

## THE 10 MOST INFAMOUS FAMILY INHERITANCE FEUDS

Last week I came across an article that caught my eye. The title of the article was “*The Ten Most Infamous Family Inheritance Feuds.*”<sup>1</sup> If as the old adage maintains, “Nothing is certain but death and taxes”, perhaps a third certainty should be added to the list in our day: “Nothing is certain but death and taxes AND court fights between heirs over how the family inheritance should be divided” (especially where a great deal of money is at stake).

### J. Howard Marshall

Among the more notable in our own day is the ongoing battle over the \$1.6 billion estate of the late J. Howard Marshall. Marshall as you may recall was the oil tycoon who in 1994 at the age of 89 years old married Anna Nicole Smith, the former stripper of Playboy fame, who was a mere 62 years his junior.

Sadly the marriage ended after 14 months of wedded bliss when Marshall died. Anna Nicole Smith soon learned that her husband’s will left the bulk of the estate to his son, E. Pierce Marshall. The grieving widow promptly sued, claiming that her “beloved” husband had promised to leave her half of his immense fortune (I’ll bet he did).

To complicate legal matters even more, Anna Nicole Smith also died in 2007. The case is presently before the U.S. Supreme Court for the second time since 2006.

### Leona Helmsley

Then there was Leona Helmsley who died in 2007 leaving behind an estate valued at a mere \$4 billion. In her will Helmsley requested that the majority of her money go to charity, including animal welfare programs. Smaller amounts were set aside for various relatives.

The shocker was that Helmsley left a cool \$12 million to her 8-year-old dog, but nothing for two of her grandchildren for reasons she said “are known to them.”

Not long after the terms of the will became known there were so many death threats against Helmsley’s dog that \$100,000 per year had to be spent on security to protect the dog.

A judge later (2008) reduced the dog’s inheritance from \$12 million to \$2 million, awarded the two grandchildren \$6 million, and the remainder was given to charity.

### John Seward Johnson

John Seward Johnson I, co-founder of Johnson & Johnson, died in 1983 leaving almost all his wealth to his third wife, Barbara Piasecka, a former maid and “only” 42 years younger than he. So it really was no shock when Johnson’s children contested the will. Three years and \$10 million in legal fees later, the court found Johnson was not mentally competent when he signed his will and awarded his children \$160 million.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://xfinity.comcast.net/finance/forwhatistworth/7698718/the10mostinfamousfamilyinhertiancefeuds...6/8/2011>

## James Brown

And the list would not be complete without James Brown – the Godfather of Soul who in 2006, died leaving an estate of some \$100 million. Brown’s will indicated his money was to be divided between two trusts: one for the education of his grandchildren and one for the education of needy children in Georgia and South Carolina. Brown’s will also made the specific point that his failure to provide for any of his other relatives is “intentional and not occasioned by accident or mistake.”

Brown’s wife and children challenged the will in court and were awarded half of his fortune.

The decision however was recently challenged in court by a record producer (Jacque Hollander) who apparently helped Brown set up the original trusts and who (“*Why I’m shocked!*”), now believes that he should be in control of the monies he helped the Godfather set aside in the trust for needy children. (Can’t you just feel his pain?)

## THE FAMILY INHERITANCE FEUD OF THE AGES

That brings us to the long brewing family inheritance feud between Jacob and his older brother Esau. It has been 20 long years since Jacob left home. His hurried departure was anything but a Norman Rockwell scene – more like a bad soap opera on T.V. There were no farewell parties, presents, or prolonged goodbyes expressing sorrow – nothing of the sort. Jacob had to “high tail” it out of town with only what he could carry on his back, and worse with the very real possibility that he might never return home or see his parents ever again.

Jacob was leaving under duress – and for good reason. He had lied to his elderly, virtually blind father Isaac and tricked him into rewriting his will. And in so doing, Jacob managed for the second time to cheat his own brother Esau – this time out of the lion’s share of the family inheritance. In fact, Esau is so upset over the affair that he threatens to kill Jacob if he ever shows his face in town again.

Jacob’s mother (who concocted the swindle), wisely sends her “favorite” albeit wayward son away with the promise that she will write when Esau cooled down and it was once again safe for Jacob to return home.

