

Wrestled



SESSION 7

Genesis 32:22-32

Memory Verse: Genesis 32:10

God changes His people when they encounter Him.

In our culture, names don't typically carry the significance they did in biblical times. Nevertheless, our names often convey significance in other ways. Years ago, one of my professors started calling me "Huldah," and the nickname stuck. Huldah was an Old Testament prophetess (2 Kings 22:14-20), and my professor felt like I was a serious student of God's Word, like Huldah.

In the Old Testament world, names expressed character and essence. In Session 3 we saw Jacob live up to his name of "deceiver." In Genesis 32, though, God gave him a new name to reflect His redeemed character. As you prepare this week, think about the spiritual growth you have observed in the adults of your group and thank God for His work in their lives. Ask Him to help you grow deeper in your walk with Him, even as you challenge them to press on to greater spiritual maturity.



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Life is mostly routine, but some moments change one’s life forever. These may include the day you started your first full-time job, the day you retire, when you meet the love of your life and marry that special person, and the day your child is born. These are life-changing moments. More significantly, when people encounter God, their lives are changed. (PSG, p. 64)

Name some of your life-changing moments. Why are people often resistant to change?



Understand the Context (Genesis 32:1–33:20)

Following his final confrontation with Laban at Mizpah (Gen. 31), Jacob continued his homeward journey. As he traveled, God’s angels met him, and Jacob named the place Mahanaim (32:1-2). The name means “two camps” and might have referred to Jacob’s camp and Esau’s camp or to the camps that Jacob set up for his family (32:3-8). Regardless, Jacob would soon experience two meetings—one with God followed by one with Esau.

Jacob learned from his scouts that Esau was coming to meet him, but he wasn’t alone. Jacob’s older brother was accompanied by four hundred men. Fearful and distressed, Jacob began devising a scheme for his protection. As noted above, he divided the people with him into two groups. He reasoned that if Esau attacked one of the groups, the second camp could escape.

To this plan, Jacob added prayer. Verses 9-12 of Genesis 32 contain Jacob’s first recorded prayer. In fact, it is the most extensive prayer in the book of Genesis. Jacob acknowledged his unworthiness and recognized that he had no claim on God’s mercy. He also admitted his fear of meeting Esau.

Jacob not only prayed for the Lord to rescue him from Esau, but also he implemented a plan that he hoped would soften any antagonism his brother might be harboring. Hoping to appease Esau’s wrath, Jacob sent a large gift for his twin ahead of him. He also sent his family across the Jabbok River.

Alone on the far side of the Jabbok, Jacob encountered God again, but in a much different way than his meeting at Bethel years before. In the wrestling

match, a “man” dislocated Jacob’s hip and changed his name to Israel. Jacob named the location Peniel (Penuel), meaning “face of God” (32:13-32).

Genesis 33 records Jacob’s meeting with Esau. Jacob, still the schemer, devised yet another plan as he went forward to meet his brother. He arranged his family in a specific order with the members he felt closest to at the rear. Jacob then went on ahead. As he approached Esau, Jacob bowed to the ground seven times, perhaps in recognition that Esau was the ruler of the territory of Edom or Seir (33:3).

Jacob, however, was totally unprepared for the reception he received. Esau ran to him and hugged him. Together, the brothers wept. Although Esau initially rejected Jacob’s gift, Jacob urged him until he accepted it. During that meeting, Jacob compared seeing Esau to seeing the face of God (33:10). Jacob recognized in Esau’s look of forgiveness a reflection of God’s face.

The long estranged twins parted in peace. Esau headed to Seir/Edom, while Jacob moved to Succoth, a city in Canaan (33:11-17). Eventually, Jacob traveled to Shechem, purchased a plot of land, and built an altar to the Lord in recognition of his new name and his new life (33:18-20).

Read Genesis 32:22-32. What do these verses reveal about how God changes people when they encounter Him? (PSG, p. 65)



PRIOR TO THE SESSION: Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: The Travels of Jacob*), and **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Key Moments in Jacob's Life*). Write the word *alone* and *wrestle* on the board or on a large sheet of paper.

