

## WORSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE

### *SERIES: THE JACOB NARRATIVE*

By Scott Grant

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#### **It's all God's work**

This month marks my 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary at Peninsula Bible Church. I have now been a pastor for 10 years. In another year, I will have been a pastor as long as I was a journalist. For 11 years I worked as a reporter and editor for newspapers. How I transitioned from journalism to church work is relevant this morning only because of the consternation it caused me.

It was difficult for me to leave journalism in part because I felt strongly about the need for followers of Jesus to work in the news media. In no way did I consider the pulpit a more spiritual place than the city desk. One was not a more “sacred” job than the other. One was not any less “ministry” than the other. Whether interviewing or counseling, editing or studying, reporting or preaching—it's all God's work.

As such, God takes an active interest in our work and reveals himself to us in it, thereby shaping our faith. His involvement therefore makes our place of work a place of worship, even if it feels more like a place of oppression. In fact, the normal Hebrew verb for “work” can also be translated “worship.” In Genesis 30:25-31:16, Jacob has the boss from hell. Laban exploits Jacob and yet God is at work in Jacob's work, and somehow Jacob flourishes. Spiritually, he comes to life. Can we likewise come to life because of our work? Let's see.

#### **Jacob's start-up**

**Now it came about when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, “Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my own country. Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me depart; for you yourself know my service which I have rendered you.” But Laban said to him, “If now it pleases you, stay with me; I have divined that the LORD has blessed me on your account.” He continued, “Name me your wages, and I will give it.” But he said to him, “You yourself know how I have served you and how your cattle have fared with me. For you had little before I came and it has increased to a multitude, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now, when shall I provide for my own household also?”**

**So he said, “What shall I give you?” And Jacob said, “You shall not give me anything. If you will do this one thing for me, I will again pasture and keep your flock: let me pass through your entire flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted sheep and every black one among the lambs and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and such shall be my wages. So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come concerning my wages. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, will be considered stolen.” Laban said, “Good, let it be according to your word.” So he removed on that day the striped and spotted male goats and all the speckled and spotted female goats, every one with white in it, and all the black ones among the sheep, and gave them into the care of his sons. And he put a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks. (Genesis 30:25-36)**

The birth of Joseph, Rachel's first child, causes Jacob's heart to turn toward home. He asks Laban to release him so that he can return to his own “place” and, literally, his own “land.” These are two key words in the Jacob narrative. Haran is Laban's place, not Jacob's place (Genesis 29:26, 31:35). Jacob never intended to stay there more than a few days, but Laban has kept him there for at least 14 years now. The Lord revealed himself to Jacob in a “certain place,” before his arrival in Haran, to tell him that his place was the land of

Canaan, which the Lord promised to him and his descendants (Genesis 28:10-15).

Jacob's heart is not only turning toward home but turning toward the Lord as well. Returning to the promised land is linked with Jacob's vow to make the Lord his God (Genesis 28:20-22).

Laban notes that he has "divined" that the Lord has blessed him because of Jacob. It takes divination, a practice that the Lord prohibits, for Laban to discern what should have been obvious (Leviticus 19:26, Deuteronomy 18:10, 14). Laban has perceived the truth, even though he used an unreliable, pagan method. The Abrahamic Covenant, which called for the extension of the Lord's blessing to all peoples, is being fulfilled through Jacob, just as it was fulfilled through Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 21:22, 26:28-29, 28:14). However, Laban is in danger of being cursed for not blessing the representative of God's people (Genesis 12:3, 27:29).

Laban says "Name your wages, and I will give it." When he first met Jacob, Laban said, "Tell me, what shall your wages be?" (Genesis 29:15). At that time, Jacob named Rachel, but Laban substituted Leah. Knowing that Jacob could never forget that exchange, Laban this time adds the words "and I will give it."

Twice Jacob uses the words "you yourself know," in connection with his service to Laban. Jacob's work has been open to Laban's investigation, and Laban has found him to be a good worker. Jacob goes on to illustrate the effectiveness of his service in order to make the case that he is neither being paid what he's worth nor what he needs to provide for his household, which includes Laban's daughters and grandchildren. Jacob proposes to remain if Laban will pay him with abnormally colored livestock. These animals would have amounted to less than the normal wage for shepherds. Laban, knowing a good deal when he sees one, says, "Good, let it be according to your word." He adds nothing about his own word.