*No such word ever came!*

## TWENTY YEARS LATER

It is now twenty years later, when God turns everything in Jacob’s life upside down and tells Jacob it is time to return home and face the music (Gen. 31:3). Jacob is understandably terrified at the idea, for as far as Jacob knows his brother still wants to kill him – even after all these years. Yet despite his fears, Jacob obeys what God is asking of him, packs up his belongings, and begins the arduous journey of moving his family and possessions, heading for home and the unknown.

And part of that unknown is a meeting Jacob is about to have – not with Esau but with God. God is going to get right up in Jacob’s face as it were – grab him by the scruff of the neck, throw him to the ground and not let him go until they get some things settled.

And while it is obvious that Jacob wants God to “bless” him (32:26) by changing his immediate situation (namely Esau), God is more far interested in “blessing” Jacob by changing Jacob’s heart.

Jacob is about to be changed by God – sounds like fun doesn’t it? You know the old adage: the only person who likes change is a baby with a dirty diaper, and even they fight you when you try to change it. Jacob is about to be changed by God.

And since this God of the Bible is the same yesterday, today, and forever *He is also the God who is more interested in changing us than He is in changing our situation.*

## **I. THE GOD WHO IS MORE INTERESTED IN CHANGING US THAN HE IS IN CHANGING OUR SITUATION (22-25)**

### **A. JACOB’S PLANS FOR THE NIGHT (22-23)**

At some point Jacob’s large entourage reaches the river Jabbok (which in Hebrew ironically sounds like the word for ‘wrestle’). As he prepares to ford the river Jacob receives word (Gen. 32:6) that his brother Esau – his big, hairy brother Esau – the one with the short fuse, huge biceps and very long memory – is headed in his direction with an armed militia of 400 men. And based on that information Jacob now knows that Esau’s “welcoming party” will meet up with him some time tomorrow.

#### **RUN FOREST, RUN!**

To Jacob’s credit he doesn’t try to run away from Esau. He could have turned around in the hope that his father-in-law, good old Uncle Laban might have a change of heart and take him back. It would require eating a little humble pie to be sure, but at least his family would be safe.

But Jacob doesn’t run away from his looming problems or his less than stellar, ignominious past. And given Jacob’s long track record of evading responsibility for his actions, as well as his well earned reputation as someone who if he had the chance would hustle his own grandmother out of her social security check, it does make you wonder why. Why didn’t Jacob run?

#### **MAX LUCADO**

Max Lucado<sup>2</sup> answers the question this way, *“Maybe he was sick of running. Or maybe he was tired of looking at the shady character he saw every morning in the mirror. Or maybe he simply knew that he’d dealt from the bottom of the deck one too many times. Whatever the motivation, it was enough to cause him to come out of the shadows, cross Jabbok Creek alone, and face the facts.”*

#### **HOW ABOUT YOU?**

How about you? Are you tired as well? Tired enough to stop running, Tired of avoiding a good, hard look at yourself in the mirror, Tired enough to face the facts, and the music? Tired perhaps of running from God?

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<sup>2</sup> Lucado, Max. *God Came Near*; Multnomah Press, p. 148.

## **FINAL ARRANGEMENTS**

Jacob now makes what he feels are all the appropriate, prudent and necessary arrangements in preparation for tomorrow's day of truth with Esau. He sends his family and possessions across the river under cover of darkness (Gen. 32: 22-23), but for some unknown reason he hesitates and remains behind.

Whether Jacob intended to join the rest of his family shortly is not clear. What we are told in Scripture is that "*Jacob was left alone*" (Gen. 32:24). "*So Jacob was left all alone.*"

Jacob finds himself all alone with nothing but his disturbing thoughts to keep him company – or so he thinks. This is exactly where God wants him – with nowhere to run – nowhere to hide – no one to rely on – AND WHERE THE REAL STRUGGLE BEGINS.

## **B. GOD'S SURPRISE PLANS FOR JACOB THAT NIGHT (24)**

### **THE IRONY**

The irony is that Jacob has planned for every foreseeable possibility but one. While he is frantically making plans to meet his brother Esau, Jacob never in his wildest imagination plans on meeting God.

But God is planning on meeting with Jacob tonight. God in his amazing grace has plans to meet with his wayward child. God is planning to pay a surprise visit to Jacob.

