

The Ladder Between Us

Guarding Our Inner Life #4 - [Romans 8:28](#)

Jacob wasn't supposed to be where he was. He had stolen his brother's birthright through deception, and now he was running — running from Esau's rage, running from everything familiar, running into a future he hadn't planned and couldn't control. The mess he was in was entirely of his own making. He was alone when the sun went down, he found a rock for a pillow, and he tried to sleep.

This is not a man who had earned a vision. This is a man mid-flight from the wreckage of his own choices. And yet — Jehovah didn't wait for Jacob to clean himself up before the ladder appeared. The ladder was already there. Over a fugitive. Over a deceiver. Over a man who deserved nothing of what he was about to see.

He had a dream. Behold, a stairway set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven. Behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Above it stood Jehovah... ([Genesis 28:12-13](#) a)

Jacob woke up afraid. *"Surely Jehovah is in this place, and I didn't know it."* (v. 16)

That's the thing about divine presence — it doesn't announce itself. It's simply there. And Jacob had been running through it the whole time. This dream is the key that unlocks everything in today's study.

The Ladder Has a Name

Centuries later, Jesus stood before a young man named Nathanael, who had just confessed Him as the Son of God and King of Israel. Jesus could have simply accepted the compliment. Instead, He pointed back to that night in the wilderness and said:

"Most certainly, I tell you all, hereafter you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." ([John 1:51](#))

He was identifying Himself as the ladder. Stand back and look at the full picture: **Jehovah at the top. Jesus as the connection. Angels moving up and down between heaven and earth — carrying prayers upward, carrying messages, provision and protection downward.**

Paul made the same point without the imagery:

"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." ([1 Timothy 2:5](#))

A mediator stands between two parties. Jesus doesn't just represent us to God the Father — He is the channel through which everything passes. What reaches you has already passed through Him. What you bring to Jehovah goes through Him. He is not passive in this arrangement; He is the structure of it.

And that's precisely why Jesus could say, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* ([John 14:6](#)) Not an exclusive claim meant to shut people out — a structural description of how the ladder works. There is one ladder. He is it.

Jesus Lived Under This First

Before we talk about what this means for us, it's worth slowing down at something easy to rush past: Jesus Himself lived under this protection first. His Father surrounded Him with this same kind of presence. Nothing reached Jesus that infinite love had not permitted. That was real. In Gethsemane, it was real. On the cross, it was real. The mockery and the nails and the silence of heaven — all of it passed through His Father's hands before it reached Him.

This matters because Jesus is not asking us to live under a protection He never needed Himself. He knows what it's like to trust that what is reaching you right now has already been filtered by love. He walked that road in the flesh. That was His source of comfort — and, as Jehovah had promised through Isaiah centuries before, the purpose of His suffering extended beyond Himself: *"I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."* ([Isaiah 49:6](#))

What Jesus endured was not just for His own formation. It was the road by which rescue came to everyone else. That is the hinge the whole study turns on — and that same structure is now available to us.

When the Blow Lands on Him

Here is where the Jacob's Ladder picture becomes intensely personal. The person who is filled with Christ's Spirit^[1] abides in His presence - His teachings. Jesus said, *"You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings"*([John 8:31](#)). (We looked closely at what this abiding means in [last week's study on John 15](#)). And because *"your life is hidden with Christ in God"*([Colossians 3:3](#)), here is what happens when a blow is aimed at that believer: it lands on Christ first."

That is not a metaphor. It is a structural reality of the mediator's role.

Consider the wilderness. Immediately after His baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days of testing. Satan came at Him with hunger, with doubt, with the offer of a shortcut. Each temptation was a blow aimed at the Son of God. And each one landed on someone who had spent forty days completely dependent on His Father's sustaining presence — not on food, not on spectacle, not on power gained apart from obedience. *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."* ([Matthew 4:4](#)) He didn't deflect the blows with cleverness. He absorbed them inside a relationship that held.

This is what it looks like when the ladder is working.

He stands between us and everything that comes at us. Whether the source of trouble is an enemy, a consequence, a disease, a loss, a temptation — it enters that structure first. It has to pass through the one who stands in the gap. *"For there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."* He doesn't just intercede in prayer; He intercedes in everything. This is precisely why the believer has no need to depend on self-constructed defenses.^[2] Not because trouble won't come — it will — but because the trouble is meeting something before it meets you.

But Why Does It Still Hurt?

Honest question. If Jesus is screening what reaches us, why is it still problematic?

Because mediation is not the same as elimination. The angels ascending and descending in Jacob's dream were not decorative — they were working. They were *carrying things* between heaven and earth. The things that reach us through that structure are not accidents that slipped through; they are permitted arrivals, often with a purpose that won't be visible until later.

Moses told Israel something important about their forty years in the wilderness:

"You shall remember all the way which Jehovah your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, to test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. He humbled you, and allowed you to be hungry, and fed you with manna... that he might teach you that man does not live by bread only, but man lives by every word that proceeds out of Jehovah's mouth." ([Deuteronomy 8:2-3](#))

Notice the verbs. *He led. He humbled. He allowed. He fed. He taught.* The hardship was not random suffering leaking through a gap in divine protection. It was divinely permitted, divinely shaped, and divinely purposeful — even when it was genuinely hard.

Jehovah said the same thing through Zechariah with a different image: *"I will bring the third part into the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will hear them."* ([Zechariah 13:9](#))

Refined — not destroyed. The fire is the point. And the Refiner controls the temperature.

