

**Group discussion** *Each number below includes questions that relate to the scripture. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better. Save time for "the big question."*

Read Genesis 28:10-22 and 35:1-15 aloud.

1. What was going on in Jacob's life in Genesis 35?

*After deceiving his brother Esau, he lived his adult life away from his family, and now he returns to Bethel, a place where he once made a vow to God.*

What happened the first time Jacob visited Bethel?

*Tell the story from Gen. 28:10-22.*

What was Jacob's vow at Bethel (Gen. 28:20-21)?

How impressed are you with his vow?

*Sounds more like a bargain than a vow, especially coming from a cheating scoundrel like Jacob.*

2. How did Jacob prepare for returning to Bethel?

*Told his household to get rid of foreign gods.*

Why would they have carried idols in the first place?

*Helped them blend in – everybody had multiple gods. No need to offend your neighbors, so join the local customs.*

How big of a problem was idolatry in the Old Testament?

*Huge! There are very few monotheists in the Old Testament. The vow of Jacob in Gen. 28:20 is typical – "if you bless me, then I'll choose you as my god. In the meantime, I'll worship Yahweh, plus the local deities."*

If the Israelites struggled with idolatry, even after all that God had done for them, what does that suggest about human nature?

3. What happened after Jacob's family got rid of their idols?

*See verse 5.*

What was God's response to Jacob when he returned to Bethel?

*See verses 10-12.*

What happens when we put away idols from our lives?

- What good things come our way?
- What bad things depart from our lives?

How have blessings come to you because you put God ahead of everything else?

4. How was Jacob different when he met God the second time?

*No longer trying to bargain with God, just there to worship.*

What changed his heart? How had he changed from being a bargainer to being a worshipper?

How did this increased maturity affect those around him?

5. How do you know when you have a foreign god?

After God, what is the second-most important thing in your world?

*It is probably a good thing, but it is God's biggest competition.*

Why do we hesitate/procrastinate to throw away our idols?

6. How do you respond to the following quote?

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

*Quote from Jim Elliot (1927-56), a missionary who died trying to reach an isolated tribe in Ecuador, portrayed in the movie, "The End of the Spear."*

How does Elliot's story affect your response to the quote?

† **The big question** *If you ask only one question, let this be it. Allow at least 20 minutes. Go around the circle and give each person an opportunity to answer. It's okay if they pass, but at least they get a chance to respond.*

What distracts you from your relationship with God? How could you arrange your life so that your faith gets top priority?

## Resources

### **Bible notes**

4 – earrings were linked to supernatural power. Ex. 32:1-4, Jud. 8:24-27.

“Yahweh” is God’s “name.” Since later Jews did not pronounce it out of respect, we no longer know the name. Translators write it as LORD or Jehovah, but scholars believe “Yahweh” is the most likely pronunciation. It is often used to distinguish God from gods, as in Gen. 28:21.

**Prayer ideas** – moved to the front page to make room for the kid activity below.

**Kid-friendly activity.** *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Give each person five blank cards.

Ask everyone to write “God” or a picture of the cross on one.

On each of the other cards, write one thing that is important to you, such as health, house, money, toys, family, equipping minister, etc.

Everyone share what you drew on your 5 cards.

Imagine that a tornado came along, causing major damage.

*Remove one card from your neighbor’s hand – not “God.”*

*Toss the removed cards into a pile in the middle.*

How would you feel about losing what’s on that card?

Imagine another tornado came along, causing even more damage.

*Remove a card from a different neighbor’s hand – not “God.”*

A robber pulls a gun and demands you give him something of value.

*Toss one of your cards into the pile.*

Imagine you lost 3 of things you value most. How would you feel?

Read Gen. 35:1-5 aloud. How do you think it felt for Jacob’s family to lose their idols? How was that like losing things you love?

How much are you tempted to love those other four things more than you love God?

Why put God ahead of other things we love? How can we do this?



March 30, 2008

## **LIFE Group Guide**

### **Genesis 35 – Throwing away idols**

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme: **Purge anything that distracts you from God.**

Prentice’s final sermon at College Hills relates to removing distractions to our spiritual growth. If we want revival to come to our lives, we have to remove anything that comes between us and God. It is interesting to see how God’s blessing followed Jacob removing the idols from his life.

Market Street Church will host a statewide youth conference at the College Hills building on April 25-26. We need greeters. Ask your LIFE group to consider serving a four-hour shift on Friday or Saturday.

Leadership tip: Read every scripture in context. You will gain deeper understanding, and you will avoid shallow or faulty interpretations. For this lesson, the text will make more sense if you read Genesis 25-35, especially chapter 28. I write these guides to require minimal preparation, but you and your group will receive a greater blessing if you prepare.

**Relate** *Use a few to introduce the theme, check everyone’s spiritual pulse, and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage through these questions.*

- ❖ Imagine that your doctor says you have only five years to live. You won’t feel sick, but you’ll never know when death will come. How would you change your life?
- ❖ How does our group benefit you?
- ❖ What is the most creative gift card you could give Kevin Owen?

**Prayer ideas** (moved from the back page due to crowding)

Pray for revival.

Ask God to show us our idols and give us courage to toss them.

Pray for someone who is not worshipping the true God.

Pray for Kevin, Chase, Reid & Trey Owen, and Jana Graves. Jana will be in Austin, and the Owens in Nashville on March 30.