### **GOMER PYLE**

As a child I used to love watching a television show called *Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C.* (played by Jim Nabors). Pyle was a loveable Marine private whose bumbling antics would constantly drive his hard-nosed drill instructor Sgt. Vince Carter (Frank Sutton) absolutely bonkers. And in almost every episode show you knew that sooner or later Gomer would utter his trademark line, "*Surprise, surprise, surprise!*"

### **SURPRISE, SURPRISE, SURPRISE!**

Years ago I decided that I would surprise my wife on our anniversary. I made all the reservations, packed a couple of suitcases, and made plans for the two of us to drive to Windsor, Ontario, take the train to Toronto, spend the weekend and see the Phantom of the Opera. I even came up with a plausible explanation for getting my wife in the car that night.

I was so proud of myself – that is until we reached the tunnel along the river in downtown Detroit. I pulled the car up to the immigration / customs check point and prepared to answer the usual questions about citizenship, etc; something I had done many times over the years while visiting my relatives in the land that brought us Tim Horton's.

Everything was going according to my masterful plan until the customs officer asked me our destination. I told him we were planning on taking the train from Windsor to Toronto. At which point my beloved involuntarily blurted out "*NO WE AREN'T!*" (Then came the smack.)

I closed my eyes, sighed and prepared to be detained – for a long time. But to my surprise, the officer just looked at me, grinned like a Cheshire cat, and said “*Get out of here!*” He apparently thought I was sneaking away with my girlfriend or something. And while he was greatly amused by the whole affair (excuse the pun), my beloved didn’t see things quite the same way. Surprise, surprise, surprise!

## **GOD’S SURPRISE VISITS IN THE BIBLE**

God is about to pay a surprise visit to Jacob – not as strange as it might seem.

When Abraham and Sarah had waited almost twenty five years for the child God had promised to give them, three strangers show up unexpectedly on their doorstep one afternoon (Gen. 18). One of them, speaking for God himself says, “*Start decorating the nursery. You are about to hear the pitter patter of little feet.*” Surprise, surprise, surprise!

When Moses had been living with forty years of regrets out in the wilderness (Ex. 3), he sees a strange sight – a bush burning but not being burned up in the process. Moses goes over to look at this strange sight and is dumbfounded when he hears a voice calling him from within the bush. The voice, it turns out, is God’s. “*Surprise! You have won an all expense paid trip to Egypt!* God told him.” Moses’ life was never the same and the rest as they say is history. A surprise visit from God.

And when Elijah was perhaps at the lowest point in his life (1 Kings 19), he found himself a fugitive from the law with a price on his head and took refuge in a mountain cave for the night. While huddled in that cave convinced his life would soon be over – that there was no hope – a terrifying storm arose, followed by an earthquake, and then a raging forest fire. And after it was all over Elijah heard a voice – a gentle whisper. God paid Elijah a visit. It was the voice of God reminding his weary servant that all was not lost, that in fact God still had a remnant of 7,000 faithful believers “*whose knees have not bowed down to Baal*” (1 Ki. 19:18). Surprise!

## **JUST WHO IS THIS MASKED MAN ANYWAY?**

Tonight, God is planning to make a surprise visit to Jacob – one for which Jacob is totally unaware and woefully unprepared. For what Jacob can’t see in the darkness is that there is someone standing silently in the shadows. Out where things go bump in the night – an unseen mystery assailant waits. Someone (Esau or one of his hired hairy goons perhaps?) is lurking, seemingly intent on taking Jacob’s life.

All we are told is that he is a man, who under the cover of darkness attacks Jacob and forcibly wrestles him to the ground. Strikingly, the text doesn’t say Jacob wrestled with the man, but that the man wrestled with Jacob. This mystery visitor has unfinished business to take care of with Jacob. And he is not going to leave until he accomplishes what he has set out to achieve – not change Jacob’s situation but Jacob’s heart. It is the wrestling match of Jacob’s life – a hard fought match – one that will go on all night long until daybreak.

And as you and I often tend to do, Jacob initially thinks he is wrestling with flesh and blood. Like us, Jacob has no clue in the beginning as to the true identity of his opponent. And like the proverbial question asked in every episode of the Lone Ranger series years ago – one has to wonder “*Just who is this masked man anyway?*”

## **A PARADOX WRAPPED IN A MYSTERY INSIDE AN ENIGMA**

His actions and true identity are a paradox wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. On the surface it seems as if Jacob's opponent is unable to overpower Jacob – that Jacob might come out on top as he always has – that somehow Jacob just might 'win'. And yet all this masked wrestler has to do is simply take his finger and touch Jacob's hip (or perhaps groin area) and Jacob is rendered totally powerless, unable to resist, clinging for dear life. That one touch is designed to make it absolutely clear to Jacob that whoever this 'man' is, he can disable and do with Jacob as he desires – whenever he desires.

