

Topic	Jacob's Wrestling
Reference	Genesis 32
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When Jacob entered the world, he was holding onto the heel of his slightly older twin brother, Esau. That's how Jacob got his name because Jacob means heel grabber. In a figurative sense that also means trickster or deceiver. Unfortunately, Jacob lived up to his name. He cheated his older twin brother Esau. He cheated him out of his birthright and later he stole the blessing that should have been given to the firstborn. Esau filled with anger threatened to kill Jacob and so Jacob fled to the land where his uncle Laban lived.

Then after 20 years of working for Laban, Jacob is told by God to go back to his family. And that's the backdrop for our scripture passage today. Jacob is going back to his Homeland and is preparing to meet his estranged brother.

When we look at how God dealt with Jacob, we can learn some truths about how God wants to relate to us today. And the first truth that we'll see is God promises us his presence. In the very first verse we see that the angels of God met Jacob. And at the very end of our text, we see that Jacob says, I have seen God face to face. God with us is a theme that pervades the Bible, both in the old and in the New Testament.

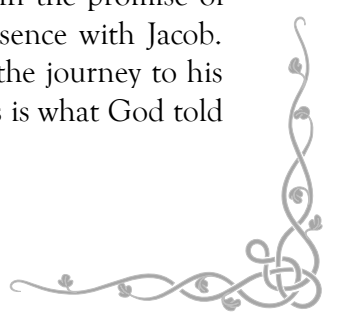
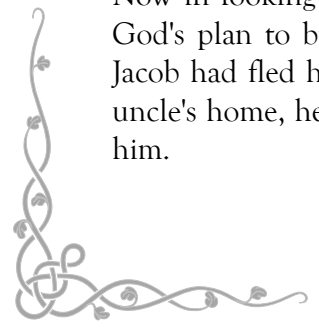
From the very beginning, it's clear that God is a God of relationships. The creation story tells us that God desired to have relationship with his most special creation; man and woman. The first chapter of Genesis says this.

So God created man in his own image in the image of God created him male and female created them.

Well, what does create it in the image of God mean. One important thing that it means is that man was made to worship, to relate to God and for God and man to live in fellowship with one another, the presence of God was to be experienced by people. But sin changed that. Adam and Eve defied God and they wanted to make their own rules. And so the relationship was broken.

But God's still desired to have reconciliation, to have fellowship with his people. He wanted to make a way possible to restore that relationship with him. So God would work through history to bring about forgiveness. God called a man named Abraham and promised that through him and his descendants blessing would come to all peoples of the earth. This promise was repeated to Abraham's son, Isaac. Both Abraham and Isaac experienced God's presence. God promised them. Fear not for, I am with you.

Now in looking at the life of Abraham's grandson, Isaac's son, Jacob, we see once again the promise of God's plan to bring blessing to all peoples of the earth and the promise of God's presence with Jacob. Jacob had fled his home because of his brother's threat to kill him. And one night on the journey to his uncle's home, he had a dream of a staircase from heaven. He encountered God, and this is what God told him.



I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, your father, and the God of Isaac. In you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

And then God assured him and he said,

behold, I am with you and I will keep you wherever you go. And I will bring you back to this land.

When Jacob woke up from the dream, he realized that God was there. God's presence was with him, even though he had not been aware of it until this dream.

Jacob went on to where his uncle Laban lived there. There he married, had children and was able to gain a lot of livestock. Then after 20 years, the Lord spoke to Jacob and told him

return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred. And I will be with you.

Once again, Jacob here's God's promise I will be with you, but at the same time, God promised Jacob his presence, he also told him, go back to your family. And Jacob knew that could be dangerous, a big problem because Esau, his brother had threatened to kill him.

But even so Jacob obeyed God. He did what God told him to do, and God kept his promise. You was with Jacob. And we see that very clearly in the first verses of our text today, Jacob went on his way and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, this is God's camp.

This must have given Jacob great strength and encouragement. He realized he was doing what God wanted to, he had followed God's direction, stepped out on faith and now he saw angels. Evidently these angels were in the guys of soldiers, the army of the Lord and encampment of the Lord's host. God showed Jacob in a very visible way that he was indeed with him.

