

Genesis / Jacob Becomes Israel / Chapter 32:1-32



INTRODUCTION

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

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

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.

Read back through the passage.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your biggest takeaway? How was your experience with the Life Tool's this past week?
2. What do you think was going through Jacob's mind when his servants told him that Esau wanted to meet?

We could imagine much of what most likely was going through Jacob's mind and guess based on how he responded. The commentators quotes below give us a great picture of all of that:

Buoyed by the camp of angels, Jacob elected to first deal with a matter that had lain increasingly heavy upon his heart for those twenty years—his shabby dealings with his brother Esau and their broken relationship.¹

Jacob's fear and distress were eminently reasonable. The last he had heard from Esau was that Esau was biding his time to kill him (cf. 27:41). Now Esau was coming with a small army! This, mixed with the suprarational elements of the

¹ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 398.

*physical dominion of his big, hairy brother, made the memories of his brother's profile, even his smell terrifying.*²

3. When have you recently taken a step of obedience to do something God called you to do?

God had called Jacob to return home. For Jacob, returning home was an act of obedience. Clearly, Jacob was prepared to make amends with Esau. This same idea was also laid out with the commentators quote below:

*For the first time in Jacob's life he wanted to be last! Jacob's intention was forthright. "For he thought, 'I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me' " (v. 20).*³

Encourage the group think through their own life and some areas that God has been challenging them to take a step of obedience.

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

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. The commentators quotes below illustrate some of these responses to these questions:

*Unknown to Jacob through most of that agonizing night, he was wrestling with a divine being, as the concluding verses make clear (vv. 29–31). Hosea 12:4 is unequivocal in his identification: "He strove with the angel." God was Jacob's ultimate and intimate enemy. Jacob was wrestling with God.*⁴

Certainly, he did not see the wrestling for what it was—a parable of his entire life. Throughout the long narrative, Jacob's life has been characterized as a grasping struggle. Jacob had wrestled with his brother (25:22), and then with his father (chap.

² R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 398.

³ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 399.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 400.

27), and then with his father-in-law (chaps. 29–31), and now with God (chap. 32). Jacob had always struggled with both man and God.

As the two wrestled on, Jacob had no idea that he was in the grip of God’s relentless grace.⁵

a. 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.

As the story will unfold, this was a crippling grace from the hand of God. We know that God accommodated his almighty strength to that of Jacob as he wrestled with him in human form. Only later would Jacob begin to understand.⁶

5. What did Jacob gain as a result of his struggle with God? What do we stand to gain from our struggles with God?

During the night, Jacob wrestled with God in the form of an angel. As a result, Jacob was given a new name, Israel, and a hip injury that caused him to limp. Verse 28 explains, “Your name will no longer be Jacob,” He said. “It will be Israel because you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed.” The commentators quotes below help further elaborate on everything Jacob gained:

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It was not from proud dominance that Jacob asked for blessing, but with tears. His request came when he was at the end of himself, helpless. “I will not let you go unless you bless me” (v. 26) was a tear-choked plea.⁸

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 400.

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 400.

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 400.

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 401.

a. **What is one struggle that you've had that led to spiritual growth?**

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

The culture tends to push self-reliance and God's Word says the opposite. This story of Jacob is a great example of why God's Word speaks against Self-Reliance and the commentators quote below continues to explain:

How blessed we are when we yield to God at the beginning of God's call, the way Abraham and Joseph did. But so many of us are like Jacob. We struggle independently of the God whom we believe and love. We want to be part of his plan, but alas, we make our own plans—and we never truly succeed. Then a crisis comes through which he lays his hand upon us (life becomes dislocated—out of joint), and we have an appalling sense of our own incompetence and weakness. That is the great hour—the hour of grace, because from there on our walk is never the same.⁹

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

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. The quote below further paint that picture:

In the context of the Bible, to disclose your name could be an act of self-disclosure, a revelation of your character, your deepest identity.¹⁰

This confession evoked amazing, transforming grace, because instead of merely blessing him, his assailant changed Jacob's name, announcing his new character.¹¹

⁹ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 402.

¹⁰ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 401.

¹¹ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 401.

a. How does Jacob’s new name reflect both who Jacob was and who he would be in the future?

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. Please see the quotes below to see this idea further explained:

The name Israel literally means “God fights” or “God strives.” But here the popular usage puts the emphasis on Jacob’s fighting or striving—“Israel, for you have striven with God and with men.” Popular¹²

We must remember that Jacob fought in his weakness. The paradox continues to instruct. The day of failure through power was over, and the day of success through weakness had begun.¹³

8. 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?

The quotes below illustrate well how the Gospel is portrayed through this story:

Jacob’s life is the story of relentless grace—tenacious grace, contending grace, intrusive grace, renovating grace. Tenacious in that it would not let him go. Contending as it was always battling for his soul. Intrusive because it would not be shut out. Renovating because it gave him a new limp and a new name.

This is the God who has redeemed us. He wrestled Satan on the cross and won. He has given us new life. And now that we are his, he will not let us go. We must submit to him. We must understand with Luther:

*Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing.¹⁴*

¹² R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 401.

¹³ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 401.

¹⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 402.

a. How does today's study change your perspective on struggles?

Encourage the group to share their own thoughts and share the quotes below to help them think through different ways to think about this study on struggles:

This blessed man sported two new distinctives—a new name and a new crippling. And here is the grand point: “The new name cannot be separated from the new crippling, for the crippling is the substance of the name” (Brueggemann). Jacob (now Israel) prevailed when he came to the end of himself. His weakness birthed strength. His defeat wrought victory. His end was his beginning.¹⁵

God may be wrestling with some of you this very day. He may be saying to you (clever, astute, capable as you are), “You have believed in me, but you have always manipulated your own life and made your own arrangements. My child, what is your name?”¹⁶

Conclusion

As Christians living between the times, we should expect to struggle. We should expect to struggle with frowning providences, and we should expect to struggle against sin and against the Evil One. The presence of a struggle should not concern us so much as the absence of one. Living between the times means that we will struggle. But we must learn to struggle well. We must not let go until He blesses us!

PRAYER

Close your time in prayer, thanking God for always knowing what is best for us and for His glory. Ask Him to deepen your trust in Him so that you'll not have to fear when struggles come, but can wholeheartedly rely on Him.

¹⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 402.

¹⁶ R. Kent Hughes, [Genesis: Beginning and Blessing](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 402.



FURTHER STUDY



Devotionals-

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/seeing-god-face-face>

Article –

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/our-blessed-struggle>

Sermon –

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/jacob-becomes-israel/>