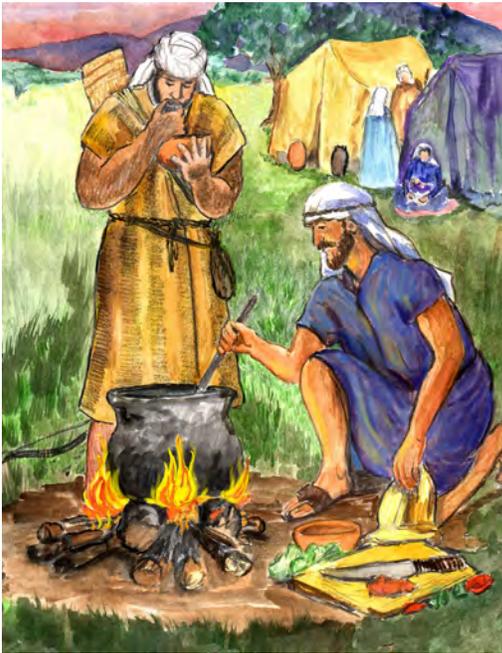


Jacob and Esau

Genesis 25:20-34; 27:1-41

Level D | Lesson 1 | Teacher Overview



Now Jacob cooked a stew;
and Esau came in from the
field, and he was weary.

And Esau said to Jacob,
“Please feed me with that
same red stew....”

But Jacob said, “Sell me
your birthright....”

And Esau said, “Look, I am
about to die; so what profit
shall this birthright be to
me?”

Genesis 25:29-32

For Teachers

This lesson has several activity options. You may wish to choose 2-3. Reading through all of the options will help you identify the activities that are best suited to your group’s size, student mix, available supplies, and the time you have to prepare. You may also want to mix and match activities from other age levels.

Activity Options

1. Talk About It
2. Make: Unmasking Our Hidden Potential
3. Take Action: Which Is More Important?

Talk About It

Reading: Genesis 25:20-34, 27:1-41

Twins Esau and Jacob struggle even before they are born. Firstborn Esau is hairy and red. He becomes a hunter. Jacob grabs Esau's heel at birth. He is mild, living in tents. Today's stories are Esau and Jacob's birth, Jacob buying Esau's birthright, and Jacob stealing Esau's blessing. The Talk-About-It compares the characteristics of the brothers and explores their relationship to our own personal qualities.

1. Which of Isaac and Rebekah's twin sons was older? (Esau) What did Jacob do to Esau as he was being born? (grabbed Esau's heel)
2. Compare Esau and Jacob. (Esau: red and hairy, a skillful hunter, a man of the field, impulsive, and despised his birthright; Jacob: smooth, mild, lived in tents, scheming—takes advantage of Esau's hunger, was close to Rebekah his mother)
3. Like other characters in the Word, Esau and Jacob are not role models we are to follow. The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that they embody two mental powers: the will and the understanding.
4. What words could be used in place of "will"? (desire, intention, purpose, wish, want)
5. What words could be used instead of "understanding"? (reason, judgment, intellect, discernment)
6. The relationship between Esau and Jacob embody these forces interacting in our mind. Which brother represents the will? (Esau—he is impulsive, acting from desire. Young children sometimes behave like this. They want things right away and show frustration if asked to wait.)
7. In what ways is Jacob like the understanding? (thinks ahead, makes plans, takes advantage of Esau, disguises himself)
8. There is conflict between our desires and knowledge just as Esau and Jacob struggled as brothers. Desire is born first. Without desire we would not do anything. But to walk on a path towards heaven, we first need to learn what to do. How do we put Jacob—knowledge—first in our lives?
9. Our birthright, the right to know and love the Lord, makes us truly human. Sacrificing ideals for the sake of worldly satisfaction is like selling our birthright for a "mess of pottage". What kinds of things tempt people to sacrifice their ideals for selfish or worldly ambitions?
10. Jacob pretended to be Esau. At many times during our life we pretend to be the person we wish we were. The Lord blesses us even when He knows this is happening. How does acting this way benefit our lives, morally, spiritually, etc.? How are habits (both good and bad) formed? (The expression "fake it till you make it" might be a helpful phrase for understanding this stage of regeneration.)

Make: Unmasking Our Hidden Potential

At a Glance:

The New Church teaches that at the dawn of humankind people had direct contact with angels and the Lord. They had an innate knowledge and perception about spiritual things, and their beliefs radiated through their faces. Like the angels, their faces could not express one thing while their minds were thinking another—they had no desire to hide anything.

