



Introduction

Esau and Jacob may have been twins but they had very different personalities and temperaments. They were opposites in so many ways - their appearance, their skills and their tastes; and what is more, mum and dad disagreed as to whom they liked best! This was a recipe for a family disaster. They should have been friends but instead they became deadly enemies. Jacob took advantage of his brother, lying and cheating in order to ensure that he (Jacob) would be the one who would be in charge of the family business and fortune one day and receive his father's blessing. However, this did mean that he had to run for his life in fear of Esau. How could such enemies ever become friends again? Could good come out of this hatred? Can what is broken be mended? The story in Genesis shows God working Jacob's life. Through strange experiences at prayer and the long years of waiting and service away from home, things did change. In fact, the Bible encourages Christians again and again to trust in the God of Jacob!

The following lesson outline picks up on the theme of the reconciliation of these two enemies and focuses on the moment when Jacob and Esau prepared to meet again after many years. Christians believe that God does turn hatred into love.

Preparation

Use an appropriate child-friendly retelling of the Bible story found in Genesis 27-33, which covers:

The birth of the twins
The bargaining for the birthright
The cheating to get the blessing
The running away from home
Sleeping outdoors and then waking to see angels
Marrying Laban's daughter... But the wrong bride!
Working on Laban's farm
Fear at meeting Esau again
Wrestling with an angel.

Development

1. Introduce the story, and particularly the incidents where Jacob tricks and takes advantage of his brother, with some of the following activities:
 - Arrange for some tasting of various lentil mixes that you have prepared earlier. Which ones do they like the best? Alternatively, and more simply, have a variety of different makes and flavours of crisps in various bowls. Can the children identify which is which and which they like best?
 - Play a game in which one child is blindfolded and has to try and guess who comes to sit in the chair beside him/her, just by touching that child's face (carefully and respectfully!), then

his/her hands and then arms. You could add an extra dimension to this by wrapping the arms and hands of the child being identified in some sort of furry material!

- Talk about favourite foods in the class. Just how much do they like these and to what lengths are they prepared to go to get these foods?
- Talk about what the class finds fair and unfair in everyday life. What sorts of things cause tensions in the family? Between friends? Between brothers and sisters? Between parents and children? (NB: Be sensitive to your class and to what is shared.)

Link each of these activities to the sorry tale of what happens between Jacob and Esau!

2. Use the following sound effects and actions as scaffolding for the whole story of Jacob:

Baby crying sounds

Slurping food noises

Stroking hands and hair

Running fast on the spot

Sleeping noises

A loud exclamation of 'Wow'

A distressed shout of 'Oh no!'

Sheep noises

A cry for help

Wrestling and struggling sounds

Link each of these sounds and actions to events in Jacob's life. Here they are listed in corresponding order:

The birth of the twins

The bargaining for the birthright

The cheating to get the blessing

The running away from home

Sleeping outdoors and then waking to see angels

Marrying Laban's daughter...

But the wrong bride!

Working on Laban's farm

Fear at meeting Esau again

Wrestling with an angel.

3. In groups, work on making some props for different parts of the story:

- The recipe for Esau's favourite food, plus some pictures, of course
- Isaac's last will and testament with alterations to give everything to Jacob not to Esau
- Use some raffia or some furry felt to make a hand and arm wrap to 'deceive Isaac'
- Jacob's diary entries for the night he dreamt of angels; the day he got married to the wrong sister; the evening before he met Esau

4. The Bible contains some amazing stories. There is lion taming (Daniel), giant killing (David and Goliath), big-fish-swallowing (that is, the big fish swallowing Jonah!) and here in Genesis



32:22-32, we have angel-wrestling! It's a strange incident. Talk with the class about:

- Why they think God sent an angel to wrestle with Jacob?
- What did Jacob think this was all about?
- Why wouldn't Jacob let go?
- What was Jacob trying to prove?
- What did he learn from this incident and from all the years he's been away from home?

Before Jacob meet Esau, he also planned and prayed a lot. He sent gifts ahead along with messengers. He was expecting the worst but clearly God had been working in Esau's life, too, not just Jacob's. Whenever enemies become friends like this, Christians believe that God is at work. In the story, Jacob says that seeing Esau's face 'is like seeing the face of God' (Genesis 33:10)

5. I wonder what the whole story is trying to teach readers for today. What is it saying about friendship? What is it saying in particular about friendships within a family?

Look at a comment on this story from the New Testament in Hebrews 12:14-17. The writer here is telling us that being at peace with each other is God's grace at work and a blessing that we should seek. In the beginning, Esau had been so careless with this blessing. Christians believe they should not treat God's blessing in the same way.

6. In a time of reflection, mention those situations both local and global where friends have become enemies; where siblings just can't get on; where people who live in the same country are at war with each other; where people who believe in the same God have nevertheless fallen out with each other; and where people have been forced to run away from home.

You could make this time of reflection visual by arranging to have some small wooden figures available, and whenever a particular thought is expressed, two of the figures could be placed in the circle next to each other, together as friends and not as enemies.