

Chapter 8

Love Leah !

The parable of the cornflake advert.

"Wonderful light streams through impeccably clean windows, draped majestically with flowing lace curtains which flutter gently in the cool breeze. Bronzed and Adonis like, the archetypal, handsome, successful Father bounds effortlessly out of bed and glides, God like, down the stairs to meet the smile of his outrageously happy family. His wife, haloed with the perfect blonde perm, the eternal Venusian beauty of both youth and motherhood on her perfect body, has sublimely prepared the ultimate breakfast, which lies, like a Eucharist, on a well laded wooden table. Pure, unctuous white milk simply bursts forth with a life of its own from the jug, caressing golden petals of corn, the glorious prize, in a fount of plenty. As they crunch and commune on such ambrosia their smiles and happiness seem to transfigure them all into paragons of virtue, avatars of a new day."

Are your mornings like that ?

We live in a society which craves beauty and success. The idea of fulfilling dreams and attaining outstanding goals is continually drummed into our hearts. A major challenge for most of us is to come to terms with the fact that life is never as simple as the adverts make it out to be. We have to learn to handle the everyday realities of life while pursuing our dreams. This is indeed a long apprenticeship, but I'd like to share with you some valuable insights that I have gleaned from two wonderful women; Rachel and Leah.

They get a mention at the end of the book of Ruth.

*" May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, **who together built up the house of Israel.** "*

Ruth 4 :11

These two women were the builders of Israel. Together they brought the required elements to give an identity to the people of God. Allegorically, they represent the same two principles that are needed today to build up the people of God, the Church.

They literally " gave birth " to Israel. Many Old Testament births, apart from carrying their historic significance, point us to the ultimate birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Each child, with their all important Hebrew names, are a type of Christ. The apostle Paul in writing to the Galatians applies this principle " of birthing Christ " to the level of discipleship when he states:

" My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.. "

Galatians 4 :19

We will need to join Jacob's story in *Genesis 29 - 30*, to glean the full benefits of what these ladies teach us.

Jacob is staying with his uncle Laban who is looking to get a good worker in his nephew. Jacob's eye has caught that of Laban's daughter, Rachel. She "*was lovely in form, and beautiful.*" She was Jacob's wonderful vision. She was his dream and hope. Laban's other daughter, Leah, was less in view. Indeed, she seems to have been less visually attractive than Rachel.

Rachel represents "vision". She is the ideal Platonic "form". She is the beautiful dream to be pursued.

Leah, on the other hand, is all that vision is not. She is not beautiful and exciting. The fact that she is described as having "*weak eyes*", is the very antithesis to vision. **Leah represents our unwanted realities of life.**

" Jacob was in love with Rachel. " Genesis 29 :18

We always love vision. Vision encourages us in our labour and gives it meaning. Jacob was willing to work seven long years because his heart was motivated by the prize of Rachel. What motivates your own work ? Here we have a principle. We must be:

Motivated By The Vision.

Jacob was so in love with Rachel that his tough life of a shepherd was transfigured. Instead of enduring the drudgery of dirty, smelly, boring sheep every day, he rose above the problems, upheld in his labour by his passion for the dream.

" So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. "

Genesis 29 :20

Without a vision, the time drags, without a passion we get bogged down in problems. It is essential to be motivated by a vision. At the very least we need to be able to see Christ glorified as the goal of our lives and activities. We need to be captivated by his beauty.

John Stott wrote the following concerning work.

" The story is told of a man who was taking a walk down a country lane, when he came across a stone quarry in which a number of men were working. He questioned several of them about what they were doing. The first replied irritably,

" Can't you see? I'm hewing a stone. "

The second answered without looking up,

" I'm earning £100 a week. "

But when the same question was put to the third man, he stopped, put his pick down, stood up, stuck out his chest and said,

" If you want to know what I'm building a cathedral. "

So it is a matter of how far we can see. The first man could not see beyond his pick, and the second beyond his Friday pay packet. But the third man looked beyond his tools and his wages to the ultimate end he was serving. He was co-operating with the architect. However small his particular contribution, he was helping to construct a building for the worship of God.

