

Questions for Small Group or Individual Study/Reflection
Unlocking the Old Testament Sermon Series
Genesis 25:21-35:29ⁱ ~ “The Life of Jacob”
“Faith Reborn” – Jacob Wrestles with God ~ Sermon for June 7, 2009

As you’ve taken time to read the Bible, how many times have you come across these powerful words, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob”? (See also, Genesis 26:24; 28:13; 31:42; 32:9) Jacob’s descendants became the 12 tribes of Israel. From the time we are introduced to Jacob in the Book of Genesis, however (even before his birth!), he is struggling/jostling with Esau within the womb and then he is born holding on to Esau’s heel! Jacob’s name means, “He cheats” or “(He who) takes by the heel”. We learn in the Jacob story that he steals, through sly and dishonest means, Esau’s birthright and later, even Esau’s blessing from their father, Isaac. As we look specifically in the sermon at the point in Jacob’s life when all seems lost—he knows of God’s promises for he and his descendants, but he struggles to believe them. Jacob is living in fear and he feels all alone. And then comes the night when Jacob wrestles with God. After Jacob physically struggles with God and received a new name with the Lord’s blessing, he was ready to reconcile with his brother Esau.

1. Have you ever gone to your brother or sister for help only to be taken advantage of? Have you ever taken advantage of a family member who came to you in a vulnerable state? What was the birthright which Jacob coveted and Esau despised? (See Gen. 25:5; 21-34; Hebrews 12:16-17)
2. Read Genesis 27:1-40; then vv. 41-46. These last six verses really “set” the context for the sermon which focuses on Jacob’s “crisis of faith” in Genesis 32. If there was ever any doubt about Jacob’s integrity in stealing the blessings from Isaac, what do the actions of the people here tell you? Who else is now implicated?
3. Turning our focus now to Genesis 32, Jacob is on his way “home” after being gone 20 years. Why is he acting fearful/nervous? What helps you overcome fear in your life? How do you feel about the way Jacob prepared to meet Esau?
4. Are the angels he meets (v.1) the result of going in faith? Or the reason for faith?
5. Why do you think Jacob chooses to be alone on the eve of Esau’s arrival? What might God be trying to teach Jacob by wrestling with him? In what sense does this story summarize Jacob’s life? What does Jacob becoming “Israel” mean?
6. What are you wrestling with right now? And/Or where are you in your “wrestling match” with God? Israel means “he struggles with God”. What name might God give you?

7. Personal Application – Prayer focus for the week:

Additional Scripture references: Take some time this week to read through Genesis 25-36. Also, see Acts 9:1-31; 13:9 (Saul/Paul’s conversion) and Romans 9:10-16.

ⁱ Through his father, Isaac’s death. Jacob’s life story continues through the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50 until his death is recorded in Genesis 49:33.