



## Frisco First

JACOB: THE STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY, ACCEPTANCE, AND BELONGING. •

JACOB WRESTLES • GENESIS 32:22-32 • 3/20/2022

### MAIN POINT

God challenges our deepest strengths and deepest satisfactions to display His grace through us.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What messages does our culture send about the power of self and the need to be self-sufficient? Where are these messages the strongest?**

**H+ Add Session** **ave you ever wrestled with God? What were the circumstances? What questions did you ask God during that time? How do you remember feeling in the midst of that experience? What was God trying to teach you?**

God desires to make us into the image of His Son, but this cannot happen if we are intent on living by our own strength and pursuing our own satisfactions, as Jacob was. This week's Scripture passage from the life of Jacob is a vivid picture of the extent God will go to in order to teach us dependency on Him and the sufficiency of His grace.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 32:22-25.

We don't know certain details about Jacob's experience, but we do know that this encounter was a mysterious event for Jacob on a dark night. More importantly, the text doesn't suggest that Jacob's encounter was a dream as Jacob had experienced at Bethel. Jacob literally engaged in physical wrestling with a man. Jacob's experience can't be spiritualized or viewed as a wrestling in prayer. Jacob physically limped away from the experience.

**Why did God engage Jacob in a wrestling match? What was the purpose of God injuring Jacob?**

**Has God ever forced you to confront conflict after you have continually tried to avoid it? Describe the experience.**

**Do you really think God could not overcome Jacob? Why, then, did God allow the wrestling to go on so long?**

Jacob's encounter with God at Peniel marked a turning point in his life. In a wrestling match, God responded to Jacob's preoccupation with control. We struggle to learn the same lesson in our spiritual lives. We, too, attempt to handle many things in our own strength and by our own efforts, rather than relying on God to accomplish His purpose through us.

**Do you agree that we primarily trust in ourselves until forced to do otherwise? Why or why not?**

**What is so appealing about self-reliance? Why is it dishonoring to God?**

**What aspects of a relationship with God do we miss out on when we are focused on our selves?**

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 32:26-29.

A dislocated thigh didn't prevent Jacob from further engagement in the struggle. But Jacob agreed to release his opponent only if the man would bless him. Jacob must have suspected that his adversary was no ordinary man, because Jacob demanded something he couldn't provide for himself. Jacob's plea arose out of his sense of desperate need and his knowledge that he was in the presence of the One with power to meet that need.

**Why do you think Jacob was so reluctant to give up?**

**God asked Jacob for his name. What might be significant about this question? What was God really asking Jacob?**

**How does Jacob's new name reflect both who Jacob was and who he would be in the future?**

**Read Genesis 35:9-12. What additional insight do we learn about Jacob's new name from these verses? How is this promise of God connected to the bigger picture we've seen in our "Fathers and Sons" series?**

**Why does God choose to use us to bless other people? Describe a time when you experienced God's blessing because of His work through someone else's life.**

Jacob's spiritual victory, symbolized by his name change, wasn't accomplished by overpowering God but by holding on to God until God chose to bless him. Spiritual blessings are received through staying close to God and clinging to Him even when we are experiencing pain and difficulty. We advance toward maturity in Christ only through struggling to be transformed into His image by His grace.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 32:30-32.

When Jacob left Canaan, he had a dream. He named the place where he dreamed of the ladder Bethel, meaning "house of God" (28:19). Likewise, Jacob named the place where he wrestled all night with God Peniel or "face of God." He had seen God face to face. Jacob had encountered a human manifestation of the divine. Jacob survived his wrestling match with God but he came away from it a changed person. His experience resulted in both a new strength and a new weakness.

**Explain the significance of Jacob's statement that he had seen God's face, yet his life was spared.**

**Have your group members share brief examples of how they have seen God redeem a circumstance of pain or hardship in their lives.**

**What did God teach you about His purposes through your experience? About your character? How did He use you to bless someone else?**

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What about Jacob's experience with God reminds us of the gospel? How can you reflect on that this week? How can you share it with others?**

**How has God wounded you, either literally or figuratively? How does today's study change your perspective on your brokenness?**

## PRAYER

Close in prayer, asking God to allow us to exhibit the courage, persistence, and humility in our times of crisis that Jacob discovered in the midst of his. Ask God to remove our self-reliances

and change our identity to make us more like Him. Pray that He will remind us of His sufficiency and grace this week.