Jacob, having learned something about the shepherding business in his years working for Laban, wants to strike out on his own. He wants to do a start-up. He evidently intends to take a small flock and make it grow.

Although Jacob offered to separate the flock himself, to ensure that there would be no breeding between the normal animals and the abnormally colored animals, the suspicious Laban takes the task upon himself. The abnormally colored of the flock still belong to Jacob, but Laban gives care of them to his sons and separates the flocks by a three days' journey.

### **Jacob prospers**

**Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white stripes in them, exposing the white which was in the rods. He set the rods which he had peeled in front of the flocks in the gutters, even in the watering troughs, where the flocks came to drink; and they mated when they came to drink. So the flocks mated by the rods, and the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. Jacob separated the lambs, and made the flocks face toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban; and he put his own herds apart, and did not put them with Laban's flock. Moreover, whenever the stronger of the flock were mating, Jacob would place the rods in the sight of the flock in the gutters, so that they might mate by the rods; but when the flock was feeble, he did not put them in; so the feebler were Laban's and the stronger Jacob's. So the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys. (Genesis 30:37-43)**

Laban's actions work to his disadvantage, because his absence allows Jacob to manipulate Laban's flock. The breeding techniques practiced by Jacob in verses 37 through 40 evidently represent a belief that animals will bring forth multicolored young if they see something multicolored while they are mating. In the first case, Jacob has the animals face colored rods. In the second case, he has animals face colored animals. The fact that some abnormally colored animals in the care of Jacob are said in verse 40 to belong to Laban, not Jacob, may be attributable to the later disclosure that Laban changed Jacob's wages (Genesis 31:7). Moreover, Jacob would use the rods only when the stronger animals were mating. Jacob was successful in taking Laban's flock and from it producing a flock of his own consisting of strong, abnormally colored animals.

The word “white” (*laban*) in verse 37 is also Laban’s name. Even the word “poplar” (*libneh*) is a play on Laban’s name. Jacob gained the birthright by serving “red” stew to Esau, who was born red and whose other name, Edom, was a play on the word “red” (*’adom*) (Genesis 25:24-34). Now Jacob gains the upper hand on “Mr. White” by using the white coloring in trees. Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, who was beautiful, but Laban substituted Leah, whose eyes were “weak” (Genesis 29:17). Now Jacob leaves Laban with “feeble” animals.

This turnaround is reminiscent of the cheer heard at Northwestern University football games years ago. Northwestern was the perennial doormat of the Big 10. How do you cheer for a team like that? The Northwestern fans began cheering this way when the other team scored: “That’s all right, that’s OK; they’re going to work for us some day.” Jacob was Laban’s doormat, but now he has turned the tables on him. And, like Abraham and Isaac before him, Jacob became “exceedingly prosperous” under the nose of a pagan leader (Genesis 12:16, 26:12-14). The verb in the phrase “became exceedingly prosperous” is the same one that the Lord used when he promised that Jacob’s descendants would “spread out,” or break through, to all points of the compass (Genesis 28:14).

Jacob foreshadows his descendants, the people of Israel, who served Egypt but sought release to worship the Lord (Exodus 7:16, 8:1). Laban foreshadows Pharaoh, who refused to let the Israelites go. In Egypt, the Israelites “multiplied and became exceedingly mighty” in the land of Egypt (Exodus 1:7, 20).

Jacob came to Haran with nothing. Although it has taken many years, he is now a wealthy man.

### **Realistic perspective**

Many of us, like Jacob, have seen our hearts turn toward home at the birth of a child. Some of us, who may be away from home, then think about returning home. Home for Jacob is the promised land, which represents the eternal home: the new heavens and the new earth. When the hospital attendants put that baby in the arms of a parent for the first time, that man or woman is never the same again. New avenues open up in the new parent’s heart—new avenues that direct him or her toward God, and toward an eternal home.

The story of Jacob gives us a realistic perspective on the workplace. Today we want our jobs to be exhilarating, and we are surprised when we encounter drudgery, cantankerous supervisors and backbiting co-workers. Since the fall, the workplace has been a place of toil and sweat (Genesis 3:17-19). As men and women of the covenant, our toil and sweat should benefit our employer. The people we work for should be able to say, in so many words, “The Lord has blessed me on your account.” When we do our jobs well, we contribute to making the Lord visible to our employers. We should even be able to say, along with Jacob, “You yourself know the service that I have rendered you.” We should be men and women of integrity who have nothing to hide and whose work is open to investigation.

