

## Our Biblical Ancestors (2018)

A Bible study resource for groups and individuals

**In** this series, you will discover intriguing ideas about Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, Jacob, Rachel, or Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah. Some of their names may be quite familiar while others may have gone unnoticed before.

You will learn how these ancestors in the faith of ours sometimes provide models of faithful living and sometimes provide cautionary tales of how we are not to live.

Each study begins by introducing one or more of these biblical ancestors with relevant scripture passages and insights about each of them. It then offers ideas for group discussion and individual reflection that draw on the experiences of our biblical ancestors and our own situations.

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*Please feel free to download this material and use it in whatever way is most appropriate to your situation.*

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## Go you go

It all starts with God's surprising word to Abram.

### The Passage: Genesis 12:1–3.

*Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*



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Going back into a family tree can be enlightening, challenging and puzzling. Stories and characters that we might want to know about are left in mystery. We may find ancestors who did admirable things, encouraging us to follow in their footsteps. We may discover hard or ugly truths, driving us to understand their context, to hope for forgiveness and to seek to do better in the life we have.

Our ancestors in faith—Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Leah and Rachel—sometimes provide models of faithful living, and sometimes cautionary tales of How Not to Be. In and through their stories, we find God's initiating grace, God's faithfulness, and God's fulfilment of promise. It all starts with God's surprising word to Abram in verse 1: "Go."

In Hebrew, it's two words: "*lech lecha*," meaning "go you go." It's more ambiguous than the English translation lets on. It can be read as a **command**: "Go, you; git going!" It can be read as a **direction**: "Go into yourself; discover your roots and your purpose."

It can be read as an **invitation**: "Go for yourself, for your own reasons; go if you think it's the right thing for you to do." In whatever way this is read, faith involves moving from your original position—whether literally or figuratively—and going where God is leading.

Working backwards through the reading helps us see where God is going. The last phrase, *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*, is God's goal. To get there, God wants Abram to be a source of this blessing, and so promises Abram, "I will bless you." In order to be blessed, Abram would need to *go*, beyond his habitual thoughts and routines. On the strength of God's promise, Abram and Sarai went.

"How come nobody in the Bible ever stays home?" a child asked. It's true. We have maps in the back of Bibles for a reason. Lines on maps represent where people moved geographically. Spiritual journeys involve moving to become more trusting of God, more willing to work towards God's goals, more compassionate, humble and generous.

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**A warning: some rough road ahead.** The writers of our ancestors' stories include assumptions about racism, sexism and political oppression that we may no longer share. Some of their priorities and fears are no longer as important in our culture. We will grapple with these thorny issues in this study series. Reclaiming the stories of these ancestors involves discerning the best routes, seeing signposts of grace along the way.

### For Group Discussion:

Who were your "ancestors in faith"? What did they teach you about being a person of faith? What did you have to learn on your own, or elsewhere?

Does it make a difference if God's word to Abram is a command, a therapeutic direction or an invitation? What roles do freedom and/or obedience play in our relationship with God?

### For Individual Reflection:

Remember a time when you chose to go. What important things did you leave behind? What important things did you find?

### Living the Story:

Go. You go. (Yes, you.) No one can make you go anywhere or do anything, but as with Abram, greater faith and deeper discipleship don't happen if you stay exactly as you are. Report back at the next study.



# Abraham's Legacy

In a relationship based on faith.



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## The Passage: Genesis 15:1–6.

*After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." But the word of the Lord came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.*

Abram—soon to be Abraham—steps onto the biblical stage as a senior citizen. He has no infancy or boyhood stories, no youthful heroic deeds. He is older, childless and driven by a single word: legacy. Abram wants children and land to support those children and their descendants. Following God's offer, Abram proves himself ready to endure anything from inconvenience to personal pain in order to make this happen.

The man we meet in this passage is at a low point. Having responded to God's call to go, he still does not have his legacy secured. The grand announcement in the first verse is met with a dismissive "So what?" Abram has already done his estate planning but God contradicts the plan. No one but "one born from your own guts," as the Hebrew puts it with visceral force, will inherit.

God's outreach to Abram ranges from the intimate kindness of a friend, drawing Abram outside to refocus, to an expansive divine promise of descendants. The sweep of the starry night sky is not a guarantee

but a promise. Abram takes it as such and trusts it, and this trusting faith is "reckoned to him as righteousness" by God.