The writer of Hebrews lands the same truth as a promise rather than a threat: *"For whom the Lord loves, he disciplines, and chastises every son whom he receives... he disciplines us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."* ([Hebrews 12:6, 10-11](#))

For our profit. Not our punishment — our profit. That is a very different frame for hard things. If you want to go deeper on the question of why a good God permits suffering, there's a full study in the archive on exactly that: [Why Surrender to a God Who Lets Bad Things Happen](#).

All Things — Not Some Things

So now Paul's declaration in [Romans 8:28](#) works just the way it was meant to work:

*"We know that all things **work together** for good for those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose."*

All things. Not the good things, not the tolerable things, not the things that make sense. All things — permitted by Jehovah, passing through Christ, descending like angels on that ladder to us. And **working together**. The word is *synergei* in Greek — **cooperative action**. Individual pieces that don't look like anything, combining into something that serves.

Joseph understood this. His brothers had sold him into slavery, left him for dead, shattered the life he knew. Years of prison followed years of servitude. He had done nothing to deserve any of it, and if he had been watching from the outside, there would have been no visible reason to believe the structure was still holding. But it was.

When the full picture was finally visible — when Joseph stood before his brothers as the second most powerful man in Egypt, with the lives of thousands resting on the storehouses he had managed — he looked at the men who had sold him and said: *"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to save many people alive."* ([Genesis 50:20](#))

Two intentions ran through the same events. The brothers meant evil. God meant good. Both were real. The evil was not erased or denied — it was *entered*, taken up into the structure, and turned. The ladder was there the whole time, carrying things between heaven and earth, even during the years when Joseph could not see it from the bottom of the pit.

That's [Romans 8:28](#) walking around in sandals.

What This Looks Like for Us

There is something genuinely freeing in receiving whatever comes as coming first through Christ's hands. Not as a passive resignation — not "whatever happens, happens" — but as an active trust rooted in a structural reality. The ladder is not a feeling. It's not a mood. It doesn't depend on whether we sense it on a given morning. It was there over Jacob before he knew it was there. It was there over Joseph in the pit before the ending was visible. It is there now.

This is especially true for those of us whose hardest suffering traces back, at least in part, to our own choices. That's an honest place to sit. When consequences arrive from your own past — the broken relationships, the health damage, the years lost, the trust that takes far longer to rebuild than it took to destroy — it would be easy to conclude they're outside the structure. That God is simply standing back, arms folded, letting you have what you earned.

But that's not what the ladder shows us.

Jacob's ladder appeared over a man running from consequences of his own making. God didn't wait for him to arrive somewhere cleaner. Joseph's story included the real wickedness of people who chose to harm him — and the real dysfunction of a family that had been broken long before the brothers made their move at the pit. Neither the self-caused mess nor the other-caused wound disqualified anyone from the structure. The ladder was already there, touching down right in the middle of both.

The results of our foolishness still pass through Christ. He still decides what shape, what timing, what weight will best work together for good — both to bring us further into recovery and wholeness, and possibly for the benefit of others who are watching our road. Someone else may be sitting in a pit right now who will one day need to hear that yours had a floor. He does not step aside when the consequences are our own doing. He steps into the middle of them.

This is what long-term Bible Sanctification teaches, if we let it. Early on, consequences feel like punishment — proof that the structure doesn't hold, that we are too far outside it to qualify. But the longer we walk the road, the more we begin to recognize the shape of things that were permitted rather than accidents that leaked through. A consequence that humbled us at exactly the moment pride would have destroyed us. A loss that cleared space for something we couldn't yet see. A relationship broken in a way that eventually set both people free.

None of that is visible from the pit. It rarely is. But Joseph had a long time to think in a prison cell before the interpretation of dreams became anyone's business but his own. And when the full picture was finally in front of him — when the storehouses were full and his brothers were standing in the room — he didn't see the suffering as the point of the story. He saw it as the road by which the good arrived. Not despite the hard things. Through them.

"You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." ([Genesis 50:20](#))

That's the testimony waiting on the far side of [Romans 8:28](#) . It doesn't always come quickly. It doesn't always come in the form we expected. But it comes to those who love God and remain in the structure — those who keep climbing back onto the ladder when they fall, who keep bringing their mess upward rather than managing it alone at the bottom.

Psalms 46 says it simply: *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we won't be afraid..."* ([Psalm 46:1-2](#) a)

Not *absent* in trouble — *present* in it. The ladder touches earth right where we are.

Jacob woke up afraid, remembered the dream, and called the place Bethel — the house of God. He thought he was sleeping in the wilderness. He was sleeping at the gate of heaven.

The ladder was already there. It still is.

"The Father's presence encircled Christ, and nothing befell Him but that which infinite love permitted for the blessing of the world. Here was His source of comfort, and it is for us. He who is imbued with the Spirit of Christ abides in Christ. Whatever comes to him comes from the Saviour, who surrounds him with His presence. Nothing can touch him except by our Lord's permission, and 'all things' that are permitted 'work together for good to them that love God.' ([Romans 8:28](#))"

— *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 71

Footnotes

1. Christ's Spirit — [the Spirit Jesus promised to send\(link to study\)](#), who carries His own character and teaching into the life of the believer. There is a deeper study in the archive examining the [connection between the angels, "the Spirit of Christ", and "the Holy Spirit,"](#) and another study on the ["Bible-defined Spirit"](#) where Jesus Himself defines His Spirit as His words/teaching. [↩](#)
2. For a fuller treatment of what this means practically — and what it does *not* mean — see the [archive study Self-Defense](#). [↩](#)

Desiring to live by every word that comes from the mouth of Jehovah ([Deut8:3; Matt4:4](#))

-Sid Nash: 07/31/2026. Latest version: <https://sidnash.org/docs/GIL4LadderBetween.html>