BEGIN: Guide the group to signal with a thumbs up or thumbs down if they have ever seen “before and after” pictures.

STATE: Share that “before and after” pictures may reflect weight loss, hair regrowth, makeup, or other products. *The main claim is usually something like “if you use this product or follow this plan, you will see visible results.”* Point out that sometimes we want to embrace change, while at other times we resist change.

DISCUSS: Encourage a volunteer to read the introduction on page 64 of the PSG. Lead a brief discussion on some significant changes people face and what the “before and after” pictures might look like for each one.

ASK: **Why are people often resistant to change?** (PSG, p. 64)

TRANSITION: *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 session, Jacob had a life-changing experience with God that had a personal impact on him, his immediate family, and his descendants.*



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Music

Secure a copy of “Let Go, Let God” by Jack Cassidy. Enlist a volunteer to read aloud the chorus. Invite the group to consider areas in their lives where they need to let go and trust God more. Remind them that, through Christ, we have a new identity—which is something Jacob learned in today’s session.

Alone (Genesis 32:22-24)

22 During the night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two slave women, and his eleven sons, and crossed the ford of Jabbok. **23** He took them and sent them across the stream, along with all his possessions. **24** Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.

(v. 22) Two wives: Jacob's two wives were Leah and Rachel. Rachel, Leah's younger sister, was the object of Jacob's affection and gave birth to Joseph and Benjamin. Leah bore Jacob six sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. Conflict dominated Jacob's family because he had two wives.

Key Concept

Marriage

"Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race." (*Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Article XVIII, "The Family")

(v. 22) Two slave women: This phrase designates Leah's servant, Zilpah, and Rachel's servant, Bilhah. When Rachel was unable to bear children by Jacob, she gave Bilhah to him as a concubine. Bilhah bore Jacob two sons, Dan and Naphtali. Later, Leah gave Zilpah to Jacob as another concubine. She bore him two sons: Gad and Asher.

A concubine was a wife of lower status—usually a slave. While the culture accepted such a practice in patriarchal times, it was never God's plan. Scripture sets forth God's ideal from the garden of Eden as the monogamous marriage of one man and one woman (Gen. 2:24). In cases where men took concubines, negative results, including disharmony and jealousy, prevailed in the family.

(v. 22) Eleven sons: At this point Rachel had not yet given birth to Benjamin. He would be born after the family settled in Canaan (see Gen. 35:16-20). In addition, Leah gave birth to a daughter, named Dinah.

(v. 22) Jabbok: This term, meaning "flowing," identifies a river near the area where Jacob wrestled with God. Today, the river is called Nahr ez-Zerqa. The Jabbok is a tributary of the Jordan River, connecting to the Jordan from the east approximately fifteen miles north of the Dead Sea. In ancient times a dense population inhabited the Jabbok Valley.

(v. 24) Was left alone: The Hebrew verb translated **was left** refers to one portion of a quantity that has been divided. Generally, it designates the smaller part. In this case, Jacob was **alone** because he sent everyone else across the river.

Sometimes the one who is left feels alone, as Elijah did in his contest with Baal's prophets on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:22). The word rendered *alone* also conveys the idea of separation and isolation. Jacob's encounter with God near the ford of the Jabbok River reminds us that a time will come in each of our lives when we must face Him alone. We cannot lean on anyone else's faith. We must decide for ourselves how we will respond to Him.

(v. 24) A man: Bible scholars have typically identified this **man** as God or as an angel carrying God's authority (see Hos. 12:1-5). Of the various Hebrew words for "man," the word used here denotes man as an individual, in contrast to mankind in general. In some contexts the term can also be rendered "champion."

Key Word

Wrestled

The Hebrew verb translated **wrestled** provides a wordplay on both the Jabbok River and the patriarch Jacob. The name Jacob, meaning "cheater" or "deceiver," conveys the selfish nature that he exhibited prior to his transformation at the Jabbok.

Physical strength had characterized Jacob's life to this point. However, in this wrestling match, he received a blow to his hip that dislocated the joint. Ironically, Jacob's resulting physical weakness led to moral and spiritual transformation.