We can make the case, as Jacob did, that we’re underpaid, if that’s the appearance of things, but by the appearance of things, Jacob never did get a better wage from Laban. Whatever our employer pays us, it’s nothing in comparison to the value God assigns our work if we offer it up to him. Therefore, we should look at the workplace the way Jacob did: as an opportunity to develop skills. This aspect of the workplace is much underplayed today. Other aspects—financial rewards, career advancement and personal satisfaction—are overplayed. What you learn now will pay off in the future, though you don’t know how. And you never know how what you learn in the workplace will be used by God as you serve him in other ways. Jacob, like Moses and David after him, learned to shepherd a flock that he might shepherd God’s flock.

Jacob didn’t receive much in wages from Laban, but he did receive an opportunity. If we take the opportunity to learn skills in the workplace, we’ll be better prepared when other opportunities come our way. It also behooves us to look for opportunities—to start something or take something and seek to make it grow. Laban’s refusal to trust Jacob actually gave Jacob an opening for creativity. Oppressive work conditions are no excuse for stifling creativity. In fact, oppressive work conditions can lead us to take risks that never would have occurred to us otherwise.

Jacob becomes prosperous, but only after years of hard work. For most of those years, Jacob had little to show for it. How different Jacob's life is from the way we want ours to be. The atmosphere here has changed since the stock option craze of the late '90s, but the air is still filled with get-rich-quick schemes. Too much wealth and too much success too soon are not usually good for the soul. Wealth and success can go to our heads and take us away from dependence on God.

Last night I watched a documentary about a man who had failed at everything he had tried by the age of 33, though he was a hard worker. Then, when the United States entered World War I, he enlisted. He was partially blind in one eye, so he memorized the chart to pass the eye exam. He became a captain and led his men into battle in Europe. He never lost a man! They said that luck seemed to follow him around. He was successful for the first time in his life. After the war, he opened a men's clothing store, but that failed, and he went bankrupt. He was 38 years old. One of his war buddies thought he might make a good political candidate, so he ran for county commissioner and won, but only by 279 votes. The man's name? Harry S. Truman, 33<sup>rd</sup> president of the United States. In the face of failure, he continued to work hard. In ways that he couldn't have imagined, the leadership skills he learned along the way paid off for an entire nation at a crucial point in its history.

The story of Jacob, as it unfolds, values greater riches: the wealth of a relationship with God that outweighs and outlasts silver and gold. And if the Lord does bless us with wealth, it still belongs to him, not us, and we must think of it in that way.

### **God sees Jacob; Jacob sees God**

**Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what belonged to our father he has made all this wealth." Jacob saw the attitude of Laban, and behold, it was not friendly toward him as formerly. Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."**

**Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to his flock in the field, and said to them, "I see your father's attitude, that it is not friendly toward me as formerly, but the God of my father has been with me. You know that I have served your father with all my strength. Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times; however, God did not allow him to hurt me. If he spoke thus, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flock brought forth speckled; and if he spoke thus, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock brought forth striped. Thus God has taken away your father's livestock and given them to me. And it came about at the time when the flock were mating that I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the male goats which were mating were striped, speckled, and mottled. Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Lift up now your eyes and see that all the male goats which are mating are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.'"**

**Rachel and Leah said to him, "Do we still have any portion or inheritance in our father's house? Are we not reckoned by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and has also entirely consumed our purchase price. Surely all the wealth which God has taken away from our father belongs to us and our children; now then, do whatever God has said to you." (Genesis 31:1-16)**

Laban's sons, who are no doubt worried for their inheritance, express concern that Jacob has become wealthy at their father's expense. Jacob hears their words, and he also sees that Laban, who had eagerly entered into the agreement regarding the flocks, is, literally, not "with him" any longer. The jealousy of Laban and his sons actually causes Jacob to move in the direction of God's leading.

After Jacob hears and sees this family's unfavorable disposition toward him, the Lord says to him, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you." When Jacob was on his way to Haran, the Lord told him, "I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this

land” (Genesis 28:15). Jacob’s desire to return to his own place and to his own land is affirmed by the Lord.

The Lord has fulfilled his promises; he has been with Jacob, and he has kept him. Now he wants to make good on his promise to bring him back to the land of Canaan. Jacob’s vow—to make the Lord his God if the Lord fulfilled his promises—looms in the background.