*So **laborare orare**, " work is worship ", provided that we can see how our job contributes, in however small and indirect a way, to the forwarding of God's purpose for mankind. Then whatever we do can be done for the glory of God (1 Cor 10 :31). "*

So having fired you all up by a call to fresh vision I still have to come to terms with the questions that arise when the reality doesn't always measure up to the vision.

Let's go back to Jacob who has finished his labour and is looking forward to consummating his relationship with Rachel. You can almost feel his eager enthusiasm as he says to Laban.

" Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her. " v.21

They have a marvellous feast, singing and dancing. In the dark of the night, and the heat of his enthusiasm Jacob gains his prize.

But... *" When morning came,... "*

*" **there was Leah !** "*

As they say in French. *" Quelle horreur ! "* He was expecting to gaze into the lovely eyes of his beloved, his beauty, his vision, but instead he got landed with Leah. How many of us also know the feeling of being landed with Leah ?

We dreamt of a vibrant, " New Testament " church coming into being. And yet, after many years, the " Sunday morning comes ", and we find the same old faces, the same old songs and the same old boredom. A " morning " of division, personal failure, sickness, poverty, tragedy or strife brings us to the sad revelation of our own personal Leah. In a nutshell, we are deeply:

Disappointed By The Reality.

This was Jacob's reality. He cries out:

*" I served you for Rachel, didn't I ? **Why have you deceived me ?***

This may well echo our own personal heart cry to God. I served you because I believed in a beautiful church...and now this ! I served you for a vision of unity...and now all this division. We don't always vocalise it, but often we feel deeply let down by God. Do we think that God has somehow deceived us ? Conned us into ministry. If not God, then other authority figures. How many feel let down by parents, politicians, teachers and pastors ?

The expression of these feelings of disappointment can lead us to rebel or run away. The non resolution or sublimation of these issues can leave us in a constant state of anxiety, bitterness and anger, with a fatigued inability to push through and finish anything.

Laban gives some priceless advice to Jacob.

*" **Finish out** this daughter's bridal week; "* v.27

The temptation is to flee our realities. Like pampered butterflies we fly from one " vision " to another, never able to settle and build. The Christian world can also feed us on unreal expectations, and we end up running after one illusion after another instead of achieving something in our everyday circumstances. Miracle crusades, new books and techniques, special anointing, new breakthroughs, come and go while often the very basics of Christian character and commitment are neglected. Families need to be loved and served, telephone bills paid, promises kept and the unreached peoples prayed for.

Jesus gave the example as the ultimate " finisher ".

" Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame , and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. "

Hebrews 12 :2 (King James Version.)

In order to get Rachel, Jacob had to learn to love Leah. How ever much he disliked the fact and wanted to run away, he had to learn to embrace his reality and finish his time with her. It takes both vision and reality to build the kingdom. They are the two facets of the Bride. Like Jacob, we love our vision more than our realities.

" ...he loved Rachel more than Leah. " v.30

" ...the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, " v.31

This brings us to back to our central theme.

Love Leah !

We need to learn to love our less than beautiful realities. This is so important. **If we refuse to embrace Leah our vision remains sterile and empty.**

" Rachel was barren. Leah became pregnant. " v.32

Embracing our reality forges God's fruit into our lives and we are prepared to own a future vision. We must learn to love Leah because she puts the character of Christ into us. So many " visions " are just empty illusions because they are not owned in reality. Many dreams become sterile fantasies because no one pays the price of rooting them in reality.

Remembering what was said at the beginning of this chapter concerning Christ *" being formed "* in us, let's take a look at some of the beautiful children Leah gives to us.

Reuben - See, a Son ! *" The Lord has seen my misery. "*

Reuben is also the " son of provision ", as the Hebrew " to see " also means " to provide. " *Yahweh Jireh*, God the provider, uses the same root word.

Our realities are often full of misery. Misery is created by all sorts of lack and neglect. Lack of friendship, health, resources, care, forgiveness etc. God has put himself in total opposition to such lack in generously giving us all things in Christ.