EXPLORE Genesis 32:22-24



APPLICATION POINT: People should expect to encounter God in times of their greatest need.

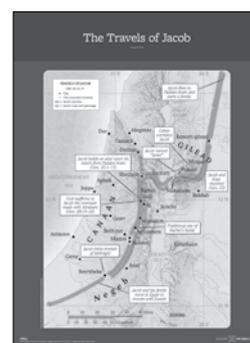
CONTEXTUALIZE: Draw attention to **Pack Item 5** (Poster: *Key Moments in Jacob's Life*) and review the life of Jacob up to this point.

SUMMARIZE: Using Understand the Context (PSG, p. 65), summarize Genesis 32:1–33:20. Remind adults that Jacob had left his home in Canaan to live in Haran. Share that in today's passage he began his move back toward Canaan. Point to the area around Penuel (Peniel), Mahanaim, and the Jabbok River on **Pack Item 1** (Map: *The Travels of Jacob*).

READ: **Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 32:22-24** while the group listens to identify the setting. Direct the group to identify key words in the verses. Point specifically to *alone* and *wrestle*. Point out those words on the large sheet of paper. Draw out the contrast between being alone to contemplate the future and being caught in an intense wrestling match.

ASK: **How can time alone calm our anxieties and give us clarity?** (PSG, p. 67) Note that while we may not physically wrestle with issues, we do have emotional and spiritual conflicts in our lives. Remind adults that God can give us strength and peace in those chaotic moments.

EXPLAIN: Enlist a volunteer to read Hosea 12:3-4. Highlight that Jacob wasn't really wrestling with a man, but with God—or an angel carrying the authority of God.



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Rope

Prior to the session, obtain a short piece of rope. Enlist two volunteers to take each end of the rope. Explain that Jacob was living a tension between faith and fear. *He was fearful of how he would be received by Esau, yet he believed God would be faithful to fulfill His promises.* Direct each volunteer to pull on their end of the rope, demonstrating that many times we feel a similar tug of fear, even as we strive to walk in faith.

New Name (Genesis 32:25-29)

25 When the man saw that he could not defeat him, he struck Jacob's hip socket as they wrestled and dislocated his hip. **26** Then he said to Jacob, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." **27** "What is your name?" the man asked. "Jacob," he replied. **28** "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." **29** Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he answered, "Why do you ask my name?" And he blessed him there.

(v. 25) Could not defeat: The Hebrew verb without the negative "not" suggests the capacity or ability to accomplish something. This would apply not only in a physical sense, but also in an ethical or religious sense. So, with the negative, it indicates a lack of composure or control. For example, Moses later used it in Genesis to describe Joseph's inability to keep his emotions in check during his encounter with his brothers (Gen. 45:1). It also highlights the inability of Moses's mother to hide her young son (Ex. 2:3).

In a religious or moral sense, the term appears in Deuteronomy 17:15 where the Lord commanded His people not to set a foreign king over them. When used in the sense of wrestling or battling, the verb without the negative is often rendered "prevail." In some sense, the man, though more powerful than Jacob, did not prevail in the wrestling match. Instead, the patriarch was declared the winner.

(v. 26) Daybreak: The Hebrew expression more literally means "the going up of the dawn" and denotes the time just before sunrise. In Genesis 32, the response of the "man" to the rising sun signified that Jacob was dealing with a superior Being (see Ex. 33:20,23). Isaiah prophesied that with the coming of the messianic age "a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness" (Isa. 9:2). Matthew quoted this passage to refer to the new age of hope and the promise that came in Jesus (Matt. 4:16).

(vv. 27-28) Your name: In the biblical world names were more than monikers. They possessed deep significance. A person's **name** expressed the individual's essence or nature. To know someone's name meant to know the person's character. Names might also convey destiny or hopes for a child's future.

The Lord sometimes initiated a name change to reveal a transformation in character or destiny (see Gen. 17:5; Matt. 16:17-18). That is true with Jacob in this passage. Asking Jacob about his name forced him to acknowledge his nature as a deceiver.

In some situations, knowing a person's name could also imply having some degree of power over them for good or for evil. However, it is doubtful that Jacob was trying to exert any control in this context. More likely, he simply wanted to know more about the One who was blessing him (v. 29).

