



Theology and THERAPY

SEPT. 2, 2026

STUDY NOTES

What's Running You

Session 1: When Your Coping Mechanism Becomes Your Character

KEY SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

- Genesis 25:22–28
- Genesis 27
- Genesis 29–32
- Genesis 32:24–30

What Is a Coping Mechanism?

A coping mechanism is a behavior, thought pattern, or emotional strategy we develop to manage stress, pain, fear, disappointment, trauma, or situations that feel overwhelming.

PRIMARY TEXT

Genesis 25:22–26

“Isaac loved Esau... but Rebekah loved Jacob.” — Genesis 25:28

- Jacob grows up in a house where love has sides.
- Daddy has his favorite.
- Mama has hers.

Jacob is growing emotionally in an environment where affection and affirmation are not experienced equally.

1. Coping mechanisms usually make sense when you meet the version of you that created them

KEY THOUGHT

- Understanding where a behavior came from does not mean excusing what the behavior has become.

2. What protects you in one environment can sabotage you in another

KEY THOUGHT

- Survival asks, "Did it get me through?" Healing asks, "What did getting through do to me?"

3. Eventually you stop using the mechanism and the mechanism starts using you

Christianity isn't merely about God forgiving what I've done. Transformation is also about God changing who I've become.

KEY THOUGHT

- Just because your response is automatic doesn't mean it is authentic.

4. Learn to name it without defending it

You cannot heal what you are committed to defending.

KEY THOUGHT

- There are moments in healing when the most liberating sentence you can say is not, "Here's why I am this way." It's simply, "This is what I do. This is what it has cost. And I don't want to defend it anymore."

5. Forgive who you had to be to survive

Part of honoring the version of yourself that helped you survive is learning how to forgive that version of yourself. Don't use your present awareness to abuse your past self.

KEY THOUGHT

- You can honor the version of yourself that survived without allowing that version of yourself to run the rest of your life.

Personal Inventory

Take a moment and answer these honestly.

1. What did I learn to do to survive?

2. When did I first learn that this worked?

3. What was it protecting me from?

4. How did it serve me then?

5. What is it costing me now?

6. Who experiences the consequences of my coping mechanism?

7. Have I mistaken it for my personality?

8. Who might I become if I no longer needed it?

9. What would I have to trust God enough to stop doing?