

My Things and I

And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.

Genesis 28:17-22

Notice how many conditions Jacob places on God in order for God to be his God. We are creatures made of the stuff of this world yet created in the image of God. We live in the now but long for God (Psalm 8:4-8). "The *nepes* is the entire human being, shaped by God with an inner life that, in the deepest sense, yearns for the Lord."¹ We require physical resources to exist; yet, we must keep our minds fixed on eternity and what lies beyond this existence (Colossians 3:1-4). We must live in the world without it taking us over (1 John 2:15-17). Perhaps Jacob is rash in setting so many conditions, but I wonder, would we do any better if we were in his circumstances? He is running for his life, and he needs a God who cares and a God who is capable of watching over him. In this regard, are we so different than Jacob? Let us remember that God initiates the promise. "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (Genesis 28:13-15). In essence, everything that Jacobs asks for will be required for God to fulfill his promise.

What place ought things to have in our lives? How do we keep our minds from being cluttered by immediate matters that urge us to ignore our spiritual lives? How do we live in the world without the world taking over our lives? True joy comes from within—the manner of person that I am. Will having all the stuff we want and life go according to our plans truly make us happy? Does the absence of trouble and temptation make for lasting happiness (see James 1:2-18)? In a sense, Jacob puts God to the test—"Will God really do all of this for me?" Is it not natural for God to test (or ought I to say purify) us? Want is a trap. Will Satan ever ensnare any of us by tempting us with what we do not want?

If God's fullness resides in the earth, then to truly be rich, full and happy we must include him as our primary acquisition to find peace. While change and decay ravage this world, God provides an anchor that sustains throughout eternity. This world will pass away so we must take hold of the one who is and seek his favor. "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob" (Psalm 24:3-6).

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¹ Lawrence O. Richards, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1991).