Instead of describing Canaan as Jacob’s place and land, the Lord describes it as “the land of your fathers” and “the land of your relatives.” Jacob’s place and land are inhabited by an unloving father whom he tricked and a vengeful brother whom he usurped. At this point, it seems that the Lord’s promise to bring Jacob back to the land will face some stiff opposition. When the Lord first issued the promises, Jacob insisted that the Lord return him to his father’s house “in safety” (Genesis 28:21).

Laban has not been “with” Jacob, but the Lord is with him. If the Lord is with Jacob, it doesn’t matter who is not with him. Having seen the Lord in the workplace, Jacob for the first time takes initiative in his marriages, calling his wives to his flock in the field. He wants them to see his flock, the evidence of God’s blessing, and he wants to meet with them in private, where they can’t be overheard.

His brother Esau was a man of the field. (Genesis 25:27). Jacob, after years of working for Laban, has also learned to be a man of the field. Once again, “the field” provides a stage in the narrative, indicating that some kind of transaction is in the works. In this case, Jacob persuades Rachel and Leah to leave their father and go with him. In doing so, Jacob tells them about the God of his father. He contrasts his wives’ father with the God of his father. Laban has been against him, but God has blessed him. Jacob acknowledges for the first time that the Lord, who promised to be with him many years ago, has kept his promise.

Jacob says he has served Laban with all his strength—and he has a lot of strength, as evidenced by his moving the stone from the mouth of the well (Genesis 29:10). Although Laban cheated Jacob and changed his wages, God has seen that Laban has not been able to hurt him. In fact, Laban’s schemes have backfired. His efforts to limit Jacob’s wages actually resulted in an increase. Jacob sees the hand of God in this. Laban’s sons’ interpretation was that “Jacob has taken away all that was our father’s.” But Jacob’s interpretation, offered to his wives, is that “God has taken away your father’s livestock and given them to me.”

God has not only prevented Laban from harming Jacob, he has used Laban’s efforts to harm Jacob as a means of blessing him. Jacob attributes his amazing success not to his breeding program but to God. Again, Jacob and Laban foreshadow Israel and Egypt. The more Pharaoh afflicted the Israelites, the more they multiplied (Exodus 1 and 2).

At some point the Lord gave Jacob a dream in which abnormally colored goats were mating. Regardless of whether it occurred before or after Jacob’s request for the abnormally colored animals, the narrator’s point is that the Lord is responsible for Jacob’s prosperity.

Jacob “saw” what Laban had been doing to him (Genesis 31:2, 5). When he lifted up his eyes in a dream, he saw that God has been involved in his world. God “saw” Leah and “gave heed to” Rachel, the two oppressed women, and blessed them with children (Genesis 29:31, 30:22). God later told Jacob, the oppressed worker, “I have *seen* all that Laban has been doing to you,” and he blessed him with livestock.

In fact, for many years the Lord had seen Laban oppress Jacob; only recently did he act to overturn Laban. Jacob “saw” Rachel but not Leah, and he was insensitive to Rachel’s plight (Genesis 29:10, 30:2). He works for many years for a man who sees things differently from him and who is insensitive to his needs. Again, Jacob has reaped what he has sowed so that he may get a good look at himself. Jacob is like Rachel, who had to watch other women bear children before the Lord opened her womb.

The Lord identified himself as the “God of Bethel,” reminding Jacob that at Bethel he erected a memorial pillar and made a vow to make the Lord his God if the Lord fulfilled his promises. When he was on his way to Haran,

Jacob had taken a stone and used it as a pillow and spent the night alone in Bethel, which means “House of God.” The Lord revealed himself to Jacob in that place, and Jacob took the stone and turned it into a pillar. The difficult place of transition became for him a place of worship.

The Lord has appeared to Jacob once again in a difficult place, this time in the land of Haran, where Laban had enslaved him. The difficult place of servitude also becomes a place of worship, for the God of “The House of God” is there. The Lord reminded Jacob of his vow to make the Lord his God upon his return to the promised land. So he commanded Jacob to leave “this land,” which is not his home, and return to the “land of your birth,” which is where he and his people belong.

Jacob has seen the Lord in his place of work, and it has shaped his faith. It has helped him emerge as a man of faith, who obeys the Lord and shares the Lord with his wives.