## COMMENTARY

### | GENESIS 32:22-32

32:22-23 As a final measure of self-protection that night, Jacob put one more barrier between himself and Esau, moving his family and possessions across the Jabbok, a westward-flowing tributary emptying into the Jordan River 15 miles north of the Dead Sea. Perhaps Jacob believed that Esau would have compassion on his wives and children, and so end his pursuit.

32:24 Some lessons in life are hard to learn, and Jacob knew that firsthand. Having escorted his family safely across the ford of the Jabbock River, Jacob remained alone. God used Jacob's isolation to deal with his fear and anxiety, but the method He used was unusual. Scholars have debated whether this man was a person, an angel, the Lord, or Jacob's conscience. Ultimately, the text does not provide enough details to provide a decisive answer. Knowing the exact nature of the man who wrestled with him does not prevent us from seeing that spiritually this was a life-changing experience for Jacob.

The mention of daybreak served to mark the predetermined endpoint of the struggle. This theme is intertwined with the entire account, appearing at the beginning, the middle and the end (32:24,26,31). God would engage Jacob in a struggle, all night if necessary, to prepare him for the encounter with Esau the next day. Daybreak represented both the end of Jacob's struggle with God and the moment of truth in the encounter with his brother.

32:25 Jacob was persistent against his assailant. The man saw that He could not defeat him. The pronoun He is capitalized and signifies that the man was the Lord Himself or His representative. If so, how could the Lord not defeat Jacob? One key idea in the word for defeat is "to endure." In the present context the limitations set were not on strength but rather on duration, with "daybreak" being the time for the struggle's termination. The man saw that Jacob would persist in the struggle right up to the finish line.

The struggle had definite results. Unfortunately for Jacob, he was left with a permanent limp as "the man" dislocated his hip socket. This aspect of the encounter provided an opportunity to explain a custom practiced by the Jews (32:32).

32:26 The man demanded that Jacob let Him go because the preset time limit for the struggle had come. Daybreak coming proved that what Jacob lacked in courage, he made up in resolve.

Though darkness hid the man's identity, Jacob knew He was able to bless him.

32:27 The question, What is your name? is more than an inquiry about what people called Jacob. The Hebrew people believed to name someone or something was to exercise control over them. Few people had the authority to name someone; and even fewer, to change someone's name. Jacob's assailant asserted His superior position by asking his name.

32:28 This verse explains the change of Jacob's name to Israel. The explanation notes Jacob had struggled with God and with men, a marvelous summary of his entire life. The name Israel literally means "he struggles with God." Jacob's new name marked his move toward a deeper spiritual development away from his former "trickster" ways. However, the names Jacob and Israel are used interchangeably through the remainder of Genesis.

32:29 Jacob attempted to learn the name of his assailant and thus to exert a measure of control over Him. The assailant's response, Why do you ask My name, served as a teaching device, not only for Jacob, but for all his descendants as well.

People cannot exert control over the Lord. Only He can reveal His name to us, and He does so only on His terms. By refusing to reveal His identity, Jacob's assailant enveloped the entire encounter in mystery. Jacob's desire to know this name was unfulfilled; his request for a blessing was granted. For the first time the implied blessing of earlier passages is explicitly stated, He blessed him there.

32:30 Jacob's naming of the place Peniel confirmed his ultimate struggle had been with God all along. The name Peniel combines the words for face and for God. He had seen God face to face. The result of his encounter was deliverance. Later the same day Jacob told Esau, "I have seen your face and it is like seeing God's face, since you have accepted me" (33:10b).

The phrase "have been delivered" utilizes the same verb Jacob used during his prayer ("rescue," 32:11). God had directly answered Jacob's prayer, though in a method Jacob could not have foreseen.

32:31 Jacob was limping on his hip, signifying the struggle had more than just spiritual or mental aspects. Jacob's whole physical being was affected by the struggle. The phrase "sun shone on him" signified Jacob's struggle was over. He was then prepared to meet his brother. And as Jacob limped into the sunlight and on to meet Esau, he knew God was with him. Every painful step he took reminded him that he need not fear men or circumstances.

32:32 The narrator concluded the account of Jacob's wrestling encounter with God by relating a custom practiced later among the Israelites. The custom reminded the people of Israel of

Jacob's meeting with God and of God's blessing on Jacob's life. The Israelites refrained from eating the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh. This dietary prohibition reminded Jacob's descendants that God had touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip. Generally this prohibition is viewed as a reference to not eating the sciatic nerve or sciatic muscle in animals. Although this prohibition is not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament, it is found in rabbinic Judaism.