In time the human mind was re-formed. Desire was separated from knowledge and thought. People could then hide their thoughts and intentions, preventing others from seeing their true feelings on their faces. They were also able to consider actions they did not delight in and see things they did not like.

Students will read about *Unmasking Our Hidden Potential* and then create masks to develop an understanding of the difference between the parts of our lives that others see and the parts they do not.

Supplies Needed for Each Student:

- supplies for making 2-sided masks e.g. paper plates, stiff paper, or fabric; scissors; pens or markers; pictures from magazines; “fancy” supplies to make the activity fun, etc.
- *Unmasking Our Hidden Potential* reading page

Teacher Preparation:

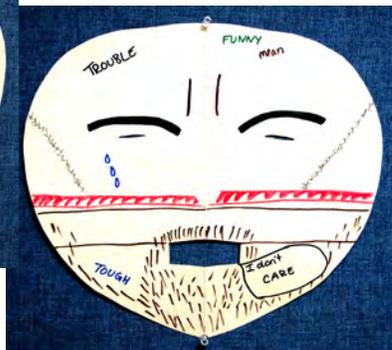
- Create a 2-sided mask about yourself to model the activity (see directions)

Directions:

1. Read *Unmasking Our Hidden Potential* with students.
2. Show students the mask you have made. Explain what your pictures or symbols represent. Sharing a few personal details may empower students to create a more meaningful mask of their own.
3. Distribute mask-making supplies.



Unmasking Our Hidden Potential Continued



4. Tell students that the outside of the mask represents the side of us that we believe people see, including how we want others to see us (our reputation). The inside explains who you really are, including aspects of your life that many people may not know, such as goals, dreams and interests.
5. Invite students to decorate the outside of the mask using pictures, symbols or cut-out pictures to show how they appear or wish to appear to others. If this feels uncomfortable, tell students they may use symbols. Here are some prompts to get students started: the image I try to portray is (tough, cool, funny, strong...); others (friends/family) see me as (quiet, leader, trouble-maker, perfect...).
6. Decorate the inside of the mask. Encourage honesty about things that people may not know. Prompts: When nobody's around I'm (funny, have lots to say, serious...) What I really love to do is (swim, sing, read...) My life really has (struggles, questions about God, worries...)
7. Encourage students to share their masks on a volunteer basis.



Unmasking Our Hidden Potential

Isaac and Rebekah's twins, Esau and Jacob, represent two forces in the human mind: desires (will) and thoughts (understanding). At the dawn of humankind, people's desires always made one with their thoughts, and their speech and actions did as well. People could tell what others were thinking just by looking at their faces because their faces expressed whatever they thought and desired. No one wanted to hide anything.

In time the human mind changed. Desire became separated from knowledge and thought. People could intend harm but say something nice. Faces could be used as masks, hiding evil intentions.

People's minds change after they die. At first people can mask their intentions and thoughts. But as they prepare to move into their eternal home this stops. At that point they can no longer control their facial expressions. Everyone sees what they really think. Emanuel Swedenborg met many people after they had died. Some had led exemplary lives. But if selfishness had motivated their good actions, their polite habits slowly vanished and eventually everyone could see what they were really like.

People living in heaven are unselfish and love thinking truthfully. People in hell are selfish and embrace false ways of thinking. Finding a place in heaven or hell involves cultivating loves and thoughts that agree. The story of Esau and Jacob pictures the steps needed to make this happen. Desires, like Esau, are born first. But those desires are self-centered at first. That is why truth needs to take the lead, like Jacob, and must guide our thinking.

The human mind—which is where the actual person lives—has two powers. One is devoted to the truths of faith and the other to the good of charity. The mental power devoted to the truths of faith is called the understanding, while the one dedicated to the good of charity is called the will. If a person is to be truly human these two powers have to be united (see *Arcana Coelestia* 5835).

If a person's will and understanding were not united when he enters the next life, the truth he understands would lift him up towards heaven, while his evil intentions would drag him down toward hell and he would hang suspended between the two. Eventually his will, which is his actual life, would pull him downward and he would inevitably end up in hell. To prevent this, those two mental powers have to be united. The Lord accomplishes this through regeneration—through planting faith's truth within charity's goodness. A person receives the gift of a new understanding through faith's truth, and the gift of a new will through charity's goodness. As a result the two mental powers make one mind (see *Arcana Coelestia* 5835).