Billy Graham, most of you know, in his book, *Angels God's Secret Agents* tells the story of a man named John Patton. John Patton was a missionary in the New Hebrides islands. One night hostile native surrounded his missions headquarters. They wanted to drive the Pattons out of their home and kill them. And so he and his wife prayed through the entire night. And when daylight came, their attackers were gone. A year later, the chief of this tribe put his faith in Christ and John Patton spoke to him about that night. The chief asked who are all those men that were circling your headquarters, John Patton explained that it was only he and his wife. But the chief insisted that he had seen hundreds of big men with shining garments and sword circling the mission headquarters. And so the natives were afraid to attack. That night in the New Hebrides islands there certainly was a double camp, angels were there to help serve John Patton's family.

Now that was certainly a supernatural experience of God's presence, but not everybody experiences things like that. As a matter of fact, most of us will not, but we do have the same promise that Jacob had when we follow God's direction. We know that he will be with us. Jesus, when telling his followers to go make disciples of all peoples promise to them as he promises us behold, I am with you always, even to the end of

the age. Yes, we have a greater promise than Jacob had because we have the promise of Emmanuel foretold by the prophet. Isaiah, this promise finds us fulfillment in the coming of Jesus and announcing the birth of Jesus the angel said, behold the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they will call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

Emmanuel, Jesus came to show us God, the father, so that we would know what it is like to have God with us. Colossians 1 verse 15 says,

he, Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

And because of Jesus's death and resurrection, we can truly receive the gift of God with us. He's not just with us as a friend who walks beside us though he does that. But when we receive Jesus in faith, he comes to live inside us through his Holy Spirit, giving us strength in place of weakness, courage in place of fear and boldness to do his will because Emmanuel, Jesus has come, we never need to be alone. We never have to wonder how to please God. We never have to worry if our efforts aren't enough. We can simply rest knowing that he is with us. He is in us. He loves us and he will never leave us.

Yes. God promises us his presence and the second truth that God can show it from our text today is God will go with us through times of crises. Yes, God is with us but even though he is with us we still face crises. We experience things that bring fear and uncertainty. God does not always shield us from these things, but he does go with us through them. Jacob was undoubtedly encouraged by the presence of God's angels to go ahead and immediately make contact with his estranged brother Esau. He knew it was dangerous, but he also knew that sooner or later he was going to have to meet his brother. And he knew that he had done wrong. He knew that things needed to be made right. His past needs needed to be addressed. There must be restitution and reconciliation.

So God sent messengers ahead of him to the brother Esau and notice his humble attitude. Jacob told the messengers, this is what you are to say to my Lord, Esau.

Your servant Jacob says I have much livestock and servants. I'm sending this message to my Lord that I may find favor in your eyes.

When the messengers returned, they said, we came to your brother Esau. He is coming to meet you and there are 400 men with him. Wow. That's a larger welcome party. That would be a warm welcome, indeed. More than likely an army of 400 men. Jacob undoubtedly knew the story of how his grandfather Abraham had attacked and defeated King's armies with only 318 men. And now Esau was coming with 400 men. Can you imagine how gripped with fear he must've been. The Bible doesn't say what Esau's intentions were, but Jacob feared the worst. Jacob is facing a serious crisis and he is terror stricken.

On the one hand, Jacob was following God's direction. He was doing what God had explicitly told him to do. He was going back to his family, to his people. But on the other hand, we see that Jacob's crisis was a result of his own doing, he was responsible for this situation. And he was going to be reaping what he had sown.

We all experienced crises in our lives. Sometimes we too are gripped with fear and sometimes some of the crises we face result from things that we have done or said. Like Jacob, we sometimes bear a portion, at least have the responsibility for our problems. We too sin, we do things that are unethical, immoral, deceptive or dishonest and then the reckoning comes.

Some people deliberately deceive others. You see this in the workplace. It could be by taking credit for work done by someone else or sabotaging the work of someone. It could be misrepresenting a product or a service just to get a sale. And this of course would cause conflict and retaliation. And maybe even a lawsuit. Relationships can be damaged also by hurtful actions.

Several years ago, I attended the funeral of my friend's mother in the US. And my friend had three sisters and they were there at the funeral. Immediately after the fact funeral, two of the sisters to the bank and they cleaned out the mother's bank account. And they didn't allow my friend or her youngest sister to have anything from the estate, although they were entitled to have a portion of the money and of the property. And as you can imagine this caused hold hurt in that family. Resentment was high and it took years before reconciliation could take place. And even then only with one of the sisters.

Not only will our sinful behavior create problems for us, but sometimes we make decisions or do things that are not necessarily sinful but they are unwise, and they bring about a crisis. A friend of ours in Germany had gone to a party sponsored by his church. There, he drank a little too much alcohol and then decided to drive home, but he didn't make it. Fortunately, nobody was seriously injured in the accident, but he did face financial loss. He was arrested by the police and fined and his driver's license was suspended.

