**Week 14: Genesis 48-49**

**Hook**

See below for a list of celebrities and the superlative that they received while in high school; break into groups and attempt to match the celebrity to the superlative.

1. Jennifer Lawrence  
2. Chris Pratt  
3. Sandra Bullock  
4. Brad Pitt  
5. Gillian Anderson  
6. Oprah Winfrey  
7. Matthew McConaughey  
8. Bruce Willis

A. Most Popular  
B. Most Likely to Brighten Your Day  
C. Most Talkative  
D. Most Likely to be Arrested  
E. Most Handsome  
F. Best Dressed  
G. Most School Spirit  
H. Class Clown


**Q. Did you receive a high school superlative?**

**Q. Do you remember who in your class was voted “Most Likely to Succeed”? Did it hold true?**

**Transition:** Today we will read as Jacob pronounced blessings on his sons. Not only speaking truth about them but sharing about the future of their descendants.
Week 14: *Genesis 48-49*

**Book**

**Main Point:** God blesses all of His people, not just the ones the world sees as important.

**Text Summary:** Jacob’s life has come to a close. In these last moments, he goes about blessing his sons.

**Genesis 48:1-16 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** God adopts us into His family.

At the end of his life, Jacob blesses all of his sons, but he blesses the two oldest sons of Joseph (Gen. 48) before he blesses his own sons (Gen. 49). He not only gives them a blessing, he adopts them as his own sons, as heirs with their uncles, Reuben and Simeon and the others (v. 5).

1 Chronicles explains to us why Jacob adopted Joseph’s sons. Because Reuben was the oldest son, he was entitled to a double portion of the inheritance. But because he had slept with Jacob’s wife, Bilhah, Jacob gave Reuben’s birthright to Joseph (1 Chron. 5:1–2). So, Joseph’s two sons each got a portion, fulfilling the double portion for Joseph. These inheritances are determined at a crucial time in the history of Israel—between the stories of Genesis and Exodus—when the family of Israel will become the nation of Israel. From this point, Israel will grow into a nation of 12 tribes, each of the sons of Jacob will be the patriarch of one tribe. Through his two sons, Joseph will be the patriarch of two tribes—a double inheritance.

Through his blessing, Jacob brings Joseph’s half-Egyptian sons back into the fold of Israel’s inheritance. He makes sure that even though they were born in Egypt, to an Egyptian mother, while their father was a leader in Egypt, they belong to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Just as Jacob adopts Joseph’s sons into his family by faith (Heb. 11:21), God adopts us into His family as His sons and daughters by grace through faith (John 1:12–13). When we are adopted as sons into the family of God, we not only share in the love of God the Father in a special way (1 John 3:1), we share in the inheritance of Christ, which is not just a share in the land of Israel, but the kingdom of God (Heb. 9:15). Just as Jacob points his sons ahead to a future inheritance in the Promised Land, we are pointed ahead to a future inheritance in the kingdom of God.

This inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us (1 Pet. 1:4). The law of entropy teaches us that everything we have on earth will fade away, but our treasures in heaven will never rust nor be destroyed (Matt. 6:19–20).
Paul tells us that we are no longer slaves to sin (Gal. 4:6–7). We are sons, who will receive a full inheritance. But many of us are living our Christian lives as if we were slaves rather than sons, both in the way we see our relationships with God and the way we view the kingdom:

1. We see our lives as an obligation to God, as if we are working to pay off our debt, rather than seeing the amazing grace of a debt that has already been paid. Sons serve God freely and willingly, with joy and thankfulness and love and security, not out of obligation.
2. We don’t have the personal investment in the work of the kingdom that a son should have. As the ones who will inherit the kingdom, we should value the work of the kingdom as much as the Father does, and work for His kingdom with the same heart and passion.

Q: What would it look like if we lived by faith, trusting in our future inheritance in the kingdom of heaven? If we lived with this kind of eternal perspective?

Q: What would our lives look like if we saw ourselves as sons of God with a vested interest in building the kingdom of God?

Genesis 48:17-22 [READ]

Talking Point 2: God often chooses the overlooked.

We don’t even have to know the background from the ancient Near East, it is clear from the text that putting the right hand on someone gave him the older son’s blessing (v. 17). The right hand was associated with God’s strength (Exodus 15:6), His favor (Ps. 16:11), and His help (Psalm 20:6). The right hand or seat was a place of honor, which is why Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father (Mark 14:62).

