GROUP LEADER GUIDE

Genesis: Street Smarts Saints

Genesis 30:25-43

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- **November 6- Agape Moms Clothing Swap (Women)**
- **November 7- Friendsgiving (Women)**
- **November 8- 2nd Saturday (Men)**
- **November 23- Child Dedication (Family)**
- **November 23- TJC Vision Night (Church)**

Check out the TJC Weekend Recap podcast for a more in-depth look at our sermons each week!

The podcast is available on all streaming platforms!

SERMON NOTES

Intro:

As Christians and churches, we love to talk about faith, hope, love, humility, courage and other virtues and actions. These are great things that we want to cultivate in our lives. The Bible has much to say about them, and so do most sermons, Bible studies, and Christian discipleship tools. But there's one biblical quality almost never discussed, though Jesus Himself commanded it: shrewdness. How many of you have ever heard a sermon, did a Bible study, or thought deeply about shrewdness?

When Jesus said, "Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (**Matt. 10:16**), He wasn't being poetic. He was describing how the kingdom needs believers who are both holy and strategic, pure and perceptive, gentle but not gullible.

So what is shrewdness? Biblically, **shrewdness means discerning reality accurately and acting effectively for righteous ends**. It's moral intelligence in motion, righteousness applied with wisdom. As one writer notes, shrewdness in Scripture is moral flexibility. It's commendable when yoked to godly wisdom, but dangerous when detached from righteousness. That's exactly what we see in Genesis 30: Laban's cleverness without conscience versus Jacob's wisdom under God's hand.

Illustration: You can think of shrewdness as the ability to play chess in a checkers world. This means you see two or three moves ahead, but using that foresight to serve good and godly ends, not self, sin, or evil.

The Bible doesn't just tell us to be shrewd; it shows us shrewdness in action. And one of the clearest examples comes in Genesis 30, a story of two men who are both shrewd and clever, but in very different ways.

Scripture Exegesis: Genesis 30:25-43

Jacob has served Laban for years now. He served 7 years in order to marry Rachel, he was deceived into marrying Leah. He got to marry Rachel too in exchange for 7 more years. They've now had many children.

vs 25–30

"As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. ***26****Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you."* ***27****But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you.* ***28****Name your wages, and I will give it."* ***29****Jacob said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me.* ***30****For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?""*

The birth of Joseph (the 11th son) signals the close of Jacob's 14-year-bride-price servitude and it rekindles in him that promise God made (Genesis 28) at Bethel to bring him back to Canaan. Jacob asks for release, emphasizing that his wives and children are already earning wages. In other words, he doesn't ask for anything else.

But Laban (always an opportunist) confesses he has learned by "divination" that the LORD is the true source of his own prosperity because of Jacob. The practice of divination was a common pagan practice which the Torah later forbids outright (Deuteronomy 18:10). Yet even this occultic practice forces Laban to admit it is the LORD, the true God, who is the source of his prosperity. So Laban offers Jacob any wage he wants.

vs 31–36

"He said, "What shall I give you?" Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it: ***32****let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and they shall be my wages.* ***33****So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Every*

*one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen.” **34**Laban said, “Good! Let it be as you have said.” **35**But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in the charge of his sons. **36**And he set a distance of three days’ journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban’s flock.”*

Jacob proposes that all the non-standard animals (meaning, the speckled and spotted goats and black lambs) will be his pay. In the ancient Near East, most goats were solid dark and most sheep solid light; multicolored offspring only consisted of 10-20% of a typical flock. Laban agrees.

But then Laban removes every animal that already meets this description and stations them "three days journey" away with his sons. So Jacob starts with zero flock. Does Jacob know what Laban did? Likely. Because Jacob has been helping tend these flocks already. He's aware that speckled and spotted animals are in the flock. But now they are gone.