"Reckoned" and "righteousness" are two rusty words that can sound old-fashioned and irrelevant but they are important. God's promise to Abram is something Abram trusts, leans on. God sees this trusting faith and considers it righteous—a sign of right relationship with God.

This verse deserves to be highlighted and underlined, because it undercuts our perennial temptation to think that we have earned God's love by what we have done. All our mental receipts for the good we have done, or the money we have donated, are not part of God's accounting. God isn't that interested in our self-justifying accounting but in a relationship with us based on faith.

Abraham's true legacy is not his genetic material, nor his possessions, nor his traditional lands, but his committed faith. We are "children of Abraham" not by biological descent but in our inheritance of his enduring trust in God.

## For Group Discussion:

1. It would be accurate to describe Abraham as "a wealthy businessman of dubious sexual and parental ethics, involved in trade deals and regional politics." How do we deal with God's inclusion of complex and not entirely loveable characters in God's story?
2. Patriarchy is a system which benefits and burdens men with power and decision-making. Abraham, the archetypal patriarch, makes crucial decisions about the lives of his wives and sons. How have you benefitted from, or been burdened by, patriarchy? As our society becomes less patriarchal, what is lost and what is gained?
3. Have you ever helped a friend refocus? What were the circumstances?

## For Individual Reflection:

It can be disappointing when the legacy of faith is not received or seen as important. If this has happened with you, how do you deal with this?

## Living the Story:

Do one thing toward your legacy.



## Sarah laughed

The outcome was impossible and the implications were ridiculous!

### The Passage: Genesis 18:9–15.

*They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."*

**S**arah is the first in a long line of biblical women identified as having reproductive problems. In that society, a woman's primary job was to be the mother of sons. Infertility was assumed to be "the woman's fault." To be labelled a barren woman could mean feeling like an unproductive burden. Infertility was not only a private grief; it was a career failure, a public embarrassment, and a divine mystery.

Sarah must have borne decades of hints and advice. Maybe she felt as if she was being laughed at for something that wasn't her fault. She was very sensitive to the contempt expressed by the pregnant Hagar (Genesis 16:4) and reacted cruelly.

When she overheard the promise of her pregnancy, Sarah, like Abraham in the previous chapter, burst into laughter. She laughed "in her middle," which can mean that she laughed silently inside herself, or it can mean that she gave a loud belly-laugh from her middle. The outcome was impossible and the implications were ridiculous!

Sarah's laugh at the wonderful but absurd promise is understandable. Like Thomas, Sarah had reasonable doubts about what she heard. This is one of those

moments when, even in the divine presence and with the expectation of proper behaviour, laughter breaks the solemnity.

In the right circumstance, such laughter puts a sharp focus on the new thing God is doing. While attending a service for bishops at Lambeth Palace during the apartheid era, Desmond Tutu snorted aloud and snickered through the Scripture reading about "obeying the governing authorities." (*Tales of Tutu, The Anglican Journal*, March 1, 2000.)

God wasn't angered by Sarah's laughter, but God didn't let her off the hook either, countering her denial with the truth. Nor did God punish Sarah by retracting the promise. When the baby was born, the ninety-year-old new mom invited everyone who heard of it to laugh with her. The name Isaac means "laughter." They named the baby Chuckles!

When humans feel frustrated and helpless in situations beyond their control—infertility, enslavement, death—the Bible witnesses to God's power to intervene and create new life where none could have been expected. God gets the last laugh and invites us to share it.



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### For Group Discussion:

In a system where it's difficult for women to have power, conflict may be expressed dysfunctionally: through passive-aggressive competition and petty cruelty. Have you seen this kind of conflict? What were the results?

Sarah's initial reaction to the promise of a miracle baby was reasonable. Do you find a tension between reason and faith? When the Bible describes miracles, how do you think about them?

Some women want children, some don't. Do you think there are still expectations for women to become mothers?

Have you been in a situation with responsibility but no control? What was that like?

### For Individual Reflection:

Laughed at, laughing, laughing with: Have you ever had a similar transition?

### Living the Story:

Bring a lovely surprise for an elderly woman.



## Hagar seeing God

A reminder that God sees what's going on.



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### The Passage: Genesis 16:3–4, 6b–10, 13.

*So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away from her.*

*The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." The angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her." The angel of the Lord also said to her, "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude." So she named the Lord who spoke to her, "You are El-Roi"; for she said, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?"*

**We** do not know whether Hagar consented to the plan to be given to Abram to bear children. A slave is legally powerless to make decisions about her body and her future. But when Hagar became pregnant, she saw that she had some power, and roles could reverse.