Joseph simply thought his father was confused (vv. 17–18). But in response to Joseph’s concern, Jacob simply says, “I know, my son, I know.” I’m not confused. I’m doing this on purpose. Jacob knew of the destinies, not just of these sons themselves, but of their entire tribes in the future (v. 19).

God often chose the younger son (Abel over Cain, Jacob over Esau, Moses over Aaron). It’s a recurring theme throughout Scripture. In the ancient Near East, the oldest son was so honored that he was given a double portion of the inheritance. But God flipped that concept on its head. God doesn’t work within the categories the world has created.

God delights in using weak, overlooked and imperfect people, filling them with His Spirit and empowering them to do His will. Moses was not eloquent; he was slow of speech and of tongue (Ex. 4:10). Rahab was a prostitute (Josh. 2:1). David was just a shepherd boy, the runt of his family (1 Sam. 16:11). Peter, James, and John were just run-of-the-mill fishermen (Matt. 4:18–
Yet He used them in such a powerful way that it shocked the people around them, and they recognized that their power must have come from God (Acts 4:13).

When God uses the weaker person or the seemingly insignificant person to do amazing things, it brings glory to God. When a strong person accomplishes something, the world will say, “Look how amazing that person is.” But when a weak person accomplishes something they could never have done on their own, the world will say, “Look how amazing God is!” (Matt. 5:16). This is why Paul writes that he will boast in his weaknesses, because in his weakness, Christ is strong in him—“[God’s] power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9–10).

God does not call the equipped. He equips the called. The question isn’t whether you are “good enough,” but whether God is calling you. Seek the Lord in prayer, ask Him what He is calling you to do, and then step out in faith, trusting that He will equip you to do whatever He asks.

Q: What does it say about God that He chooses to use the weak and seemingly insignificant people rather than those who are powerful and important in the eyes of the world?

Q: What may God be calling you to do that you feel like you aren’t naturally “strong enough” to do?

Q: How can you learn and grow when you are called out of your comfort zone?


Talking Point #3: No one is beyond God’s redemption.

People often have pretty significant last words, especially when you know they’re going to be their last words. But in ancient cultures, deathbed blessings from a patriarch were a very significant ritual. Blessings or curses pronounced by the patriarch were always taken seriously and considered binding.

In this chapter, Jacob offers blessings and curses to his 12 sons, a judgment of their past performance and their future prospects. Yet this chapter is not just Jacob’s opinions or his wishes about his sons and their futures, it is prophetic, he tells us so himself (v. 1). His blessings are poetic and so use a lot of imagery and metaphor that can be hard to interpret.

Reuben – Jacob proclaims that Reuben has lost his birthright as the firstborn son (Gen. 49:3–4). Remember, we saw that Reuben’s act with Bilhah was not only a betrayal to his father, but a challenge to his father’s authority and a grasp for power. Instead, it had the opposite effect, and his father gave his firstborn status to his favored son, Joseph, through his two sons (Gen. 48).
Simeon and Levi — Reuben, Simeon and Levi were the three oldest sons of Leah, Jacob’s unloved wife (Gen. 29:31). Simeon and Levi were not twins, but they are listed together because they were partners in crime (Genesis 34). This curse is certainly referencing their great sin in killing all of the Shechemite men out of revenge for their sister Dinah’s honor (Gen. 49:6), but that doesn’t mean it was the only time they showed violence. Note, though, that Jacob doesn’t curse Simeon and Levi themselves, but curses their anger and their wrath (v. 7).ix Jacob distances himself from their anger and cruelty (v. 6), but he does not disown them or kick them out of the family altogether. Instead, he divides them and scatters them among the other tribes in Israel.

So one may wonder, if Levi was so evil and cursed, why were his descendants made the priests of Israel? If we look ahead to Exodus, after Israel had become a whole nation rather than just a family, and each man’s descendants had become a tribe, we see that Moses and Aaron are descendants of the tribe of Levi (Ex. 2:1; 1 Chron. 6).