Another interesting tidbit is ancient records show these flocks and herds typically have a turnover cycle of around 6-7 years, which is exactly how long Jacob will serve for these livestock (Genesis 31:41).

vs 37–43

*“Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks. **38**He set the sticks that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, **39**the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. **40**And Jacob separated the lambs and set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban. He put his own droves apart and did not put them with Laban’s flock. **41**Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob would lay the sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the sticks, **42**but for the feebler of the flock he would not lay them there. So the feebler would be Laban’s, and the stronger Jacob’s. **43**Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys.”*

So what does Jacob do? He adopts this superstitious method embraced by many in the ancient world called maternal imprinting. It believed what the mother saw or experienced at conception could mark the embryo. He cut fresh sticks of poplar, almond, and plane, peeling the white stripes and setting them at the watering troughs where the strongest animals would mate.

The result? The herds started producing more and more spotted and speckled animals, and they were the strongest. These were separated off as his animals (his wages) as Laban's solid animals shrunk in number and were weaker. Within six years, Jacob owned large herds, camels, and donkeys. He has plundered Laban. His wealth has grown significantly. Two things brought this about: his shrewdness of action and the Lord's blessing. In fact, we read in Genesis 31:10-13 that an angel reveals that God saw what Laban was doing and supernaturally redirected the breeding. Jacob later says, "God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me" (Genesis 31:9).

This story isn't about superstition in breeding animals. It's about Laban's sinful shrewdness and deception and Jacob's strategic wisdom. Notice Laban is motivated by greed and deceitfulness. Jacob is strategic and faithful. Laban is exploiting Jacob for gain. Jacob is protecting his household under God's guidance. Laban uses shrewdness to oppress Jacob. Jacob uses shrewdness to steward.

This story forces us to ask: What does godly shrewdness look like in a fallen world? To answer that, we have to go to the teachings of Jesus and see how He redeems this concept.

As we saw earlier in Matthew 10:16, Jesus says to be "Wise as serpents, innocent as doves." Jesus doesn't call His disciples to naivety. He sends them into a hostile world and commands two things that seem opposite: 1. be shrewd, but 2. stay pure.

Jesus builds on this idea of shrewdness in one of His most surprising parables, the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16. In the story, a manager is about to be fired for wasting his master's resources. Knowing his days are numbered, he acts decisively. He calls in his master's debtors and reduces what they owe, hoping they'll remember his kindness when he's unemployed. When the master finds out, instead of condemning him, he commends him, not for his dishonesty, but for his foresight. Jesus says, "The sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light." In other words, unbelievers often plan more strategically for temporary futures than believers do for eternal ones.

Jesus' point isn't to praise corruption but to highlight vision. The manager recognized his moment and used what he had, while he still had it, to prepare for the future. That's what Jesus calls His followers to do: to live with eternal foresight, to use time, money, influence, and opportunity now in light of forever. "Make friends by means of unrighteous wealth," Jesus says, meaning, leverage temporary resources to advance eternal purposes. The world plans for retirement; the Christian plans for resurrection. The world invests for comfort; the Christian invests for kingdom impact. Shrewd disciples think ahead, act with purpose, and manage their lives strategically for the glory of God.

So when Jesus tells us to be "wise as serpents," He's calling us to that kind of holy cunning, foresight married to faithfulness. Shrewdness is simply wisdom that acts now in light of what's coming. It's seeing the long game of eternity and living today accordingly. Godly shrewdness doesn't manipulate; it multiplies. It doesn't exploit; it anticipates. It's faith that thinks ahead. And it is not only for eternal reward that shrewdness serves, but kingdom purposes and causes on earth today.

In fact, we see this all throughout the Bible:

- Joseph interprets dreams, doesn't get outmaneuvered again to get left in jail (I'll tell Pharaoh the dream myself), and builds a strategic plan to save nations.
- Daniel uses wise diplomacy in a pagan court.
- Paul divides the Sanhedrin during his trial over the subject of the resurrection because he sees there are two groups present who oppose each other; he adapts rhetoric for Greeks and Jews for effectiveness (Acts 17 vs Acts 18). Paul knew how to protect his witness without compromising it. When facing flogging, he asked a shrewd question: "Is it lawful to flog a Roman citizen?" When surrounded by enemies, he made a shrewd comment about the resurrection that divided his accusers and centered the gospel. Sanctified shrewdness doesn't replace faith; it expresses it under pressure.
- The Hebrew midwives deceived Pharaoh to save infants. Rahab hid the spies. Hushai outmaneuvered Absalom. These weren't moral failures. They are examples of moral wisdom in action.