There are also times when we face problems, crises that are not a result of our actions. Many of us know the anxiety created in us upon hearing a doctor diagnose us with cancer, or when we even hear the term COVID-19, we shrink in fear of contracting it. When someone is a victim of abuse they experiences untold agony. And we, when we look at the soft economic situation here in Malaysia and also globally, we naturally have dread for the future, but we can be assured that God goes with us through these crises.

Yes. Some of our crises come because we live in a fallen world and are surrounded by people who like us are sinful, but sometimes we have a crisis because we are following God's will. Jacob was following God. He was doing what God had said to do. Go back to the land of your fathers and that put him in a crisis situation. We too today might experience crises at times when we obey God.

For example, if someone is trying to do business with honesty and with integrity and in a way that honors God, he might face crises if he just surrounded by corruption. Also telling the truth could cause a problem when lying might help us to get out of an immediate difficulty, at least temporarily. Sharing the gospel with someone who really needs to hear it, which God wants us to do can sometimes lead to crises when there are those around us who object to our sharing.

A young man we met in another country who came to a seminar that we led was facing a crisis when we met him because he had been obeying God's command to go make disciples of all peoples. After becoming a believer in Jesus he had shared the good news with all the people in his village and many had come to

faith in Christ. And then he went to a neighboring village and was sharing the gospel there and saw also many people come in faith to Christ, but some of the religious leaders and also some of the politicians in the area got quite upset and so they stirred up a mob and then threatened to burn his house, kill his wife and children. So he and his family had to flee for their lives and they fled to a nearby large city where we met them.

They face these difficulties because they had been obedient to God, but they would tell you that God was with them during this crisis. And after fleeing into this nearby larger city and finding a place to live, they had already begun to be able to find a new ministry and they were again sharing their faith in Christ with other people.

Although we all face problems and crises, none of us enjoy them, but at times a crisis can be a blessing. God sometimes uses crises to get our attention, how kind it was of the Lord to drop Jacob into the middle of a crisis so that he would turn his attention to God. A crisis can end up being a time of mercy. Sometimes God's appointed means of grace is getting us stuck and getting us to be afraid, so that we will humble our hearts and call on his name.

In addition to God getting our attention through crises, God can also use times of uncertainties and struggles as opportunities to help us grow. It was important for Jacob to grow in his relationship with God. He needed to deal with his sins of the past. He needed to learn to trust God, step by step. The crises Jacob faced led him to an intense time of prayer. It led him to wrestle with God and it brought him to a point where he was more willing to listen to God and to let God transform him. The turnaround in Jacob's life came because he faced a crisis.

Crises can be times to experience a new, the grace, the help, and the strength of God. Verses that have helped me personally in times of stress and fear are Isaiah 41 verses 8 and especially verse 10 God said this to the descendants of Jacob, but it also applies to us today. This is what the verse says,

But you Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen do not fear for, I am with you. Do not be dismayed for, I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

In times of crises in times of fear, whatever the cause may have been, God is with us. And he goes with us through these difficult times and he can even use them to bring about good. A third truth we can see through our text is God hears our prayers. When crises come your way, pray like Jacob did. He was facing a crisis, was terribly afraid and yes he was largely responsive for the mess he was in, but still he came to God in prayer to seek God's grace and to seek God's mercy. This prayer of Jacob is the longest prayer recorded in the book of Genesis. And it is instructive for us today, Jacob begins his prayer by addressing the God of, for him, the God of Isaac. And in doing so he was tying into the promise that God had made to Abraham and Isaac, and then also to him to bless them, to give them many descendants and to bring blessing to all peoples of the earth through them.

He addresses God as Lord using the proper name Yahweh for God. Jacob is addressing the Lord God, who had already revealed himself to him and who had already spoken to him during his time with his uncle Laban.

When we address God, we remember who he is. He is creator. He is almighty. He is all knowing. He is merciful. He is just. We realize who it is that we are talking to. And we remember all that he has done. After coming to faith in Jesus we recognize God is the one who has saved us and who is working in our life.

Next in his prayer Jacob remembers and quotes God's word. Now that might not be obvious at first glance. You might ask what Bible verse is Jacob quoting. We'll remember there was no recorded scripture at that time. It would have been impossible for him to pray the Psalms or the Lord's prayer, but God had spoken directly to Jacob earlier revealing his will and so Jacob remembered and quoted the word God had given to him.