Key Word

Israel

Jacob's divine opponent may have allowed him to win the wrestling match, but He still had authority over Jacob's life. Demonstrating this power, He changed the patriarch's name from Jacob to **Israel**. As noted, Jacob's name carried the idea of being a "deceiver." By changing Jacob's name, God indicated a transformation in Jacob's character.

Suggested meanings of "Israel" include "God strives," "God heals," "God rules," or "he strives against God." After his encounter with God, Jacob limped physically as a reminder of his struggle with God. But, more importantly, God gradually began to transform the way Jacob lived. Jacob's struggle with God created a new moral strength and loyalty to God that guided the rest of His life.

(v. 29) Blessed: Jacob had refused to let go until his opponent **blessed** him (v. 26). This implies Jacob's recognition that he was dealing with a superior Being. In ancient thought, blessings were generally conferred from the greater to the lesser. Jacob had stolen his father's blessing, so he longed for God to provide a legitimate blessing for Him.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers have a new identity after they encounter God.

READ: Invite the group to read **Genesis 32:25-29** silently, looking for the result of the wrestling match. Share that Jacob had spent his life trying to get the upper hand in every situation, but this was not a battle he was going to win by his wits or through deception.

RECORD: Add *New name* and *Israel* to the list on the board or paper. Remind adults that Jacob's name basically meant "deceiver," which fit his previous actions. Encourage adults to read through the information for verse 28 (PSG, p. 69) and discover Jacob's new name and its meaning.

SHARE: Note that in Genesis 17 Abraham also received a new name. Highlight that here Jacob was renamed "Israel," which means "strives with God."

ASK: **How did receiving a new name set the future course for Jacob? How can a change in identity serve as a blessing?** (PSG, p. 70)

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Verbal

To introduce this passage, share that many times we call people by nicknames. Say a name and encourage the group to suggest a possible nickname. (*Examples: Elizabeth/Liz or Beth, Andrew/Andy or Drew*) Relate that in the Bible, God sometimes changed a person's name to signify a change in that person's life. *For example, God changed Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah to reinforce the covenant promises He had made to them.* Explain that in these verses, Jacob got a new name that reflected a change in his relationship with God.

New Walk (Genesis 32:30-32)

30 Jacob then named the place Peniel, “For I have seen God face to face,” he said, “yet my life has been spared.” **31** The sun shone on him as he passed by Peniel — limping because of his hip. **32** That is why, still today, the Israelites don’t eat the thigh muscle that is at the hip socket: because he struck Jacob’s hip socket at the thigh muscle.

(v. 30) • **Peniel:** This place name means “face of God.” It is located on the Jabbok River, northeast of Succoth. During the period of the judges, Gideon destroyed a city or tower built on that site because the people there refused him provisions while he pursued the Midianites (Judg. 8:8-9,17). Jeroboam also did some building at this location (1 Kings 12:25). The site has been identified with a *tel*, a mound or small hill built up over centuries of occupation, about seven miles east of the Jordan. The *tel*, called Tulul edh-Dhahab, commands the entrance to the Jordan Valley from the Jabbok gorge. The location was also called “Penuel” (v. 31).

(v. 30) **Face to face:** This phrase indicates Jacob experienced a theophany, a physical appearance or manifestation of God. The Old Testament presents a basic assumption that to see God could be fatal (Ex. 19:20-21; 33:20; Judg. 6:22-23; 13:20-23). Yet we know that people did see manifestations of God and lived to tell about it (Gen. 32:24-32; Ex. 24:9-11). In Genesis 32, Jacob had a direct encounter with God, but he did not see the Lord’s full essence (which would have resulted in death).

As Genesis 32:30 reveals, a person who remained alive after seeing God was overwhelmed with awe and gratitude (Deut. 5:24; Judg. 6:22-23; Isa. 6:5). Such individuals realized that sinful human beings cannot survive seeing God’s face or being in God’s presence without His grace or merciful intervention. Jacob’s survival foreshadowed his face-to-face encounter with Esau (Gen. 33:10).