All the examples I've just shown are shrewd without compromise. They blended moral clarity with strategic action. Ultimately, a Christian who displays shrewdness has wisdom under pressure. They have righteousness. They live with holiness that plans ahead. They don't get easily tricked. In fact, they plan and maneuver so they can be effective and make an impact.

Jesus commands shrewdness from His followers, so a question worth asking is this: why do Christians and churches never talk about this? One reason is many Christians think the word "shrewd" sounds too worldly. It

sounds manipulative, so we've replaced it with "nice" or "naïve." But niceness without discernment is not a virtue. It only makes you vulnerable. Another reason it's never discussed is many churches have drifted into a simplistic pietism. Meaning, we've taught believers to keep their hearts clean but rarely their minds sharp. Faith has become privatized, and wisdom became moralism instead of strategy. This goes back to our talks about functional gnosticism where we don't think much about "things of earth." Another reason is we've seen abuses of it. We're afraid people will manipulate others so we've stopped teaching Christians to navigate evil wisely. But Jesus didn't say "avoid serpents." He actually encouraged His people to "imitate their wisdom."

Many Christians think holiness means harmlessness, but Scripture shows otherwise. As one writer puts it, piety isn't perpetual niceness; obedience sometimes requires calculated, self-protective action for the kingdom. The result of not ever addressing this to Christians is we've produced generations of sheep with no strategy for surviving among the wolves, sincere but easily deceived, compassionate but culturally powerless.

Application:

1. See Reality Clearly.
Shrewd people don't live in denial. They read the room, recognize motives, and discern patterns. Shrewd people can read others and are not easily swayed by appearances or facades.

Shrewdness requires sober-minded clarity. An example would be parents guiding teens through digital culture and social media, not fearful but wise to the dangers and traps.

2. Act Strategically, Not Reactively.
Shrewdness plans ahead in faith. It doesn't wait for a crisis; it anticipates it. Shrewdness thinks ahead and foresees things.

This includes Christians in business who negotiate contracts or lead teams. A shrewd leader thinks through the implications of a decision before it hits the headlines or the budget. They build buffers, clarify expectations, and avoid making promises they can't keep. It's the young couple who doesn't just hope their marriage stays healthy but invests in date nights, mentors, and boundaries early on. It's the parent who doesn't wait for their teenager to stumble online but intentionally sets up conversations, filters, and accountability before temptation arrives. It's the church that budgets conservatively and builds margin so generosity can continue when the economy tightens. It's the believer who prepares spiritually for suffering now, cultivating prayer and Scripture habits before the storm hits, so that when trials come, their soul isn't scrambling for footing. It's the friend who

recognizes relational tension forming and lovingly addresses it early rather than waiting for resentment to explode.

3. Guard Purity While Engaging Complexity
Remember: “Wise as serpents, innocent as doves.” Our engagement must be as holy as our strategy is smart. Remember that Daniel refused to eat defiled food yet proposed a creative alternative that won respect.

Don't sin. Don't lie. Don't cheat. Don't do evil to others.

4. Use Wisdom to Do Good, Take Dominion, and Advance the Kingdom
Godly shrewdness always serves righteousness. It’s not manipulation; it’s mission. The Proverbs 31 woman is shrewd. She studies the market, invests wisely, and prepares her household for winter. That’s not greed; that’s godly foresight. Christian business owners who study their industry, diversify wisely, or build reserves during good years are living Proverbs 31 shrewdness.

At work, shrewdness means reading the dynamics of your team, understanding when to speak, when to wait, and how to frame ideas so truth can be heard. It’s discerning awareness guided by holiness. When Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship, it wasn't for safety or comfort, but for gospel opportunity. He wasn't just interested in saving his neck, but he knew it gave him a chance to share the gospel further and to broader audiences.