You know, we can base many of our prayers on God's word. I'd like to share with you how praying scripture and remembering his promises helped me in a time of crisis. After being diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer in 2016, I had to undergo surgery and then a very harsh chemotherapy regimen. It was very difficult, difficult for me, physically and emotionally. During this time, I realized how weak I was and I depended on God and the prayers of the church. Many days I didn't have the strength to do normal tasks and I became discouraged and I didn't know what the outcome would be. Would the treatment helped me and would it hurt me? And it was also very difficult for David to see me this way. Well the church we were attending at the time, began a church wide effort to memorize scripture. And during my treatment, the church began memorizing a passage that I learned as a youth, Philippians 4, verses six and seven. And as I spoke these words in corporate worship and found myself meditating on them at home and during quiet times, they took on new meaning because of my situation. Listen to the words,

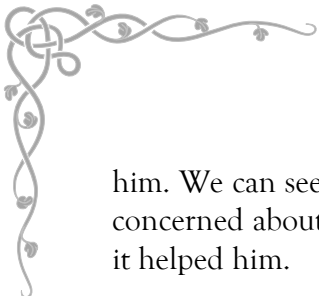
Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

And so I continued to lay my concerns at his feet and I thanked him for what he had already done in my life. And I can truly say at that time, that peace did come as I prayed God's word.

Jacob prays God's word. He quotes God's word and then he acknowledges God's greatness, his mercy, his love, his faithfulness. And in so doing, he realized how small and insignificant he was. He admits to God, I am unworthy. I am not worthy of the good you have done me God. And so he acknowledges that all of the good things in life that he has received are a direct result of God's grace.

When we pray, we come to God in humility, and then we praise him for his greatness. We thank him for his goodness and we acknowledge our unworthiness and we can even go further than Jacob did and we can confess specific sin. Jacob's prayer is relatively short. We don't know his other thoughts, but there's the possibility that when Jacob said I am unworthy, his past flashed before his eyes, as he remembered his sins, especially those sins against his brother Esau. He knew that his actions had not been pleasing to God.

And then after Jacob admitted his unworthiness, then he prayed for deliverance. He prayed for salvation. This was not only a personal request. It was also a request for his wife and children. And for those with



him. We can see here that at least his perspective in life is a little bit broader than it used to be. He is now concerned about family, whereas 20 years earlier he didn't care if his family members were hurt, as long as it helped him.

When we pray, we can bring our requests to God. Yeah. Just like you mentioned from Philippians in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God. Yes. And also we see this in the Lord's prayer. Give us this day our daily bread, lead us not into temptation, deliver us from evil. The Bible shows us that we can bring our own personal known needs to the Lord. The conclusion of the prayer shows us that Jacob's request was not just a selfish self-centered request. Rather we will see that Jacob was praying according to the will of God. This is what he said.

But God, you said I will surely do you good and make your offspring as the sand of the sea.

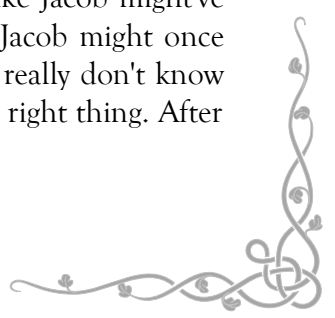
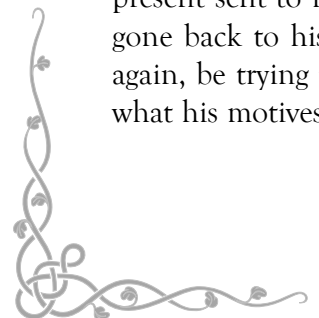
You say 20 years earlier, God had told Jacob that he had a role to play in his salvation plan because God had told Jacob in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. God's stated plan his will was to bring salvation to the world through the Messiah. Jesus would be born to a mother who was a descendant of Jacob and one of his sons. So Jacob knew it must be God's will for him, or at least for one of his sons to remain alive because God was going to work through them to bring about descendants who would then be the forefathers of the Messiah.

So Jacob's prayer was not a selfish self-centered prayer, rather he is praying that God's stated will, would come to pass. He's trusting God to act in accordance with his word and his will. When we come to God, we can also align our requests with his will, but how do we understand his will. Well, we find his general will for all of us in his word and so we search and we study the scripture.