Sarai, whose name means "princess," suddenly had a tenuous position as a wife, while Hagar carried the long-desired heir. Sarai dealt harshly with the Egyptian, just as the Egyptians will later deal harshly with the enslaved descendants of Sarai.

When the angel asked Hagar where she was going, she could say what she was running from, but not what she was running toward. The angel of the Lord gave her a plan and a promise for her son Ishmael.

Hagar, shocked that a god would notice a homeless, pregnant, single, slave, named the god "El-Roi"—Seeing God. The name reveals a relationship. Hagar sees the God who sees her. Later, when Abraham

cast her and Ishmael out into the wilderness (Genesis 21:9–20) God rescued them and helped them thrive.

Hagar was twice made a scapegoat by Abraham and Sarah. She and her son were embarrassing, living evidence that the older couple had not trusted God's promise of an heir, so they displaced their jealousy, guilt, shame and fear on her. A pattern emerges: Hagar in despair in the wilderness, the presence of God, a spring of life-saving water.

In Christian tradition, the scapegoating continues: Hagar is seen as a symbol of bondage and "the flesh" (Galatians 4:22–31). By contrast, in Islamic tradition Hagar is seen positively as a devoted mother who runs between two mountains seeking water for her child, a run symbolically re-enacted every year in the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Hagar reminds us that God sees what's going on. With Hagar, we trust in The God Who Sees, who helps us find water in the wilderness.

### For Group Discussion:

"Everything can be subcontracted if you're rich enough." Are there things which ought not to be subcontracted? If so what are they?

In what ways does Hagar's story represent or differ from modern practices around surrogacy? Around human trafficking?

Whom do we make scapegoats for their poverty or oppression?

Compare *Sarah Leading Hagar to Abraham* by Matthias Stom ([bit.ly/2q8aq30](https://bit.ly/2q8aq30)) and *Hagar in the Wilderness* by Rivkah Walton ([bit.ly/2GB3sPX](https://bit.ly/2GB3sPX).) How did these artists see Hagar? How do you see her? How do you think she would see you?

### For Individual Reflection:

Hagar could be the patron saint of awkward relationships: dad's new girlfriend, mother of half-siblings, the person who doesn't quite fit into accepted narratives. Is there someone like that in your life? What have you displaced onto that person?

### Living the Story:

Make amends with the person in the questions above, and/or give real help to someone trying to survive in their wilderness.





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## Isaac the silent

He was able to remain decent and loving.

### The Passage: Genesis 22:1, 2; 7-12

*After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."*

*Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.*

*When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."*

**I**t may seem unfair to consider Isaac with a reading about what was done to him rather than what he did. But this is a typical Isaac story. While there are many colourful stories about his father Abraham and his son Jacob, Isaac himself seems nearly absent except to be a necessary genealogical link. Isaac is best known as someone acted upon by others.


This story (in Hebrew called the *Akedah*, the "Binding") is difficult. The God of mercy and justice asked for something arbitrary and atrocious. Note that God was very specific about which of Abraham's sons was meant.

No age is given for Isaac, although artists often portray him as a teenager. He may have been a young child with a hauntingly innocent question for his dad. He may have been as old as 37; Sarah, who had him at age 90, dies in the next chapter at 127.

Whatever age was meant, this is a story of suspense and horror. Tension builds as the father and son walk together, with one planning to walk back alone.

The divine intervention and provision of a ram doesn't seem to be either happy or an ending. There is no record that Isaac or Sarah ever spoke to Abraham again.

If we understand Isaac as a survivor of trauma, this story may explain his near-absence from his own life. He tried to avoid conflict (see Genesis 26) and live a quiet life. Unusual for a husband in the Bible, he was said to have loved his wife (Genesis 24:67). Even after being cruelly deceived by them (Genesis 27), Isaac was patient with his wife and blessed his son.

Whatever damage was done during that terrible camping trip to Moriah, it did not destroy Isaac's ability to be decent and to love. 

### For Group Discussion:

Abraham, who had previously argued and bargained with God, didn't protest the order to kill his son. Why do you think that is? What do you imagine you would do? What would you do if you were Sarah?

How does this story challenge or affirm your image of God?

What do you, or have in the past, sacrificed for faith? What are you willing to give up? Where would you draw the line? Is it okay to draw a line?

What tools might a person use to maintain strength and hope after a traumatic event?

