God’s New Name for Jacob

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God is at work changing His people so that we may fulfill what He has called us to do.

MAIN PASSAGES: Genesis 32:24-32; 35:9-15

God repeatedly reminded Jacob of the promises He had made to his grandfather, Abraham, and his father, Isaac—promises that had been passed on to him. But despite these repeated promises and experiencing God’s faithful provision, Jacob was still a flawed man, a schemer and a deceiver. Instead of resting in the promises of God, he took matters into his own hands time and time again. But along with the promises God had given Jacob, He was also at work transforming Jacob’s character.

Why does one’s character matter so much to God?
Group Time

Point 1: Jacob’s old name reflects his flawed character (Gen. 32:24-27).

24 Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 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.

While we do not know how this wrestling match began, we know one of the outcomes was the crippling blow the “man” gave Jacob. But this blow was not a curse; it was a blessing, for now self-reliant Jacob would not be able to rely on his own physical prowess, if needed, to combat Esau. With that one touch, Jacob was brought low, and people in a humble posture are the ones God delights to do great things through.

How has God humbled you through circumstances to force you to rely more on Him?

The Lord dealt a second blow to Jacob that night. While this one wasn’t physical like the first, in many ways it was more devastating. It came when the “man” asked Jacob for his name and Jacob responded by saying his name out loud—the second blow.

What were God’s promises in Genesis, and to whom did God make them?

_________: A __________ to one day crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15)

_________: Never again to __________ the earth by a flood (Gen. 9:11)

_________: Offspring, land, and a __________ for the whole world (Gen. 12–17)

_________: Offspring, land, and a __________ for the whole world (Gen. 26)

Jacob needed to learn that God’s promises do not come about by our own strength and shrewdness but instead through God’s grace and power.
Point 2: Jacob’s new name reflects the grace God has shown him (Gen. 32:28-32).

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.

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 Penuel—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.

Jacob’s new name marked a gradual process of change. In God’s wisdom, He gave Jacob the name **Israel** as an ever-present reminder of this event and God’s continuing work in his life. Jacob was a *work in progress*. The true source of strength, power, and provision in his life was God. It was time for Jacob to stop fighting against God for blessing in his life and instead fight alongside God as part of His plan to extend His blessing to the world.

? Why do you think God is content to rename Jacob in an instant but work to change his character over time?

? Thinking of a time when you’ve wrestled with God, what did you learn from the experience?

**New Identity of the Believer:** The believer in Christ is declared ________________ on account of Christ’s perfect life and substitutionary death and resurrection.

No longer is the person a ________________, defined by past failures or present struggles. Anyone who is in Christ is a “______________” in whom the old, sinful self is passed away and the new, redeemed self is alive and progressing, becoming more and more like Christ.
Point 3: Jacob’s new name reflects the task God has
given him (Gen. 35:9-15).

9 God appeared to Jacob again after he returned from Paddan-aram, and he blessed
him. 10 God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; you will no longer be named Jacob, but
your name will be Israel.” So he named him Israel. 11 God also said to him, “I am God
Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation, indeed an assembly of nations, will come
from you, and kings will descend from you. 12 I will give to you the land that I gave to
Abraham and Isaac. And I will give the land to your future descendants.” 13 Then God
withdrew from him at the place where he had spoken to him.

14 Jacob set up a marker at the place where he had spoken to him—a stone marker.
He poured a drink offering on it and anointed it with oil. 15 Jacob named the place
where God had spoken with him Bethel.

God renewed and expanded upon the covenant promises He had previously given to
Jacob, connecting them to his new name. The name “Israel” would continue to reflect
the new path of Jacob’s life, a path that would lead him from a self-focused life marked
by “Jacob”—“deceiver”—to one that clings to the covenant-keeping God who will bring
about His staggering promises through “Israel.”

Jesus warned us that if we want to be His
followers, we must take up our cross daily
(Luke 9:23) and die to our old self (Rom. 6:6-8).
When we die to ourselves, we position ourselves
to be shaped by God into becoming who we
are called to be: God’s image bearers in a world
full of rebellion against Him. When God calls
us to Himself, He calls us to follow Him on a
journey, one where day by day He makes our old
nature more distant and foreign as He also makes
our new nature more vibrant and familiar. And
though the journey is often a struggle, because of
God, it is good.

How have you experienced the
struggle of faith and seen evidence of
God’s goodness through it?

Voices from
Church History

“Do you know why many of
us are not yet truly blessed?
We have not yet been
truly broken. Men throw
broken things away, but
God never uses anything
until he first breaks it. You’ll
never show me anybody
who has been or will be
mightily used of God who
has not been broken.
There is no blessedness
without brokenness.”