### **Rachel and Leah agree**

Rachel and Leah respond to Jacob with one voice. Earlier, they were at odds with each other. Evidently, once they began talking to each other, they were able to reconcile their differences (Genesis 30:14-15). Also, Laban’s treatment of his daughters now works against him. They recognize that they have no “portion or inheritance” in their “father’s house.” Whatever inheritance they have is with Jacob, with the God of his “father,” with the God of the “House” of God (Genesis 31:5).

Laban has treated Rachel and Leah not as daughters but as foreigners, with no rights. He sold them to Jacob, who paid for them with 14 years’ worth of labor. It was customary to transfer part of the purchase price to the brides themselves. The women, then, should have benefited from Jacob’s work for Laban. However, Jacob was not even able to provide for his family (Genesis 30:30). Evidently, the women see Laban’s oppression of Jacob as total consumption of the purchase price. Both Rachel and Leah agree with Jacob’s interpretation of the transfer of wealth. They do not believe that “Jacob has taken away all that was our father’s,” as their brothers believed (Genesis 31:1), but that “God has taken away from our father what belongs to us and our children.” The women therefore tell Jacob to “do whatever God has said to you.” Jacob has told his wives about God’s involvement in his life, and they believe him. Their future is not in Haran but in Canaan, not with Laban but with Jacob. Their future is with the family of God.

### **God at work**

What do we do about jealous co-workers who ascribe our success to underhanded tactics and thereby sully our reputation? At the highest level, we are to acknowledge the sovereignty of God. He is sovereign over both employers and co-workers, over both Laban and Laban’s sons. The jealousy of co-workers may even move you in the direction of the Lord’s leading, just as it moved Jacob.

And what is it that the Lord promises us in the workplace? He promises us the same thing he promises for every aspect of our lives: He promises to be with us. For some of us, that may mean riches. For others of us, that may mean poverty. For all of us, that means the Lord is committed to his relationship with us and to accomplishing his carefully crafted purposes for each of us. Therefore, look for the hand of the Lord in your workplace—how he works things together for good in ways beyond your anticipation. If the Lord is with us in the workplace, it doesn’t matter who is against us there. “If God is for us, who is against us?” (Romans 8:31).

If we see the Lord’s faithfulness to us in the workplace, and how he values our initiative there, we should be encouraged to take initiative elsewhere and to speak of the Lord’s faithfulness, in the manner of Jacob. Leadership in the workplace may come easier to us than spiritual leadership at home, for example. But if we involve the Lord in our work, and see his power in the sphere of greater comfort, we can be encouraged to take him home with us. All the while, the workplace stretches us, and we become something we weren’t before, just

as Jacob became a “man of the field.”

See if you can ascertain whether the Lord has honored his promise to be with you in the workplace—always remembering that he will probably make his presence known in unexpected ways. Employers and co-workers may seek to harm us, but really, they can’t touch us. God uses every harmful intention to form us for himself and for his purposes. What they intend for evil, God intends for good.

If ultimately we are successful in the world’s eyes, to what will we attribute that success? Credit goes to the Lord. The Lord set the stage; moved the players into place, even wicked players; and provided the dream whereby Jacob realized success. Everything—from our initiative to the environment by which our initiative can flourish—comes from the Lord.

It’s easy to see what the Labans of this world are doing to us. It’s not as easy for us to “lift up our eyes” and understand that the Lord sees everything that the Labans are doing. We see this world, but the scriptures, as the Holy Spirit illuminates them, give us eyes to see a different world—a heavenly world that has invaded this world. Lift up your eyes and see—see that God sees, that God cares, that God is involved. God has seen everything that has happened in your workplace. And he will right all wrongs. Much of our workplace angst is rooted in our propensity to look for meaning, riches or advancement without looking to the Lord.

Watch for how you reap in the workplace what you have sowed. When something is done to us that causes us harm, have we in the past treated others in a similar way? Laban does to Jacob in the workplace what Jacob did to his wives at home. The workplace is often a crucible in which our faith issues with God become visible. It’s a place of spiritual discipline. Even if we’ve done nothing “wrong” per se, we may endure harsh working conditions for many years as God shapes us. With this perspective, it is possible to work hard and even effectively in an oppressive environment.

