

# BREATHE: Breathing Underwater

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## Genesis 32:6-12, 33:1-4

6 The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." 7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies, 8 thinking, "If Esau comes to the one company and destroys it, then the company that is left will escape."

9 And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good,' 10 I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two

companies. 11 Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him; he may come and kill us all, the mothers with the children. 12 Yet you have said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted because of their number.'"

**33** 1 Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel, and the two maids. 2 He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. 3 He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother. 4 But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

## REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Read the passage slowly. Then take a deep breath and read it again. What word, phrase, or image stands out to you?
2. Do you know the backstory of Jacob and Esau? If not, you can read about it in Genesis 27. What has created animosity between them?
3. You can read the poem *Breathing Underwater* by Carol Bialock ([here](#) or using QR code). Father



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Richard Rohr was inspired by this poem when he wrote his book *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the 12 Steps*. Key to the 12 steps is owning the ways we've hurt others, and seeking to make amends.

- a. If you read the poem, how might making amends or reconciliation be like "learning to breathe underwater"?
- b. Why might the reconciliation of the two brothers, Jacob and Esau, be so unlikely and so important?
- c. Do you think Jacob was a sincere and transformed participant in this reconciliation? Why or why not?
- d. What experiences of making amends or finding reconciliation do you have? What did you learn from those experiences?
- e. In what ways have your family relationships improved, deteriorated, grown, or just changed over time—be it parents, siblings, chosen family, children, or extended family?

4. There is a lot of "sibling rivalry" and family dysfunction in Genesis. These themes cycle from Cain/Abel (murder), to Jacob/Esau (stolen birthright), to Joseph/brothers (human trafficking) and beyond.

- a. What do you know about "generational trauma"? How do painful experiences get "passed down" from one generation to the next, even long after the original event?
- b. How do the actions of Esau show promise for easing the generational trauma?