After the people had left Egypt and crossed through the Red Sea and received the Law on Mount Sinai, Moses was on the top of the mountain for 40 days (Ex. 24:18). There Moses received the instructions about the tabernacle and all of its utensils and the offerings, including setting apart Aaron and his sons (Levites) as priests (Ex. 25–31). But while Moses was gone for so long, the people became impatient and they asked Aaron to make for them a golden calf to worship, which he did (32:1–6)! When Moses came down to take control, he said, “Whoever is for the Lord, come to me,” (32:26) and it was “all the Levites” who rallied to him. And here, Moses used their violence for good, to purge the idolaters from among them. At God’s command, they killed 3,000 of the Israelites who were unfaithful that day (v. 27). Then Moses said because they were willing to kill their own sons and brothers for the Lord, he had set them apart for the Lord that day (32:29). Even though the anger and wrath of Levi had been cursed by Jacob, the Lord redeemed tribe of Levi for Himself and His service. No one is beyond God’s redemption.

Q: How and why is no one beyond God’s redemption?

Q: If you have seen God turn someone’s life around dramatically, share what you saw. How did that person change? How did God redeem his or her life?

Q: How can we help be a force for change for our friends who are far from God?

Genesis 49:8-28 [Read]

Talking Point 4: God is the source of all blessing.
Q: Why is it significant that Jacob had a specific blessing for each son, according to what was suitable to him?

Q: What does this mean for us?

In this section, Jacob showers blessings on both Judah and Joseph, though he also has some good things to say about his other sons, too.

Judah: Judah was the youngest of the first four sons of Leah, so this is yet another example of God choosing the younger brother. Although Judah is far from perfect, we see him demonstrate leadership among his brothers (Gen. 46:28). In Judah’s blessing, Jacob paints a picture of strong leadership over the rest of the brothers (49:8), and therefore, that the future kingly line will come from the tribe of Judah (v. 10). He is compared to a lion because of this royal line (v. 9). His tribe will be so prosperous and so abundantly fruitful that wine will be so plentiful they could use it to wash their clothes if they wanted (v. 11).x

Zebulun: Zebulun’s territory did not extend all the way to the Mediterranean Sea but the major coastal trade route (The Way of the Sea) ran through Zebulun, involving them in exporting and importing.xi

Issachar: Issachar was born because Leah bought the right to sleep with Jacob from Rachel (30:14–16). Issachar is described as strong, but forced to work as a servant (49:14–15). In Jewish tradition, it is believed that this blessing of Jacob is an allusion to the fact that many of the tribe of Issachar became religious scholars, or servants of the law.xii

Dan: Dan shall be the judge of the other tribes of Israel. The name Dan means “judge” in Hebrew. In Numbers, Dan is the second largest tribe after Judah (Num. 1:39). But Dan is also portrayed as having snakelike behavior (Gen. 49:17), which we see in their later attack on the unsuspecting people of Laish (Judg. 18).

Gad: The tribe of Gad, along with half of Manasseh and Reuben, settled east of the Jordan River (the Transjordan). Because they will be vulnerable on the east side, they will be attacked by raiders and they will become strong by fighting them off. This is a play on words in Hebrew – the word for raid “gud” sounds very similar to “Gad.”xiii

Asher: Asher means “happy” or “blessed.” Their tribe’s location along the coast will make their land very fertile and economically prosperous because of trading by sea.

Naphtali: Naphtali will also be fruitful because of the rich natural resources of upper Galilee. The highly fertile plain of Gennesaret was called “an ambition of nature, an earthly paradise” by Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century. Naphtali also had several major roads running through it, so was ripe for trading.xiv
Joseph: Jacob’s longest blessing is for Joseph. Joseph’s blessing is also the only one that includes God in it (Gen. 49:24–25). Joseph is a fruitful bough by a spring, like the metaphor of the wise man in Psalms—“like a tree planted by streams of water” (Ps. 1:3). The word blessing is repeated over and over—blessings upon blessings (Gen. 49:25–26). God is described as the Mighty One, as He is throughout the rest of the Old Testament—the One who wins our battles for us (Ex. 14:14, et. al.). He is the Shepherd who will guide and protect Joseph (Ps. 23). He is the Stone; the Rock on which we can stand (Ps. 19:14). He is the source of all heavenly blessings (Gen. 49:25). God’s blessings are everlasting (49:26). This everlasting blessing is set upon Joseph, who was set apart from his brothers as the one to save the family.

Benjamin – Benjamin’s descendants will be aggressive warriors (1 Chron. 8:40). Saul, the first king of Israel, was from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Sam. 9:1–2). The apostle Paul was also a Benjamite (Rom. 11:1; Phil. 3:5).