" He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things ? "

Romans 8 :32

Reuben can bring a fatherly touch of healing for those who have been humiliated by the realities of poverty and neglect. However, God never responds to just need - he responds to faith and vision. *Reuben*, the son of vision, is birthed through our faith battles with the reality of lack. God, *" so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, "* a greater *Reuben*, to die on a cross and provide abundantly for all our needs. The Lord sees the misery of the world and provides hope and healing in providing a solution in his Son. He wipes away our tears and gives us the strength and provision to carry on.

Do you " *see a son ?*" **Provision is " for the vision "**

In the midst of misery we need a revelation of God's total provision in Christ.

Simeon - One who Hears. *" The Lord heard that I am not loved. "*

Yahweh Shamma, God, the hearer, is also linked to the Hebrew here.

One of the hardest realities, and one of the most painful wounds of mankind is the suffering of not being loved. This lack of love is often expressed in the murderous

indifference which inhabits our selfish inability to listen to the other person. **Listening is loving.** Roots of rejection express themselves in all sorts of sinful misery. Most of our sinful habits find their source in " cold ", or " unloved " areas of our hearts. God brings healing to these wounds through " **hearing** " us, and sharing an intimate love through His Son. The dark clouds of being unloved can hold a silver lining of a greater, redemptive love. This love permeates our realities through the gift of prayer. **Prayer is having God's ear.** *Simeon* is the " son of prayer ", birthed through our battles with the reality of a cold, unloving world.

One of the greatest revelations of God on earth came to Moses through the burning bush. In a few short phrases God reveals His " *Reuben/Simeon* " heart, and his desire to "see ", " hear " and act.

" I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them... "

Exodus 3:7-8

God rescues us from loveless reality by " coming down " and putting the burning passion of prayer into our hearts.

Levi - Attached. *" become attached to me. "*

Isolation is the scourge of modern existence. Alienated individuals, each one striving for his five minutes of fame, we march on through life, unaware that we are all part of one human family.

A modern adage is " divide and conquer ", and evil powers constantly attack the body of Christ on earth with demonic assaults to break apart the fellowship of the saints. A lack of unity in the systems and governments all over the world creates untold misery. Division and strife in the family leads to pain and divorce, while war between nations is probably the ultimate expression of this lack of " bonding " one to another. The Greek word which defines Satan as " the devil - diabolos " means the divider.

Anyone who has tried to build the work of God will have had to confront this sad reality of division.

It is in the fiercest furnaces that the finest gold is smelted. It is easy to be united in times of peace, prosperity and sunshine, but the winter's chill of hardship and battle will reveal our true friends. A true team is forged in the fires of adversity. **Levi is the son of fellowship, the true gift of covenant relationship to those who have persevered together through trials.**

As hard iron nails attached Christ to the cross, so his spilt blood made a new " covenant relation " possible with God, attaching us eternally to the Father's heart, and bonding us as brothers into a new humanity on earth. As a man is joined to his wife in

loving intercourse, so we too enjoy the ultimate bonding of communion (koinonia) with Christ, and look forward to an eternal consummation.

" " For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. " This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church. "

Ephesians 5 :31-32

Judah - Praise. *" This time I will praise the Lord. "*

Can you wake up on a drab Monday morning and *" praise the Lord ? "* Learning to love Leah invites praise into the most mundane of circumstances and makes reality pregnant with God's presence. The Authorised version expresses this beautifully in *Psalms 22 :3*.

" But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. "

God lives in our praise, and shouts of thanksgiving and worship can transfigure even the most arduous of realities. It's relatively easy to praise God in a packed congregation or a glorious Christian conference, but how do you fare in the confines of your closet ? Paul and Silas were even more confined as they found themselves in the bitter injustice of a Turkish prison ! In the midst of this harsh reality they did not sink into self pity and criticism, but found the strength to praise the Lord.

" About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them . Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. "

Acts 16 :25-2

Unleash an earthquake of praise into life's trials, and upset the status quo of criticism and negativity. *" Rejoice in the Lord always "*, insisted the apostle Paul, and **Judah, the son of praise, is given to us so that we may incarnate heaven on earth's hellish horizons.**

It is well worth learning to love Leah as she gives us much fruit. Own your responsibilities and embrace your realities as they will forge Christ in your character. Already we have seen, Reuben as Vision, Simeon as Prayer, Levi as Fellowship, and Judah as Praise.