God heard Jacob's prayer, but there was no audible response this time. I'm sure Jacob would have loved to hear God's voice say, don't worry. Be happy. God could have answered like that. He could have said, "do not fear your brother Esau comes in peace. He will not harm or attack you". And we do hear God speak words like that in other places of scripture. For example, in the book of acts chapter 18, the Lord said to Paul "do not be afraid, but go on speaking for, I am with you and no one will attack you to harm you". But God did not say that to Jacob, because God had a better plan for him. God wanted to use this crisis to do a work of grace in Jacob's life.

God did hear Jacob's prayer and he answered it according to his will. Now it took some time before Jacob knew how God would answer his prayer, but this time of uncertainty was well worth it because God was going to use this experience to transform Jacob.

In the meantime, Jacob came up with a plan to try to diffuse his brother Esau was anger. He said ahead of him, a tremendous amount of livestock and several large herds as a huge gift to his brother and the servants accompanying the herds were to tell Esau. These herds belong to your servant Jacob, they're a present sent to my Lord Esau and moreover he is coming behind us. It sounds to me like Jacob might've gone back to his old ways. His scheming tricks is wheeling and dealing. Sounds like Jacob might once again, be trying to rely on his own ideas, trying to come up with a plan. Possibly so we really don't know what his motives were because the Bible doesn't say, but possibly Jacob wanted to do the right thing. After



all, he sent the gifts to Esau immediately after he had prayed, perhaps he felt impressed during his prayer that he needed to do something to make restitution. Pay his brother back with the money he had wrongfully taken from him, pay him back for this wrong he had done. So Jacob, because he had cheated his brother Esau knew that he needed to make things right.

It could be that Jacob really was wanting to do the right thing. He wanted his brother to see that he wasn't the same man as he was 20 years earlier. And that brings us to the fourth truth we can learn from our text, God desires to transform us. And he wants to transform us from within. Jacob had done all he could think of to prepare for his meeting with Esau, and he had taken steps, all that he could to protect at least part of his family in case of an attack that night separated by a stream from his family Jacob was all alone.

But Jacob was not able to sleep suddenly seemingly out of nowhere a man appears. And he wrestles with Jacob all night long until daybreak. When the man appears, we're not told who he was. At first, it seems that Jacob might not have known who the man was, but by the end of the night, Jacob realized that his opponent was no ordinary man. His struggle had been against God.

God had desired to bring Jacob to a place where he could encounter him and change him radically. Now, Jacob had come from a godly heritage. His grandfather, Abraham loved God. His father, Isaac was also a man of faith, but a religious heritage is no guarantee the children in the next generations will love and trust God and early in Jacob's life we see very little evidence of him having any kind of genuine faith. Jacob needed a life changing encounter from God and so did each one of us. Our faith cannot be dependent upon our parents or our grandparents' faith.

Transformation involves a personal encounter with God. And so another truth that we can learn from this passage is that transformation is often preceded by a struggle. Our text says a man wrestled with Jacob all night. Now that's a very long wrestling match. In modern day Olympic wrestling the match lasts only six minutes and that's divided into three bouts. Each of which is only two minutes long, but Jacob's match lasted all night. It was an intense struggle and what was the struggle about. Well, since Jacob was wrestling against God, the struggle really must have been with himself as he was confronted with his character, with his sin and with his self-sufficiency. And undoubtedly, he was also struggling against God's rightful sovereign place as the Lord, the master of his life.

You and I, when we're honest, we'll admit that we also struggle with God. Maybe you have not yet come. There's a place in your life where you have repented and placed your faith in God, receiving Jesus as your Lord and savior. Maybe you come from a different religious background and are wrestling with the truths of the Bible and the claims of Christ for your life. Maybe you're struggling with how coming to Christ might affect your relationships with your family. Maybe you're coming from a free thinker background where you struggle to accept the existence of the God who created you. And you struggle to acknowledge his claim on your life.

Those of us who are believers in Jesus, we will also still at times struggle with God. God may speak to us through his scripture or through his Holy Spirit or through fellow believers about something that needs to be changed in our life or he may have an assignment for us that he continually brings before us that we may not be willing to do and so we struggle and we wrestle with him. God might be telling you to

reconcile with an estranged family member. You may be involved in some destructive sinful activity that God wants you to stop. He may want you to apologize and make it right where if you've wronged a colleague or an employee, and it's possible that he wants you to speak to a neighbor or a friend about their relationship with God, or even to share the gospel with them. And so it becomes a daily struggle when we hear God's voice, but we do not respond.