### For Individual Reflection:

Can you think of someone in your life whom you might consider a traumatized survivor? How did they react? Would you say there had been healing or recovery?

### Living the Story:

Find a way to help a traumatized survivor. If this is you, use tools appropriate for your own healing.



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## Rebekah the strong

Shadow sides to a strong personality.

### The Passage: Genesis 24:16b–20, 58

*She [Rebekah] went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up. Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please let me sip a little water from your jar." "Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels.*

*[Her mother and brother] called Rebekah, and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will."*

**R**ebekah was the successful applicant for a job for which she didn't know she was applying: wife in a wealthy emigrant family. She was attractive, had good social skills, took initiative, and was physically strong (one camel can drink twenty gallons of water at a time, and she offered to draw water for ten camels!). She was also decisive when her consent was sought and received. Rebekah's various strengths were thought to make her the ideal candidate for Isaac.

Isaac may not have been the ideal groom. It was culturally unusual that he was forty years old and unmarried, although the son of a wealthy man. He took no part in his own courtship. Strong Rebekah had a moment of weakness the first time she saw her future husband: although the NRSV translation tries to put it politely, in Hebrew it says that the first time she saw him, she fell off her camel (Genesis 24:64).

Rebekah's strength was tested by decades of infertility, followed by a difficult pregnancy and depression (Genesis 25:22). She and Isaac fell into bad parenting patterns

from their respective families. Isaac, like his father, favoured one son over the other. Rebekah, like her brother Laban in future chapters, used deception to defraud family members.

There are shadow sides to having a strong personality. Rebekah's willingness to take advantage of her husband's disability (Genesis 27) indicates a "win at all costs" mentality, a twisted version of strength. She had a miserable relationship with her daughters-in-law (Genesis 26:34, 35 and 27:46) who came from the local Canaanite culture and had families nearby for support.

Rebekah used all means at her disposal to secure the future for her favoured son, Jacob. But her betrayal of Isaac and Esau prompts the question, "Was it worth it?"

Even though the Bible generally favours the success of Jacob and his descendants, the pain and cost to Isaac and Esau are remembered too. Both of these results stem from Rebekah's actions. Like a soap opera character, Rebekah's actions cause drama, but also drive the story forward. 📺

### For Group Discussion:

"The story assumes that Rebekah had been appointed by the Lord to be Isaac's wife; therefore events unfold according to divine providence" (NRSV comment) If Rebekah is simply an answer to a prayer, does that take away some of her agency? What might this say about our own choices and agency in God's plan?

Finding a suitable life partner can be difficult. What do you think are the "red flags" in a relationship? What are the "deal breakers"?

If you have in-law relationships, what was new to you about the family's habits or expectations?

Do you have cross-cultural relationships in your family? Are there different assumptions about appropriate behaviour? What happens when boundaries are crossed?

Curiously, Rebekah's death is never mentioned in the Bible. Rabbinic commentators have speculated on reasons for this omission. Does it bother you when the Bible has inconsistencies or omissions?

### For Individual Reflection:

What was a moment of strength for you? A moment of weakness? Where was God in each of those moments?

### Living the Story:

Don't be Rebekah! Don't manipulate others.



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## Esau and Jacob: brothers and nations

Not just brothers but stereotypes of nations.

### The Passage: Genesis 25:29–34

*Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.) Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way.*


Once there were two brothers. Harry, nicknamed Red, was hairy and impulsive, while the younger brother, Tripper, was smooth and clever. Although Harry had certain rights as the older brother, Tripper repeatedly "tripped him up" to gain his own advantage.

Esau ("Hairy") and Jacob ("Tripper") are not just brothers but stereotypes of nations, Edom ("Redland") and Israel. The biblical authors were writing not only about family relationships but reflecting on political relationships between local peoples. If someone asked, "Why don't we get along with those people?" or "How did our country come to be?" the biblical authors would reply with origin stories of sibling conflict or co-operation.

The stories favour Jacob, since they are told from the point of view of people identifying with his group, but they are clear-eyed about his unethical character. A long night of wrestling permanently changes him, which he interprets as a divine smack-

down (Genesis 32:24–32). The next morning he faces up to the brother whom he had cheated and betrayed. They reconcile, and Jacob the Tripper becomes Israel ("God-Struggle").