Let's move on to consider Leah's other two natural children which follow a season of barrenness for her. Seasons of dryness and lack of fruit, " dark nights of the soul ", as St John of the cross used to say, are a fact of the Christian life. We must learn to handle God's silences and pace ourselves for His seasons. (For flow and brevity I'm

not including the children born by proxy via the maidservants, although they too are part of Israel, and a study of their names is not without benefit.)

Issachar - Reward. " *God has rewarded me.* "

God delights in rewarding His hidden heroes. True prizes are rarely the public laurels placed on well heeled brows but more often the hidden gems which reside regally in the hearts of God's servants. Servants who have learnt the lesson of sacrificial love. Servants who live the miraculous law of "perissos" - the extraordinary "abundant more" of divine love.

" But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. "

Luke 6 :35

Matthew gives us three " secret realities " which, if embraced, procure a reward.

*" So when you **give**...
But, when you **pray**...
When you **fast**...*

...Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you. "

Matthew 6 :2-24

Your true reward will not be based on outside achievements or on what men can see, but on your secret life with God, seen only by the Father.

Men rarely see the hidden tears of a night of intercession, the secret abandon of sacrificial giving, or the disciplines of self denial. *Issachar*, the son of genuine reward, embodies all these realities.

Zebulon - To Dwell . (or Honour). " *dwell with me.* " (or " *treat me with honour.* ")

The Hebrew root " *zabal* ", meaning " habitation ", seems to indicate the idea of " taking up residence " in this son's name, although the NIV translates it as " to honour ". In essence, if God takes up residence, this is indeed an honour. God desires to reside in our " clay pot " lives, transforming them into vessels for His glory.

" But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet (ready) for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. "

2 Timothy 2 :20-21 (King James Version)

God resides in our realities. He doesn't live on some mythical "Mount Olympus", a never, never land of indifference, a mere spectator of humanity's suffering. Instead, he came to be born in the poverty, muck and straw of flesh and blood reality. He inhabited the extreme agony of bone wrenching crucifixion, and is eternally present, in the mystery of pained majesty, at all of man's barbaric atrocities.

Zebulon, is the "son of incarnation", the ability to live and act for Christ in any and every situation. He is an essential part of Christ's pioneer promise to his first apostolic believers.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age."

Matthew 28 :18-20

I hope that by now we are beginning to learn to "love Leah" and embrace our own particular trials and realities. God is never unfair, and when he sees that the character of His son is being gradually wrought into our lives, He knows that it is the right time to trust us with our vision. **God always remembers our dreams.**

"Then God remembered Rachel..."

Genesis 30 :22

It was the "*kairos*" moment for the vision to bear fruit. God has the right time for each of our particular dreams to come to birth.

"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman,..."

Galatians 4 :4

Our own time has come to engage the fruit of vision and learn from Rachel's new found fecundity.

Joseph. May he Multiply. *"May the Lord add to me another... God has taken away my disgrace."*

The original creation mandate sent man out to multiply. The Body of Christ on earth is also meant to expand and fill the earth. Our shame is that we are only too often "barren" when it comes to effective evangelism and missionary enterprise.

Vision will always lead us to mission.

We are too often in disgrace in the eyes of God and men because of our passionless, visionless religion. We stay within the security of our four church walls,

having little relevance for 21st century man. We end up in sad decline rather than the biblical norm of seeing folk added.

*" And the Lord **added to their number daily** those who were being saved. "*
Acts 2 :47

Joseph, the son of mission, takes away our disgrace, and moves us on to multiplication. He is,

*" a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring,
Whose branches climb over a wall...
The prince among his brothers. "*
Genesis 49 :22&26

Joseph is the missionary structure, (see Chapter, "God's Chosen Instrument "), that enables us to go beyond the " walls " of church and influence a nation. The dew of heaven rests upon his brow and he brings princely dignity to the people of God. He can make a home in " Egypt ", and learn a new language and culture. He can go through the flames of spiritual warfare and testing to take up the prophetic mantle of leading a nation.