Close:
Interestingly enough, divine shrewdness is at the center of the gospel. How, you ask? Well, Satan thought the cross was his victory. But in the wisdom of God, it was the trap that undid him.

Colossians 2:15: “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”

The cross is the ultimate act of holy cunning. God out-schemed evil with goodness, defeated deception with truth, and out-flanked the enemy with a move that turned death into victory. That victory set guilty captives like us free. Death brings life. In the wisdom and shrewdness of God, Satan's schemes to use the Pharisees, Judas, and the crowds all become means by which the greatest victory of God is ever won.

So the invitation of this passage is not merely “be clever.” It’s: trust the God whose wisdom is deeper than human schemes, and reflect His shrewdness in a foolish world. God blesses Jacob. Laban's attempts to cheat Jacob are thwarted not by Jacob's shrewdness, but by God's favor, blessing, and protection over him.

Jesus lamented that the sons of this world are more shrewd than the sons of light. Maybe that’s because we confuse holiness with helplessness. Some of us need to turn up our shrewdness, to think ahead, plan wisely, and leverage what we have for kingdom purposes. Others need to turn up our dove-like love. Jesus calls us to both. So walk through this world with eyes open, hearts pure, and minds alert. Don't be naive or gullible, because the kingdom of God needs people who are not just sincere, but shrewd. **PRAY**

- How was your week? What is one thing you’re grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of?

- **REVIEW**
    - Read **Genesis 30:25-43** and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different translation.
        - Also read:
            - **Matthew 10:16**
            - **Deuteronomy 18:10**
            - **Colossians 2:15**

- **DISCUSS**

1. **Defining Shrewdness**
   Jesus commands us to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves." How would you define biblical shrewdness in your own words after hearing this message? Why do you think this virtue is often ignored or misunderstood in Christian circles?

2. **Jacob and Laban's Contrast**
   Genesis 30 shows both men being "clever," but in very different ways. What key differences do you see between Laban's manipulative cleverness and Jacob's godly shrewdness under God's favor? What principles can we learn from their contrasting motives?

3. **Seeing Reality Clearly**
   The sermon said, "Shrewd people don't live in denial—they read the room." Where in your life or calling (family, work, finances, ministry) do you sense God calling you to see reality more clearly instead of ignoring or reacting to it?

4. **Strategic vs. Reactive Faith**
   "Shrewdness plans ahead in faith; it doesn't wait for a crisis." Can you share a time when you either (a) acted strategically in faith, or (b) failed to plan ahead and paid the price? What did you learn about wisdom through that experience?

5. **The Line Between Manipulation and Mission**
   "Godly shrewdness doesn't manipulate; it multiplies." How can we discern the difference between using wisdom for kingdom purposes and using cleverness for selfish gain? What heart checks help you stay on the right side of that line?

6. **Examples of Sanctified Shrewdness**
   The sermon mentioned Joseph, Daniel, Paul, Rahab, and others as models of shrewdness. Which of these examples most challenges or inspires you—and why? What do they teach us about trusting God while navigating difficult situations?

7. **The Cross as Holy Cunning**
   The message said, “The cross is the ultimate act of holy cunning.” How does seeing the gospel this way—God outmaneuvering evil with love—reshape the way you face challenges or spiritual opposition?

- **BUILD UP | SEND OUT**
  - **How are you making yourself known at church this week?**
  - **How are you growing to know Christ better this week?**
  - **How are you making Christ known this week?**
- **PRAYER**
  - **Pray over any request from your group members.**
  - **Pray for our team:** Jackie Cornett: Ministry Assistant- TJC Kids
  - **Pray for our replanters:** Christ’s Fellowship
  - **Pray for our short-term teams:**
    - Central Asia departed September 25, 2025
    - Rome Team departing on November 14, 2025
  - **Pray for our long-term units on the mission field:**
    - The Wilsons
    - The Grays
    - The Browns
  - **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app