searching for something else.

But, the person with initiative, the person who refuses to walk off that path that they know will lead them to their goal, will stick with it and in the end...in the end ... in the end will see Gods brilliance: It's always at the end. They see a greater purpose. A much greater lesson.

That's why these stories are even in the Bible. Didn't Jesus' own disciples face this? They thought it all was working out! Seeing miracles. Walking around with the messiah. Having palms thrown in front of you because you're with the popular Jesus of Nazareth! The man! To all of a sudden out of nowhere... there he is dead on a cross. Game over! You were wrong. Better start looking for another path in life. But wait... in the end... In the end... in the end... there was something greater! Some powerful message to be learned and taught and a greater purpose.

Look again at Jacob...

He now has two wives. And these two wives are doing what any two wives of

one husband would do...fighting over who gets to sleep with him. Now I know it sounds like every guys dream... it's not.

Jacob is being used as a weapon against Leah and Rachelle's desire to be the most important in the household. And having children was the trophy that says..."I WON!"

And so they keep on fighting and trying to outdo one another by getting pregnant... and you know what came out of all this?

The 12 tribes of Israel!

And look, the girl who was the setback in Jacobs life...look who she bought into the world!

You see, God used this situation which seemed so contrary to what Jacob had wanted, and used it to give Him children he never would have had.

And God split up the Gene pool and personalities of the patriarchs by dividing them between 4 women and one man.

Another example...God wrestled

Last week Pastor Bruce beautifully described the wrestling match between Jacob and God himself. But look at this...

Genesis 32:6 When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, "We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."

400 men??? Oh no...What do I do? Well, what any Godly faith living man would do. He prayed right? Wrong. That's not what he did first.

7 In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, [c] and the flocks and herds and camels as well. **8** He thought, "If Esau comes and attacks one group, [d] the group[e] that is left may escape."

You see, He still wasn't quite there yet. Not where the Lord wanted him. He was still Jacob the supplanter. Jacob who takes initiative first without seeking God first.

9 Then Jacob prayed, “O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, Lord, you who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’ **10** I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. **11** Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. **12** But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’”

So he prays. In fact....He prays his heart out. And what does the LORD do?

HE FIGHTS HIM!

Can you believe it? How many times have you went before the Lord in prayer only to have something bad happen after? And not only that, God touches his hip and causes the joint to come out of the socket! GREAT! Now what am I going to do? My brother is going to attack me and not only can't I fight back but I can't even run away!

EXACTLY! That's exactly what the Lord wanted in order to help him!

31 The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

God didn't want Jacob to flee, or to fight. He didn't want to find some trick to get out of this. He wanted him to persevere. To face the challenge in faith, not his own strength. Not with his own wit.

And so what did Esau see? **A broken man limping and then bowing.** Could this have changed Esau's heart? Would Esau's heart changed the opposite way if Jacob was not broken from the wrestling match with God?

And you know what? Anyone from that point forward while looking at Jacob would see that limp as a reminder of the man who wrestled with God, who persevered, and lived another day. A better day.

It was a physical reminder of Gods strength, His mercy and His wisdom in our lives.

Yes, sometimes the road we are on cause's scars in our lives. Sometimes

physical, sometimes mental...but scars are sometimes the greatest testimonies we have in this world.

And the world needs to see them. Don't be ashamed of your scars. They often are the message that goes beyond words...if you let it.

Mention the scars on your arm...

Conclusion

So Jacob was right when he asked why don't you roll the stone away from the well to water your sheep. That it was foolish to wait until all the sheep are gathered.

But there is another well that you need to consider.

It's a well whose stone has already been rolled away. And it doesn't just have water...It contains living water. And it looks like this...**SHOW TOMB**

Jesus said John 4:14 while speaking to the Samaritan woman by none other than JACOBS WELL

"but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

You see God wants us to take the most important step of initiative you could ever take by laying down all pride, all uncomfotability, all self-doubt and embrace Jesus Christ as your Lord and savior. And this will be the one time in your life where you take just one step forward towards Him, and you will never have to take another step back.

For God forgives all sin, past, present and future and offers us eternal life with Him. And that can never be taken away, or fall apart, or be lost or stolen. This is forever.

But it needs to be done, not because everyone else is doing it. It's not a trend. It's a personal decision that can only be made by you. Do you trust that Jesus is "The Wellspring of Living Water." That if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead you will

be saved.

If you say yes then I would like to give you the opportunity to take the initiative here and now to ask Jesus into your heart. It's as easy as **ABC...**