All the good with a person is formed by means of truth (*Arcana Coelestia* 9995).

When good and truth have been joined in a person he then has a new will and a new understanding and so a new life (see *Arcana Coelestia* 10143:3).

Take Action: Which Is More Important?



At a Glance:

In this activity, students will debate whether the will or the understanding is more important. Two chairs, set on opposite sides of the room, represent the two points of view. Only students seated in these chairs may speak. As they speak, the other students move from one side of the room to another as they are swayed by different arguments.

Supplies Needed:

- 2 chairs set facing each other on opposite sides of a room
- space around each chair for students to gather
- copy of *Which Is More Important?* readings for each student

Directions:

1. Introduce the consideration of whether the will or the understanding is more important by asking students to discuss one of the examples listed below. Try to keep the dialog open-ended by suggesting alternative points of view if the group seems to strongly veer one way or the other.
 - Which is the best way to create a more peaceful world? 1) Study conflict resolution and write a book about it? 2) Join a peace march
 - If someone yells at you is it better to 1) defend yourself and yell back 2) ask the person to clearly explain why he or she is upset
 - If you see a beggar on the street should you 1) Give him money right away 2) Donate to a local charity that might help him
 - Which is the best way to help someone you see in a road accident? 1) Call 911 and wait for expert help? 2) Jump out of your car and do what you can?



Which Is More Important?

Continued

2. Hand out the *Which Is More Important?* page and read it together as a group.
3. Explain that the two chairs represent two different points of view. Designate one as standing for the position “The will is more important than the understanding” and the other as standing for the position, “The understanding is more important than the will.”
4. Ask for an initial volunteer to speak to each position. Have them sit in the chairs and take turns speaking. As each person speaks, the students should move to stand with whichever speaker they agree with at the time. Students may move freely and change points of view as often as they wish
5. When a speaker has finished, he or she gets up from the chair. Anyone who wants to speak may sit in the chair. The two sides alternate in speaking. Students may change sides as often as they wish, including speaking on both points of view.
6. When the discussion seems to have ended, bring the group back together and ask whether the exercise has given them a new perspective. If time allows, discuss the questions at the bottom of the readings page.
 - Have you ever known someone whose will really seemed to predominate over his or her understanding? Or whose understanding seemed to predominate? Describe what the person was like. How did you feel about his or her behavior?
 - Do we need one ability—the will or the understanding—more than the other? Is one or the other more important to our spiritual life?

Which Is More Important?

The true ideas that live within us must become what we will or desire and act upon before our inner self can be united with our outer self. . . .

Action comes first, our willing or desiring follows. For what we first do from the understanding, we later do from the will, and finally we put it on as a habit. It is then made part of our inner self. Once this has happened, we no longer do good from truth, but from good. For we then begin to see the happiness that exists in doing the truth and to see something of what heaven is like. This spiritual insight remains with us after death, and by means of it we are lifted up into heaven by the Lord.

(See *Arcana Coelestia* 4353.)

Faith—which also means truth—is first in time, but charity—which also means good—is first in intention or purpose. Whatever is first in intent is really first, because it is primary and so also the first-born. Whatever happens first in time is not really first, but only seems to be. To make this more understandable, let's look at analogies with building a church, building a house, laying out a garden, and preparing a field for planting a crop.

The first thing in time in building a church is laying the foundations, building the walls, putting the roof on, and then putting an altar inside and constructing a pulpit. But the first thing in intention is the worship of God in the church, which is the reason why the other things are done.

The first thing in time in building a house is making its outer structure, and then filling it with all the necessities of life [such as furniture and appliances]. But the first thing in purpose is to create a convenient dwelling for oneself and the other people who are going to live in the house.

The first thing in time in laying out a garden is leveling the ground, preparing the soil, and planting trees and sowing seeds to raise useful plants. But the first thing in intention is what can be gained from these things [such as food to eat, a beautiful place to sit in, etc.].

The first thing in time in preparing a field is leveling the ground, plowing, harrowing, and then sowing; but the first thing in intention is the crop and the use that the crop will serve.

(See *True Christian Religion* 336.)

1. Have you ever known someone whose will really seemed to predominate over his or her understanding? Or whose understanding seemed to predominate? Describe what the person was like. How did you feel about his or her behavior?
2. Do we need one ability—the will or the understanding—more than the other? Is one or the other more important to our spiritual life?