This mystery man won't reveal his own name or identity to Jacob, but he has no qualms about changing Jacob's name (something by the way that God does throughout the Bible to signify a change of heart or character or purpose). He is called a "man" at the beginning of the match, but by dawn's early light Jacob knows beyond the shadow of a doubt that this "man" is far more than just a 'man'.

And what scares Jacob more than anything is the realization that his wrestling partner is supernatural – that his assailant represents himself and speaks as if he were God Himself.

## **IF ONLY WE HAD THE TIME**

Speculation about the true identity of this 'man', and/or the nature of what is actually happening in the darkness is legion.

Some see this account as simply a metaphor to describe Jacob's wrestling with God in prayer. Others believe the 'man' is actually an angel or messenger of God (see Hosea 12:4-5). There are those who think that Jacob is wrestling with the one known in the O.T. as The angel of the LORD. And still others suggest that this 'man' is perhaps a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ Himself.

And lest you find that idea so far out in "left field" as to be laughable, let me remind you that the message of the gospel of grace essentially revolves around the truthfulness of the Scripture's claim that somehow in the person of Jesus Christ – God was with us in human flesh (Emmanuel).

## **BOTTOM LINE...**

This is a wrestling match that brings Jacob face to face with God Himself; a fact that before the night is over Jacob himself eventually realizes and later publically acknowledges when he calls the place "Peniel" - the face of God (Gen. 32:30a). Why? Because as he tells his family, "*It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared*" (Gen. 32:30b). Jacob will meet God on this night – the God of the Bible.

Not necessarily the God that Jacob (or we) might like him to be. But the God, who Jacob learns *is more interested in changing us than he is in changing our situation.*

## **PREPARING OUR HEARTS TO MEET GOD**

Let me ask you a question. Last night, before turning in for the night, did you think about preparing to meet God today in worship? This morning in all your preparations before leaving home, was preparing your heart to meet with God part of your routine? More importantly, did you consider the possibility that God might be

planning to meet with you? That God in his grace would make a surprise visit to you today? That God would surprise all of us by making His presence known this morning? Would that not be wonderful?

Of course, the uncomfortable truth is that far too often you and I come to church prepared to meet with everyone – except God. We come without even thinking to pray before the start of worship, pleading with God to be merciful and surprise us with a fresh sense of His presence.

Want to transform your worship experience this morning? A good place to start is by asking God to surprise you – to walk *not* through the door of this building but through the door of your soul.

## **WE NOW RETURN TO OUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED WRESTLING MATCH**

In the morning, Jacob is planning to meet with Esau – but not with God. Jacob’s entire focus is on meeting Esau, all the while oblivious to the reality that God is planning to meet with him first. God is going to pay his struggling, wayward child a surprise visit – a terrifying, but transforming visit – one that changes Jacob forever.

And that is good news, for if God will do that for a con artist and river boat gambler like Jacob, then God can and will do that for you or me. If God was not reluctant to get his hands dirty and wrestle in the mud with Jacob, then God has no hesitation with wrestling any of us to the ground this morning.

*I must warn you though, the God of the Bible is not only...*

### **I. THE GOD WHO IS MORE INTERESTED IN CHANGING US THAT HE IS IN CHANGING OUR SITUATION (22-24)**

*But the God of the Bible is also...*

### **II. THE GOD WHO IN LOVE BREAKS US IN ORDER TO BLESS US (25-29)**

#### **A. JACOB’S REALIZATION AND ONLY DESIRE**

#### **ALL NIGHT LONG**

When I was in high school I wrestled at the 95 pound weight class. Our matches consisted of 3 – 2 minute periods, or 6 minutes in total. Jacob’s wrestling match is a marathon by comparison. Jacob and his mystery opponent go at it all night long – right up until daybreak and the first traces of sunlight begin to peek out above the horizon.