Stories of Esau and Jacob both assume and question racism, legal and political power structures, and ethics in leadership. That makes them always fresh and applicable. If someone asked today, "Why do those people called 'red' live in that unproductive land of red rocks?" and heard, "Because we used hunger and deception against them," would this still be about ancient Israel and Edom?

Tradition says Jacob (and possibly Esau) was laid to rest in the Cave of the Patriarchs at Hebron, along with Abraham and Isaac. This remains an important site of religious observance for both Jewish and Muslim worshippers, but sadly it is now divided into separate spaces for each of them. "Once there were two brothers..." who are still writing their story. 

### For Group Discussion:

Read the origin story of the Ammonites and Moabites (Genesis 19:30–38). What do you think this was meant to say about people from Ammon and Moab?

What are some self-justifying political or social myths of entitlement? What clues are there for us in the Esau and Jacob stories about breaking and building relationships between peoples?

If you were a biblical author describing Canada as a family, how would the story go?

Is God's grace for undeserving characters such as Jacob a source of comfort or consternation for you? How do you see the relationship between grace and justice?

How do you feel about leadership which is unethical but benefits you/your family?

Jacob had no acceptable means to subvert the consequences of being the younger brother, so he used unfair means. He did so until his dying breath, switching the blessings of his older and younger grandsons (Genesis 48:8–20). Was there a time when you challenged accepted rules?

### For Individual Reflection:

What have you had to wrestle with? How did you emerge from it?

### Living the Story:

Faith is political. Vote in local, provincial and federal elections.





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## Those who don't get heard

Rachel, Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah

### The Passage: Genesis 29:18, 22–25a, 28b, 31, 30:4,9

*Jacob loved Rachel; so he said [to her father Laban], "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." [After the seven years] Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. When morning came, it was Leah! [After Jacob agreed to work another seven years] then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.*

*When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. Rachel gave Jacob her maid Bilhah as a wife; and Jacob went in to her. When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife.*

Zilpah and Bilhah are remembered because they became wives and mothers of tribal leaders, the highest honour a patriarchal society could give to women. What these women thought about their roles, or even whether they consented, is not recorded.

But from the standpoint of their own time, this way of according them respect is consistent with the biblical authors' experience of God as one who notices people of low status and lifts them up.

A marriage of that time was a contract between two men: the prospective groom and the father of the bride. Although the arrangements were made by Jacob and Laban, we can gather some information about Leah's and Rachel's perspectives.


There are direct statements. Leah was unloved (Genesis 29:31) and Rachel envied her sister's fertility (Genesis 30:1).

There is inference through the baby names. Leah expresses her longing for her husband's respect and affection (Genesis 29:32–34) and Rachel sees her maid's son as a kind of victory over her sister (Genesis 30:8).

There is silence. Although there are several references to Jacob's love for Rachel, it never says she loved him back. Neither sister seems content until they strike a deal over the aphrodisiac mandrakes (in Hebrew, "love plants" Genesis 30:14–16) and from then on work co-operatively.

According to Genesis 35:19, Rachel was buried near Bethlehem after she died in childbirth. "Rachel's Tomb" continues to be a place for intercessory prayer for some Jewish people, similar to the way some Christians regard Mary. Perhaps Rachel is getting what she wanted most; respect as a mother.

Tradition says Leah is buried beside Jacob at Hebron, taking the place of honour and connection beside her husband, so perhaps she also got what she wanted.

The season is right to conclude these reflections on the patriarchal family in Advent and Christmas. The link between Rachel and Bethlehem is noted in Matthew's nativity (Matthew 2:16–18). Advent resonates with Mary's song of hope and warning about the coming reign of Christ (Luke 1:46–55) when low-status people like Zilpah come first. 

### For Group Discussion:

When Leah was getting married to Jacob, where do you think Rachel was? Do you think she might have opposed or agreed to the deception?

What is internalized misogyny? Is the story of Rachel and Leah giving their maids to Jacob as wives an example?

Timothy F. Simpson notes that "just desserts" stories (Jacob deceiving then being deceived) are told in many cultures as a catalyst for the development of empathy. Do you think that strategy works? If so, under what circumstances?

See: *The Politics of Choosing A Mate (or Two)*. [bit.ly/2PpcrE6](https://bit.ly/2PpcrE6)

### For Individual Reflection:

As I have been writing this year, many current issues have appeared in the lives of the patriarchal family: sexual ethics, child abuse and trauma, Indigenous rights. What are the most relevant Bible stories for you?

### Living the Story:

Practice listening to those who don't get heard. Practice reversal of the expected order.