

WRESTLED

GENESIS 32:22-32

(Prepared by Gene Thompson using LifeWay's ETB material.)

1. What are some of your life-changing moments? (Graduation; first job; retire; meet the love of your life; see your children born; the death of a mate; etc.)

More significantly, though, when people encounter God, their lives are changed. We refer it to being transformed.

2. When you think of the word "transformed" what comes to your mind? (Changed from one thing to another.)
3. What is perhaps the most graphic illustration of transformation we find in nature? (The caterpillar to the butterfly; tadpole to frog; embryo to baby.)

Life is mostly routine, but some moments change one's life forever. More significantly, though, when people encounter God, their lives are utterly changed. As Jacob discovered, it's impossible to experience God and not be transformed.

4. How has knowing God changed your life?

Life throws changes at us whether we like it or not, but we know that an encounter with Christ transforms our lives in a way nothing else can. In today's study, Jacob had a life-changing experience with God that had a personal impact on him, his immediate family, and his descendants.

After some 20 years working for Laban Jacob decides it is time for him to go back to Canaan. Word had come back to Jacob that Esau was coming with 400 men to greet him. So, Jacob divides his family into two main groups, hoping one of the groups will escape Esau. But He sent a series of gifts ahead of his family to try to appease Esau. After sending his family on ahead Jacob spent the night alone at the river Jabbok.

ALONE! Read Genesis 32:22-24

Jacob was leaving Haran and Laban behind and sending it all across into the Promised Land. It was a big moment!

1. Why do you think Jacob stayed at the river crossing that night by himself? (Perhaps he felt the need to spend some time alone with God before he met Esau.)
2. What are some things people do when they can't sleep? (Pray; wrestle with the bedding; eat; watch tv; etc.)
3. Who was Jacob wrestling with that night? (It could have been an angel or the pre-incarnate Christ—a Christophany.)
4. How can time alone with God calm our anxieties and give us clarity? (It helps us to get a good picture of where we are and where God wants us to be.)

NEW NAME! Read Genesis 32:25-29

1. Why does this man ask Jacob's name? (To disclose your name could be an act of self-disclosure, a revelation of your character, your deepest identity.)

This question made Jacob consider who he really was. It was a confession of guilt—I am a fraud. I am a deceiver. I am a supplanter. I am rightly named Jacob, for I cheated my brother twice. Deceived my father. Deceived my uncle, even though he changed my wages 10 times.

2. Why was Jacob's name changed to Israel? (He was now a changed man. Now his name means "God fights" or "God strives.")
3. When Jacob asked for a blessing what exactly is he asking for? (The Hebrew word for blessing [barak] here is used only of God's work for and with us as He pours out His life and shares His goodness. He wanted what only God could give!)

One of the strange things in the Bible is God's choice of Jacob and God's love for Jacob, because in Isaiah 41:14, God calls him a "worm". But later, God calls him a "prince". —Gen.32:28.

Jacob being given a new name because he had wrestled "with God and men and ...prevailed would have been a great encouragement to Moses' original audience, the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. They needed to know that God would fight for them as He had fought for (and with) their ancestor.

4. How did receiving a new name set the future course for Jacob? (It was a transforming experience in his life. He became a blessing to others.)

5. How can a change in identity serve as a blessing?

Names today do not carry the weight and meaning like they did in Biblical times. Your reputation is based on your actions, how you treat others, and what you stand for!

6. What comes to someone's mind when they hear your name?

7. What means does God use to transform us into Christlikeness? (Whatever means necessary, grief, sickness, pain, suffering, blessing, etc.)

8. What role do we play in the transformation process? (Submit our lives to Him and follow Him in obedience.)

Through a daily relationship with Him, talking to Him in prayer, and studying His Word, God can take us from being spiritually immature to being strong spiritual leaders.

NEW WALK! Read Genesis 32:30-32

Not eating the meat from the thigh muscle is not a commandment; it is more like a tradition among the Jews.

In these verses "The sun shone on him." Jacob experienced a new day, and a new beginning by God's design.

1. What scars do you have that remind you of an event in your life?

2. Do you see any signs of humility in these verses? (Jacob declared that he had seen the face of God, yet his life had been spared. Jacob knew he was unworthy of God's blessings, yet God had shown him mercy and grace.)

As a sign of another spiritual landmark in Jacob's life, he named the place Peniel, which means "face of God. Jacob's first spiritual landmark was at Luz where he renamed the place Bethel, meaning "house of God." At another encounter with angels, Jacob named the place Mahanaim or "This is God's camp."—Gen. 32:1-2. With each heavenly visitation, Jacob renamed the meeting place, acknowledging God's presence and transformation in his life.

3. What are some spiritual markers for believers? (Salvation; baptism; commitment to service; becoming aware of our spiritual gifts and putting them into use.)

Jacob may not have made a quick transition in his life but from now on the Bible uses the phrase "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob..." about a dozen times.

Praise God for His grace—not only in allowing us to wrestle with Him during times of uncertainty—but for the ways He reveals Himself to us in those times.

CHALLENGE!

1. How has God transformed your life?

2. How have you seen God working in your life?

3. How can we collectively celebrate what God is doing? (Remain faithful to Bible study and worship. Demonstrate love to those around us. Minister to those in need physically and spiritually.)

4. When have you encountered God in a time of great need?

5. Ask God to give you opportunities to share your testimony of His faithfulness with those who need to hear it.