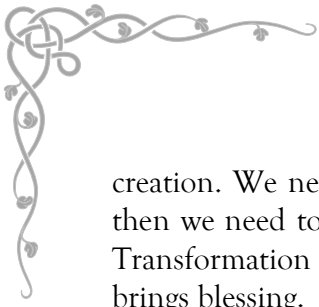
Our text goes on to say that the man wrestling against Jacob could not prevail. Now, how is it that someone, messenger of God with God's power cannot prevail against the mere mortal? Of course, the power of God could have crushed Jacob. No problem. Just like God's power is greater than any resistance we might bring against him. But God in his sovereignty has chosen to give people some measure of free will. God allows us to rebel against him to resist him, just like Adam and Eve in the garden chose to disobey God. We can be stubborn. We can choose to live life our own way. Sometimes we find ourselves going toe to toe with God in the struggle to surrender our will to his, but God won't force us to yield yet. He is not passive. He humbled Jacob. He touched his hip and what do you think God dislocated Jacob's hip. Well, God will sometimes use everything at his disposal to help us to surrender to him. And in Jacob's case, putting his hip out of socket.

Now that does not mean that every time something bad happens to us, that that's the result of you resisting God. But sometimes it is a result of that. And so God in his great love will sometimes allow or even cause things to happen to show that his way is best. As one African American preacher said we don't surrender we see the light, we surrender when we feel the heat. As Jacob was wrestling, he must have realized he could not defeat his opponent. So instead of trying to defeat him, he clung to him in order to secure a blessing. By then, he knew that he was wrestling with a messenger of God and he knew that he needed God's blessing. And so he held on to this man desperately pleading for a blessing.

That's one sign that transformation is beginning to take place in our lives. Instead of struggling against God, we acknowledge our need for God. God's blessing in your, and my life becomes of utmost importance and we are willing to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.

Transformation involves a personal encounter with God. It's often preceded by a struggle, but to truly be transformed, we need to let God change us from within because transformation is a work of God. Before Jacob could receive the blessing he had to let God change his name and in doing so God changed his character. The man wrestling with Jacob would have known his name. He didn't need to ask, what is your name? Just like God knew where Adam and Eve were hiding in the garden when he asked them, where are you? But this messenger from God wanted Jacob to take a long look at who he really was. The man asked, what is your name? Jacob answered by saying, Jacob. And by saying his name, he was revealing his character. In other words, he was admitting, yes. I admit I'm a trickster. I'm a deceiver. I'm a conman. He was confessing his sinfulness and his stubbornness.

But then God gave Jacob a new name. Israel. Jacob had striven with God and he had prevailed. But not in the sense of beating God, that is impossible. The victory was his because he would now cling to God in faith and depend on him. And Jacob became a new man, his pride turned to lowliness. His greed turned to generosity and his self-reliance turned to worship. Only God can change us from within. Yes we can try to make changes externally in our outward behavior, but we need the power of God to become a new



creation. We need to be born again by God's spirit, which happens when we receive Jesus by faith. But then we need to go ahead and let God renew our minds and conform us to the image of his son. Jesus. Transformation can happen only when we let God change us. And in closing, we see transformation brings blessing.

What blessings did Jacob receive? Well, the immediate blessing was that his life was spared. His brother greeted him with an embrace instead of a sword, Jacob had been delivered and he and his family had been saved. Another blessing Jacob had was the privilege of being integrally involved in God's salvation plan. God's plan to bring blessing to the world through the coming Messiah would take place through Jacob and his descendants.

But the most important blessing was God himself. Up to this point, we've not seen Jacob identify God as his God. But in the next chapter, Jacob builds an altar and he names the place, which means God, the God of Israel, Jacob now known as Israel would refer to God as his God. And we can receive similar blessings today when we let God transform us. God wants to save us. When we come to God in faith, acknowledging our sin, asking his forgiveness, repent, turn in faith to him, ask him to take control of our life and lead us we are born again. He saves us. Jacob was saved e from physical death. Coming to faith in Christ will save us from spiritual death and eternal death.

God will also give us a new name, meaning he will change our character. God will give us the privilege of joining with him and his work, being involved in his plan to bring salvation to all peoples of the earth. And most importantly, God will be our God. We can have an intimate relationship with him, walk with him, trust him, follow him. As we close in prayer, let's remember the trues that we have seen so far in scripture today. And as we pray, we will pray that these truths be a reality in our lives.