–Adrian Rogers (1931-2005)
My Mission

Because we have been given the new name of Christians, we live in a manner worthy of the name we have received so that others may praise God for His transforming power.

• What step of faith do you need to take in the name of Christ?
• How can your group encourage one another to find your identity in Christ and in Christ alone?
• In what area of your life do you need to bear the name of Christ more faithfully to bring glory to His name and tell others about Him?
Daily Study

Day 1: Read Genesis 32:1-23

We can learn quite a bit about others, and ourselves, in the prayers uttered in times of distress. As night fell on Jacob and his family, his countenance fell with it. Jacob knew he would face Esau the following day, and he was afraid. Esau had the clear advantage, forcing Jacob into a defensive posture, something quite unusual for the schemer.

After dividing his family and possessions into two groups, Jacob did what may have been challenging for him—he prayed (vv. 9-12). At its core, prayer is an acknowledgement of our humility and God’s authority over our lives. That is not easy for someone like Jacob who likes to control his or her circumstances. But in this prayer, we see that God was at work in his life.

Jacob began by recounting his history with God. God was the faithful God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, the One who told Jacob to return to his family’s land so He might prosper him. It’s not hard to read between the lines. But then Jacob confessed his unworthiness of God’s kindness and asked God to rescue him. Jacob was where he needed to be; he was desperate and humbled before God. Then Jacob closed his prayer by once again reminding God of His promise to prosper him. And with that, Jacob prepared messengers to greet Esau and began to settle in to rest for the night, but he would not get any rest. God would take the seeds of humility and dependence and plant them even deeper in the patriarch’s heart.

Voices from Church History

“Our prayers need to be focused upon the present. We must trust God today, and leave the morrow entirely with him. The present is ours; the future belongs to God.”

—E. M. Bounds (1835-1913)

What are your prayers to God like in times of distress and uncertainty?
Day 2: Read Genesis 32:24-32

Jacob had finally reached the proverbial end of his rope. After years of scheming and swindling, he was about to face a situation he knew he could not manipulate to his favor. Humbled and afraid, he asked God for deliverance. Would He rescue him from Esau?

We can’t miss that word, *rescue*. It’s important because it connotes that Jacob was helpless; he needed rescue by another. And with that in mind, we see God answer Jacob’s prayer that same night. In the wrestling match, God would drive Jacob toward deeper humility through wounding his thigh and asking his name. And it would be through this deepened humility that God would provide rescue.

This is how God works in our lives as well. We too need rescue by another, not from an angry sibling but from sin. And humility is the same path for us as well—we call out to Christ to save us. And when we do, God responds to us in our posture of humility and raises us up with Christ.

In what areas of your life do you need to humble yourself and turn them over to God?

Day 3: Read Genesis 33:1-20

The time had arrived. Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming—along with four hundred men. Jacob then went ahead of his family and bowed seven times. Even though Esau had traded the birthright—the position of family leadership to him—Jacob greeted his older brother in a posture of respect and humility. We can only imagine what raced through Jacob’s mind in that moment. It most likely was not what happened next as Esau ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him.

We cannot miss what God was doing behind the scenes here. Just as He was at work in Jacob’s heart, He was surely at work in Esau’s as well. Years before, Esau had determined in his heart to kill Jacob, but now that heart was changed, and God was surely the One behind it. We cannot forget that while God is working on us, He is working on others too. Broken relationships that may seem hopeless are far from it when God is at work.

What relationships do you need God to repair or strengthen? Pray first for God to work in your own heart and then in the hearts of others.
Day 4: Read Genesis 34:1-31

Jacob probably felt like he was taking one step forward and two steps back. Jacob was changing, or to be more precise, God was changing Jacob. It looked like Jacob was on the path to experience God’s long-promised blessings.

But then one of the local men, Shechem, raped his daughter, Dinah. Jacob’s sons took matters into their own hands and Simeon and Levi avenged their sister by killing not just Shechem but every male in the city as well. While we can wonder about Jacob’s response, or lack thereof, to his daughter being raped, and we can recognize the disproportionate actions of his sons, there is something else for us to consider in this chapter.

Jacob was trying to live differently, but he was not in a vacuum. The actions of his sons impacted him, just as his actions had impacted so many others. God designed us for community, and we are to strive to be an encouragement and blessing to others and to keep our actions from being a detriment to them.

How have your actions possibly been harmful to someone else recently, either intentionally or unintentionally? Have you confessed this and sought forgiveness?

Day 5: Read Genesis 35:1-29

Jacob was settled near the city of Shechem, but God had something different in mind for the patriarch. So He commanded Jacob to get up and go to Bethel and settle there. Furthermore, he was to build an altar to God where he had met with Him when he fled from his brother Esau so many years before.

