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Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
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Romans 8:12-25  
Genesis 28: 10-22

## **SOPORIFIC OR SOPHOMORIC**

To seek what is spiritual. To hope for what we have not seen. It is something else that comes into us—the spirit of God. The power of the Holy Spirit, which ever calls us into spiritual awakening. Now you know the story of Jacob and Esau. You know how Jacob tricked his brother into giving up his birth right and tricked his father into blessing him instead of Esau. You know that he wasn't entitled to this birthright. You know that his family has to be one of the most dysfunctional families in all of scripture. After the horrendous trick on his dying father with the help and scheming of his mother, his brother decides that he won't marry just one outsider; he'll marry two and completely embarrass his family and be so angry with Jacob, that Jacob has to leave town.

Jacob is spiritually asleep and it is only in this dream that he escaped the fate of his twin brother Esau, falling victim to his fears and his anger. While he was literally asleep there with his head on a rock for a pillow, he dreams about the house of God: Bethel.

Esau back at home is in worse shape. Yes, he's the older brother. Yes, he's the stronger. Possibly even the smarter of the two. But this older brother knows too much. And he doesn't know what he needs to know. He's not aware of what is happening all around him. And so he's like a sophomore. You've gone through those first years of college—can there be anything worse than when one of our children brings home their sophomore friend from college and they know everything about everything? Of course, they are so smart. They are 20 years old and they have the experience of the world under their feet.

Esau's that sophomore and Jacob is the sleeping man. I think that's the condition that we find ourselves in most of the time as we try to follow Christ. We're either too cocky and know too much, or we're completely unaware of God's presence all around us. We are either clueless, or we are doing so much that we never trust God for what we cannot see.

Think of your own life. Think of the times when you could say I know God was guiding me this one moment. I know that the Lord was making my decisions in spite of me. Think of the times when you have been disappointed. When you didn't receive what you thought you deserved. Like a second-born in Israel who will inherit so much less than an older brother. Like Jacob, who is a momma's boy, hiding behind her apron strings. Think of the times when you've schemed and even been dishonest in order to get what you wanted. Think of the times when your whole purpose was to manipulate another human being into doing what you desired; yes, even if brother, Esau, became the disobedient child. But Jacob spends a lifetime understanding and not understanding what God promised him that day in the dream.

Remember now, Jacob is the one that has the twelve sons and a daughter. The twelve sons become the tribes of Israel. Remember that one of his sons, Joseph, becomes the salvation of Israel during the time of famine. And I wonder if Joseph becomes a virtuous leader in part because he's taken out of the dysfunctional family of his father. I wonder if the whole Jacob and Rachel and Leah and Esau, the Esau anger—I wonder if all of those ancestral memories would have turned Joseph into something that God could not use. And how ironic that it's a virtuous Egyptian who teaches Joseph how to really forgive and trust God.

God promises to be with Jacob no matter what, and from that we take the idea and the belief in God's chosen people. But if we are not careful, we will be just as spiritually asleep and we will understand something other than what God intended. The mystery and the majesty of God being with us and making us a blessing for others—God choosing us to be a people—is that we can in fact be delivered from our deceitful ways, our selfish pursuits of owning everything. And that the dreams we have can be about others being transformed. Can you give witness in your life to a sense of a divine encounter?

Yesterday I heard Tony Campolo talk about how he knew God was telling him to speak to a homeless man with a dirty beard and greasy clothes. And how the man offered him a sip of his coffee— a McDonald's coffee he had just received, because someone at the church had provided the money. He didn't want to drink that coffee. He didn't want to come near that man. But he knew that God was asking him to affirm another person, and so he took a sip. He said, "My you're generous with such good coffee." And the homeless man said, "No, it's just when God puts something so wonderful in your life, you have to share it."

Tony said the hair stood up on his arms and he knew God was speaking to him. And he also knew the man was probably going to ask him for ten dollars. And he was getting mentally prepared for that He said, "Is there anything I can do for you?" And the dirty, homeless person said, "Yes. I want a hug." Now this irreverent evangelical, Tony Campolo, said that was a decision-moment for him. He had to decide if this was going to be a divine human encounter, or if he was going to make an excuse and go away. But before he knew it, his arms were around the homeless man and the homeless man's arms were around him. And then he realized that the homeless guy wasn't going to let him go. He had the grip of his jacket behind his back and was holding Tony tight. Slowly, but surely, Tony became aware that all the people around him were staring—watching—staring. The lesson God was teaching him was that it's not about appearances. It's not even about what other people think. It's about trusting me in this moment. Eventually they disengaged, and as Tony went on to his office, he was certain that in that instant, he was holding on to God. And God was reassuring him that he would not let him go, no matter what.

Believe the good news. Trust that God's promise is indeed meant to be a blessing for you and for all you encounter. Even if, at first, you don't recognize him as God's representative, trust God with this moment and this promise. Amen.