Jacob blesses his sons, but he recognizes that all blessings come from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (49:25). Jacob said it was God who blessed Jacob himself in the land of Canaan (48:3) and it was God who would pour out blessings on his son (Joseph) from heaven above (49:25). God blessed Abraham (12:1–3; 15:1–7; 17:1–8), Isaac (26:23–33), and Jacob (28:1–17; 35:9–15). Those blessings are all being passed along to the 12 tribes – God will make them a great nation, give them a land, and be their God. This is what we will start to see happening in Exodus, so this chapter is a bridge to the rest of the story. This is how these 12 tribes, the nation of Israel that we will follow through the rest of the Old Testament, came to be. God has promised to bless His people, and His blessings are coming to fruition.xv

James tells us that all good and perfect gifts come from our heavenly Father (James 1:17). Jesus tells us that our Father delights in giving us good gifts, even more than a human a father loves to give good gifts to his children (Matt. 7:11). Paul tells us that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of all of these blessings, promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons. Our inheritance is in Christ (Eph. 1:11–14). So, as we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing, let us pass that blessing along to others as Jacob did to his sons.

Q: What spiritual blessings have you received from God in Christ?

Q: How has a relationship with Christ changed you? What impact will that change have on your future?

Q: How has God specifically blessed you, according to your unique personality and life experience?
Q: How can you pass on those spiritual blessings to other people, as Jacob passed his blessings to his sons?

Q: How can we be a spiritual blessing in our churches? In our families? To strangers and to friends? In our neighborhoods? In our cities? In the world?

**Genesis 49:29-33 [Read]**

**Talking Point 5:** Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Jacob asked to be buried with his fathers, the fathers of the promise, the fathers who had also been blessed by God—Abraham and Isaac. They had been buried in a cave in Canaan, the land that was promised to them by God as part of the blessing (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:1–7; 17:1–8; 26:23–33; 28:1–17; 35:9–15). They did not yet own the land of promise. Jacob and his fathers, Isaac and Abraham, had just been sojourners there. But they had bought this one cave in a land that wasn’t theirs as an act of faith. Almost like putting a down payment on a plot of land in hopes to one day be able to actually build a home there. They were buried there in faith that one day that land would be theirs. Along with his blessings over each of his sons, this last request was part of Jacob’s forward-looking faith in the promises of God to his family.

Q: What would it have been like for Jacob to know that God’s promises for him were really for his descendants in the future?

Q: What blessings did Jacob still see in his own personal life, even if the big promises of descendants and land were for far-off generations?

Q: What promises has God made to you for your future? For your present?
Week 14: *Genesis 48-49*

**Took**

**Main Point:** God blesses all of His people, not just the ones the world sees as important.

Teacher, provide your group with blank note cards. Challenge them to prayerfully find someone in their life to whom they can write a note in which they speak a blessing. It may be a friend, family member, coworker, church family, or even an enemy or mere acquaintance. It doesn’t have to be poetic like Jacob’s, just heartfelt and prayerful. It doesn’t take a special spiritual gift to speak a blessing over someone. It’s not a prophetic word about that person’s future, just a word of encouragement over his or her life, a positive word from God’s Word to that person, to build up him or her (Eph. 4:29).

**CHALLENGES:**

**THINK:** *How has God been faithful?* – Take some time to look back over your life and look for ways God has been faithful to you throughout your whole life. How has He cared for you, provided for you, redeemed you? How has He been like a shepherd to you? Where do you see His hand orchestrating things for your good? Were there times when you didn’t see Him working at the time, but you can see Him now, looking back? How has God been at work in your life? How has He changed you, on the inside?

**PRAY:** *For God to use your weaknesses* – Ask God to show you where He is calling you to serve in His kingdom. Even if it is outside of your comfort zone. Even if it is in an area you see as a “weakness” for you. Ask Him to equip you and work through you to go where He is leading. Ask Him for the trust to follow Him. Ask Him to grow you through your stepping out in faith and to use you as a vessel through which His Holy Spirit can work.

**ACT:** *Building the kingdom* – As adopted sons, ones who have an inheritance in the kingdom of God, we have a vested interest in building the kingdom of God. Ask God for **one concrete way** He is calling you to work toward building His kingdom this week and **then do it.** Maybe it’s as simple as giving money to a ministry or praying for an unchurched friend. Maybe it’s volunteering at your church or with a non-profit. Maybe it’s something bigger and bolder outside of your comfort zone. Listen for God’s voice **and follow.** Don’t think about all the reasons you aren’t good enough or you don’t have time right now. If He calls you, He will equip you. Just follow.