So Jacob obeyed. But first, he told his family and all of the others with him that they had to do something. They had to get rid of their foreign gods and purify themselves. After doing so, they then set out for Bethel, and God moved before them (see v. 5).

Once again, we see Jacob being changed before our eyes. He understood that God was calling him to increased faithfulness, not just in going where God wanted him to go but also in casting aside other gods from his family’s midst. Just as Jacob was calling on his family to purify themselves and change their clothes, God was doing the same in his life—purifying and changing his heart.

How has God been at work purifying and changing your heart? Where do you still need Him to work?
Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- Jacob’s old name reflects his flawed character (Gen. 32:24-27).
- Jacob’s new name reflects the grace God has shown him (Gen. 32:28-32).
- Jacob’s new name reflects the task God has given him (Gen. 35:9-15).

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

What are some things you have observed this week that reaffirmed for you your new and permanent identity in Christ?

How can you stir up in one another a zeal for God’s mission that is rooted in your new identity in Christ?

Notes

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UNIT 1
SESSION 1

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

SESSION 4

SESSION 5
2. Sidney Greidanus, Preaching Christ from Genesis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 125.

SESSION 6

UNIT 2
SESSION 1

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

SESSION 4

UNIT 3
SESSION 1

SESSION 2
1. Thomas Brooks, Heaven on Earth (CreateSpace Publishing Platform, 2014), 64.

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SESSION 6

UNIT 2
SESSION 1

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SESSION 3

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1. Thomas Brooks, Heaven on Earth (CreateSpace Publishing Platform, 2014), 64.

SESSION 3
For a story to be great, it must include a great beginning. The story of the Bible, which tells the true story of our world, is no exception.

In the Book of Genesis, we see God the Creator in all His majesty and goodness as He spins the world into motion and lavishes His image bearers with love. We have an “inciting incident” that introduces conflict into this good world, as the first humans raise their fists in defiance toward their loving Father and bring havoc into this peaceful paradise. But even here, we have a promise—God will make things right again. God will cover His people’s sins and crush their adversary. The rest of Genesis shows how even though sin spread throughout the world, God remained faithful to His promise to Eve, His promise to Noah, and His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Book of Genesis is a glorious and earthy tale of rebellion and redemption, of sin and salvation, of failings and faith. Here is a book that shows us who we are in our sin and who God is in His grace. May this study lead you to express gratitude for God’s love toward you and then extend His love to everyone who inhabits this world He has promised to restore.
Fall 2018  
**In the Beginning**
Creation and the Fall (Genesis; Job)
God Establishes a Covenant People (Genesis)
God Grows His Covenant People (Genesis)

Winter 2018-19  
**Out of Egypt**
God Redeems His People (Genesis; Exodus)
God Provides for His People (Exodus)
God Receives Worship from His People (Exodus; Leviticus)

Spring 2019  
**Into the Promised Land**
God Guides His People (Numbers; Deuteronomy)
God Gives His People a Home (Joshua)
God Delivers His People (Judges; Ruth)

Summer 2019  
**A Kingdom Provided**
God Provides a King (1 Samuel)
God Provides a Godly King (1–2 Samuel; Psalms)
God Provides a Wise King (1 Kings; Ecclesiastes)

Fall 2019  
**A Nation Divided**
God Speaks to His People (1–2 Kings)
God Judges the Sin of His People (2 Kings; Prophets)
God Shows Mercy to His People (2 Chronicles; Prophets)

Winter 2019-20  
**A People Restored**
God Sustains His People (Daniel)
God Restores His People (Ezra; Prophets)
God Prepares His People (Nehemiah; Esther; Malachi)
Spring 2020  
**Jesus the Messiah**  
Jesus Comes into the World (Luke)  
Jesus Begins His Ministry (Gospels)  
Jesus Among the People (Gospels)

Winter 2020-21  
**The Mission Begins**  
The Holy Spirit Comes (Acts; Epistles)  
Fundamentals of the Faith (Acts; Epistles)  
New Life in Christ (Acts; Epistles)

Summer 2020  
**Jesus the Servant**  
Jesus the Healer (Gospels)  
Jesus the Teacher (Gospels)  
Jesus the Miracle-Worker (Gospels)

Fall 2020  
**Jesus the Savior**  
Jesus and the Kingdom (Gospels)  
Jesus the Savior (Gospels)  
Jesus the Risen King (Gospels)

Spring 2021  
**The Church United**  
Living Like Jesus (Acts; Hebrews)  
The Sent Church (Acts; Epistles)  
Don’t Forget (Acts; Epistles)

Summer 2021  
**All Things New**  
Paul in Prison (Acts; Epistles)  
Facing Adversity (Acts; Epistles)  
Jesus Will Come Again (Revelation)