Most importantly, God reveals himself to us in the workplace. Often, the workplace is a hard place. God specializes in revealing himself to men and women in the difficult places of their lives. He revealed himself to Jacob in Bethel when he was on the run, and in Haran, where he toiled for years. He thereby transforms those places into places of worship. The “God of the House of God” is in your workplace, which makes it, of all things, a temple.

When we see the Lord in our workplace, it shapes our faith, and we emerge as men and women of faith who are more bent toward obeying the Lord. We also, in the manner of Jacob, emerge with stories of God’s faithfulness to share with others.

How do we go about worshiping God in the workplace? No one saw God more clearly in the workplace or worshiped him better there than Brother Lawrence, the 16<sup>th</sup> century monk who served his order in France as a cook for more than 30 years. He never sought a “higher” position.

He had a natural aversion to the kitchen, but one friend noted that Brother Lawrence accustomed himself to do everything there for the love of God and to pray on all occasions for God’s grace to do his work well. When he went to work, Brother Lawrence would pray, “O my God, since Thou art with me, and I must now, in obedience to Thy commands, apply my mind to these outward things, I beseech Thee to grant me the grace to continue in Thy presence; and to this end do Thou prosper me with Thy assistance, receive all my works, and possess all of my affections.”

His friend said, “As he proceeded in his work, he continued his familiar conversation with his Maker, imploring His grace, and offering to Him all his actions.” Such conversation was not immediately easy for him, however. At first he did so with diligence, but then he found that the love of God inwardly excited him so that he conversed with God without difficulty.

“The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer,” he said, “and in the noise and clatter of

my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament.” His friend said Brother Lawrence was “pleased when he could take up a straw from the ground for the love of God, seeking Him only, and nothing else, not even His gifts.”(1)

### **Lessons for employers**

Many of us can learn from Jacob, the laborer. Many of us can also learn from Laban, the supervisor. While the example of Jacob is mostly a positive one, the example of Laban is a negative one. From Laban, we mostly learn how not to do it and, perhaps, to stop doing what we’re doing and start doing something else.

If we’ve become “successful,” it’s more than likely that other people have helped make us successful. There are no self-made men and women. Laban acknowledged that Jacob helped him, although he did so only to butter him up. We should acknowledge the contribution of others in the interest of blessing them as they have blessed us.

If we see people under our supervision who show promise, it behooves us to empower them and give them room to create without micromanaging them. Jacob found a way to be creative despite Laban. Our employees should find ways to create because of our influence.

If we are in a position to influence the wages of our employees, we should consider their value to the company and what it costs to live here—not how much we can squeeze out of them. If you think someone’s services are worth more than what they’re being paid, and the company is in a position to reward him, seek to pay him more.

We should all be aware of service industry workers: waiters, clerks, barbers. Church groups who go to restaurants together should be aware that the wait staff is watching. The reputation of the gospel is on the line when we go to these places, and when we leave tips. If service industry people have served us well, we should serve them with a healthy tip if we’re able to do so. It’s a particular joy to surprise such workers at Christmas time.

What happens to Laban should serve as a warning to all who would exploit workers under their supervision. Laban reaps what he sows. His efforts to stifle Jacob backfire. Just as the Lord saw what Laban was doing to Jacob, he sees what we’re doing to our employees.

### **It is the Lord Christ whom you serve**

Each of us should be able to look at our work lives from both a heavenly and biblical perspective and say, “God has been with me.” If you have a job, you’re blessed. If you’ve had a job, you’re blessed. If you’ve had some say in what you do and how you do it, you’re blessed. If God has been with us, and if he is with us, we can worship. And when you go to work tomorrow, or when you go to look for work tomorrow, thank God, and ask for his help and converse with him in the course of your day.

The apostle Paul says this: “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve” (Colossians 3:23-24). Whether you’re an employee or an employer, CEO of a Fortune 500 company or working the bar at Starbucks, it is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

And know this: The better reward, the best part of your inheritance, is still in the future. For Jacob and his descendants, their inheritance was the promised land. It was the place of his birth, and he would return there. Everything that the promised land evokes will be fulfilled for us in the new heavens and the new earth. In that place, work will be fully meaningful, for in that place, the servants of Jesus will serve and worship him (Revelation 22:3).



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## NOTES

(1) Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, ©1993 by Barbour and Co., Uhrichsville, Ohio. Pp. 15-16, 18, 32-34.

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Genesis 30:25-31:16

Ninth Message

**Scott Grant**

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