Key Doctrine

Salvation

Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God’s grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. (See John 3:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

(v. 31) **Limping:** Besides Genesis 32:31, this particular Hebrew verb appears only in Micah 4:6-7 and Zephaniah 3:19. In Micah and Zephaniah, the term (translated “lame”) occurs in the context of the Lord’s compassion on His people. In Genesis 32, the reference to Jacob’s limping serves as a physical symbol of His wrestling match with God.

Although the match resulted in Jacob’s “victory,” that victory came with a painful injury that would always remind him that we prevail with God by yielding to Him (Heb. 11:21). No longer a deceiver, Jacob was a new person, beginning a new spiritual walk as “Israel” (one who prevails with God).

(v. 32) **Israelites:** This designation identifies the descendants of Jacob/Israel through his twelve sons. These descendants later entered the promised land became citizens of the nation or kingdom of Israel. After the United Kingdom divided in 931 BC, the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom became known as Israel and its inhabitants retained the name Israelites (see 2 Kings 17:6-12). The two tribes of the Southern Kingdom were known as Judah—the name of one of Jacob’s sons.

(v. 32) **Thigh:** The Hebrew word designates the side of the lower torso and upper section of the leg. The Israelites viewed the **thigh** (or **hip**) as the seat of vital functions, particularly procreation. In patriarchal times placing a hand under the thigh affirmed the strongest oath (Gen. 24:8-9).

Elsewhere in Scripture, striking one’s thigh could symbolize intense grief and repentance (Ezek. 21:12; Jer. 31:19). When his divine opponent struck Jacob’s thigh, He not only demonstrated His superiority, but He also indicated that the very basis of Jacob’s life had been changed.

EXPLORE Genesis 32:30-32



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can celebrate God's working in their lives.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Genesis 32:30-32**, while the group considers how Jacob was changed by his encounter with God.

EXAMINE: Point out that Jacob also changed the name of the place where he encountered God to Peniel. Share **Pack Item 12 (Handout: At Peniel)** and encourage adults to scan the information on the handout. Allow a few volunteers to share some significant ideas from the article.

REFLECT: Add *New walk* and *New limp* to the list on the paper or board. Point out that Jacob's limp was actually a blessing, as it reminded him of God's covenant and his own ongoing reliance on God.

ASK: **How did Jacob's actions demonstrate trust in God?**

PRAY: Direct adults to this statement on page 71 of the PSG: "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 (v. 30)." Challenge adults to spend a few minutes meditating on verse 30 and using it as a prayer back to God. Share that they can pray the words directly from the verse or use the verse as theme for their prayer.



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Case Study

Prior to the session, prepare copies of the following case study: *Tim's company announced that they will be downsizing. He doesn't know whether to look for another job or wait to see if his job is secure. A job change might require a move and possibly less income. How do you think Tim should approach this situation?* Group adults into teams of two to four people. Distribute the case study and direct each team to review and apply the key principles in today's session to Tim's situation. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share their teams' work.

CHALLENGE

- SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from Apply the Text on page 72 of the *Personal Study Guide*:
- *People should expect to encounter God in times of their greatest need.*
 - *Believers have a new identity after they encounter God.*
 - *Believers can celebrate God's working in their lives.*
- REVIEW:** Invite the group to share how they can apply one of these statements to their personal lives this week.
- ASK:** **When have you encountered God in a time of great need?** (PSG, p 72)
- STATE:** *Remember the before and after pictures we considered at the beginning of the session. Whether weight loss, hair growth, or makeup, the change was visible in a positive way.*
- ASK:** **What positive difference would people see in your “pictures” of before you trusted Christ as your Savior and after you trusted Christ?**
- PRAY:** Close in prayer, praising God for His faithfulness and kindness. Thank Him for lives that are changed to a new identity in Christ.

After the Session

Reinforce the session by following up with anyone who expressed doubts about how Christ has changed their life. Pray with that person encouraging them to trust in Jesus for the first time or find peace in trusting Christ in their times of need. Send a text or email to the group, reminding them that changes on the inside should be seen in our actions, attitudes, and words. Challenge adults to allow God's transforming power to work in and through their lives this week.

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