

Have you ever been married to someone who did not love you? This was my plight. It is true that your idea of marriage may be very different from ours back then. All marriages were arranged marriages for us. My father, Laban, saw something in Jacob that pleased him. He knew it would benefit him financially to have Jacob in the family.

The problem was that Jacob actually fell in love with my sister, Rachel. He loved her so much, in fact, that he broke the rules and asked my father for Rachel's hand in marriage even though she was younger than I. The deal was made, but my father did not live up to his end of the bargain. Rather than sending Rachel to Jacob's bed, he sent me. I did not want to go. I knew Jacob loved Rachel, but my father insisted I obey him. There was part of me that hoped that Jacob could learn to love me in the same way he loved my sister. It did not happen.

So, our father was able to get two daughters off his hands with one action. By tricking Jacob, I became a wife to him. But, that was not good enough. Jacob insisted on having Rachel as his wife. He loved her so much. And, so Laban rid his responsibilities for us by handing us both over to Jacob. In the process, he forced Jacob to work 14 years in his service.

I bring to you the gift of longsuffering. It may not sound like much of a gift; however, I was able to endure great strain, pressure, and heartache with this gift of my spirit. I poured myself into my children. I was so blessed with children. Poor Rachel – it took her forever before she was able to conceive a child for Jacob. Not me. I began conceiving right away. I continued to think this would be enough, that Jacob would so pleased with the many sons I bore him, that he would begin to feel true love for me. It did not happen.

He was a fine husband. He always took care of my children and me. He could have left me with my father, I suppose, but when he decided to leave Laban's service and set out on his own, he took all of us with him. He was kind enough. But, he never looked into my eyes the way he did hers. There were times that it was excruciating.

Have you ever been married to someone who did not love you? I have. And, I offer the gift of longsuffering to you. May you be blessed by this valuable gift.

Discussion Suggestions - Leah

Our monologue by Leah speaks of the gift of long-suffering. Leah was in an arranged marriage to Jacob, unloved by him, and not liked by her sister, who was Jacob's other wife and true love. With each son that Leah bore Jacob, she fervently hoped that he would begin to love her. She even named each son a name that she hoped would open Jacob's eyes and cause him to love her (Reuben = "See, a son"; Simeon = "hears" 'the Lord has heard I am hated' and has given her this son to lessen the hate; Levi = "now my husband will be joined to me"; and Judah = "This time I will praise the Lord").

Long-suffering can be defined as a patient endurance and steadfastness under ill will that has no thought of retaliation. It is the opposite of anger, it is associated with mercy and it does not surrender to the circumstances. It is just as it sounds, *long suffering*.

As hard as it is for us to go through times of long-suffering, we, like Leah, must be able to trust and rely on God. To possess the gift of long-suffering, we must be able to accept whatever our situation may be even though we cannot fully understand it. Here is the tough one: To possess the gift of long-suffering, we must no longer be troubled by whatever the situation is that is causing us grief. In other words, we need to be able to trust and rely on God so completely that we can lay this burden at the cross and know that there *will* be blessings when we get through what we need to get through.

- ✦ Discuss together times when members of the group have had a season of long-suffering. (Examples: An unexpected death of a loved one; caring for an aging loved one whose memory is fading; a failing marriage; loving a child who is making unwise decisions in life; a co-worker who makes the work environment miserable, etc.)
- ✦ How did this season of long-suffering strengthen your faith?
- ✦ What were your emotions towards God in the midst of it all?
- ✦ What blessings came from your season of long-suffering?

PRAYER:

Close with a prayer thanking God for the seasons of long-suffering, for they strengthen our faith, our trust, and our love for God. Pray for those who are currently in a season of long-suffering. Pray for their faith in God to be strengthened tenfold so that they might receive God's blessings. In all things, praise God!