He knew rejection from his brothers, trial, temptation and prison in Egypt, but in the end, he learnt to encourage others in their dreams thus fulfilling his own dream as a young man. He is also the son of tested vision. His "*richly ornamented robe*," symbol of his dream, was ripped jealously from his shoulders and "*dipped in blood*." The authenticity of ownership was recognised in a blood stained cloak.

" It is my son's robe ! "
Genesis 37 :33

Christ's own redemptive dream was violently nailed to a cruel cross. The authenticity of salvation and victory was also recognised in blood and suffering.

" He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. "
Revelation 19:13

Our dreams and visions may well go through the process of death and suffering. Rachel's second son well illustrates this other principle of " tested vision. "

Benjamin...Or Ben-Oni ? " Son of my right hand...or Son of my suffering. "

On the same road to Bethlehem that Mary and Joseph were to take, a pregnant Rachel was also carrying a child of promise.

" Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty...As she breathed her last - for she was dying - she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin. "

Genesis 35 :16-18

Humanity saw Christ, the " man of sorrows ", dead on a cross, but like Jacob of old, a greater Father intervened in love and overturned the naming in death with a vital new " christening " of resurrection, raising up His son to sit at His right hand in heaven.

Benjamin is the son of resurrection. The ultimate triumph of the vision over death and suffering.

May we know this same denouement of resurrection life in our own experience. Vision and reality, the pain and the gain, the cross and the victory of eternal life. All are part of life's feast. May each of these " sons " build more of Christ into us and encourage us to " Love Leah ".

Before ending, and especially for all who have known the sacrifice of loving Leah, I'd like to look at the grandchildren of vision. They are sons of deep healing.

Manesseh. Forget. *" It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household. "*

Genesis 41 :50

Forgive and forget. Not the forgetfulness that doesn't remember, but rather the forgetfulness that still leaves a scar, but without the pain and infection. Joseph knew all about trouble and dysfunctional family life ! Holding his young son in his arms he also knew the gracious sovereignty of God, who could make all things work out for the good. **Manesseh gave him the healing grace to be able to forgive his brothers. He is the son that heals our past and soothes the pain of our harsh realities.** May we too know the gift of *Manesseh* to our own " troubled " hearts.

Before going away to serve God somewhere it is vitally important that we go as whole people. Our missionary call and devotion to service should never be a fig leaf over our deep emotional hurts. Never run away into mission ! The apostle Paul clearly stated that he did " *one thing* " to fulfil his calling.

*" But one thing I do: **Forgetting what is behind** and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus. "*

Philippians 3 :13-14

Ephraim. Twice Fruitful. *" It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering. "*

Genesis 41 :52

We all have our lands of suffering. Families, churches, towns, mission fields. Joseph had suffered deeply in Egypt but he persevered through to fruitfulness. He held his son and was deeply satisfied. It had all been worth it. Jesus, a much greater Joseph, knew the profound suffering of the cross, but, as he hung in pain, he held the pregnant promise of a new humanity being birthed from his wounds.

*" After the suffering of his soul,
He will see the light of life and be satisfied. "*

Isaiah 53 :11

*" ...for the joy set before him (he) endured the cross, scorning its shame, and
sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. "*

Hebrews 12 :2

The ultimate *Benjamin/Ben-Oni*, Christ was fruitful in his suffering. *Ephraim*, is the joyful mother after childbirth, forgetting the labour pains. **He is the son who puts the Christ like seal of fruitfulness on our labours, healing us from the despair of bareness and bitterness.**

What a wonderful family we now have ! Be "*motivated by the vision.*" Even if you end up "*disappointed by reality,*" you must press on to "*love Leah.*" This has its application for our husbands and wives as well. We may not be as beautiful as we once were, but never give up on love ! Don't run away into illusion. Don't be seduced by the adverts ! Stick with a faithful love of reality in all its dimensions.

Learn to love Leah. She will produce a rich and eternal harvest.