Why does the match go on so long? Again, the paradox is that we are told the man saw (realized, perceived) that he could not overpower Jacob, seemingly pleads for Jacob to let him go – and yet all he has to do is touch Jacob’s hip socket to dislocate it and render Jacob helpless. What are we to make of all this?

## COOL HAND JACOB

In 1967 the movie *Cool Hand Luke* (starring Paul Newman and George Kennedy) hit the silver screen. Early in the flick Luke gets himself in trouble with the Law and finds himself doing hard time as part of a chain gang.

There is a brutal scene in the movie, a fight between Luke (Newman) and the defacto leader of the group known as Dragline (Kennedy) – a boxing match to be exact. It is a boxing match however where the outcome is never in doubt. The outcome is certain before the first punch is thrown – not because the fight is ‘fixed’ but because George Kennedy is about twice the size and weight of Paul Newman. The match resembled a bantam or feather weight boxer going up against a heavy weight.

Yet, despite the over whelming odds Luke will not give in, will not give up, will not quit, or ever admit he is beat – even when beaten badly. Despite the fact that his opponent repeatedly pummels Luke, knocking him to the ground – over and over again, Cool Hand Luke still manages to get up each and every time. Even though bloodied and repeatedly urged by the other men in the crowd not to get back up – Luke simply will not cry ‘uncle’ or give up.

Eventually Luke’s opponent, even though he could have finished the fight, simply walks away. Why? Not because he couldn’t beat Luke – but in order to win he would have had to seriously harm or even kill Luke. And Luke’s opponent didn’t want to win the fight at that expense. (As it turns out he actually liked Luke.) So he “lets” Luke “win”.

## JACOB FINALLY MEETS HIS MATCH

So when Jacob’s opponent says “*Let me go.*” (Gen. 32:26), it is not really “*Oh, please let me go*”, but rather “*Look, it’s almost morning. We’ve been at this all night. Don’t you think it’s about time that you give this up? Do you not get it yet, Jacob – you can’t win this one.*”

The point seems to be that Jacob has finally met his match. He has struggled all his life and prevailed over every obstacle he ever encountered. He wrestled first with his brother Esau, then his father Isaac, then his father-in-law Laban and bested them all. But now, Jacob has met someone he can’t get the better of – someone who won’t let him have his own self-centered way. He is wrestling with God and God’s will for Jacob’s life. Better said it is God who gets in Jacob’s face so to speak, and is wrestling with him. Yet, Jacob foolishly will not give in or give up. Even though beaten he clings, refusing to let go.

## YOU JUST CAN’T HELP BUT ADMIRE THE GUY

Now there is an admirable aspect to Jacob’s character. It’s called tenacity or perseverance or grit. When the going gets tough, the tough get going. Yet the downside is that there comes a point in everyone’s life when the better part of wisdom is to let it go, to give it a rest, to get over it, to move on with your life, to cut those you live with and love you some slack.

Sooner or later you must ask yourself, beloved, “*Do I want this to be resolved – to be over? Or do I just want to keep stirring the pot forever?*” Like the sick man at the pool of Bethesda Jesus asks us the similar question this morning, “*Do you want to get well?*” (John 5:6).

## **THAT TIME HAS NOW COME**

That time has now come for Jacob. It is time for him to give it up, to submit his will to God's, to humble himself before the God who is the only source of all true blessing, the God who holds Jacob's destiny in his hands. How about you? Is it time?

Jacob has finally met his match. He is a broken man. So now all he can do is cling to God for dear life, asking God's covenant blessings on his life. *"I will not let you go unless you bless me"* (Gen. 32:26). He is clinging to the God of the Bible – the God who breaks us in order to bless us.

## **GOD'S PURPOSE**

He is the God who humbles us, not to punish but to bless. He is the God who brings us to our knees – not because of His ego, but yours / mine. He is the God who treats us in such a manner, not to force us to cry 'uncle', but so we will cry out *"Abba, Father"*.

So we will learn to approach God and say, *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed is your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done..."* (Mt. 6:9). So you and I will learn to pray as Jesus did in the garden, *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done"* (Lk. 22:42).

He is the God who breaks us in order to bless us – a blessing that only comes as we learn to cling tenaciously to Him and Him alone – as we cling to God as if our very lives depend upon it – for they surely do.

Whether Jacob is asking God to spare his life (Gen. 32:11), or to give him the blessings of God's covenant promised to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac before him, or asking for some assurance / blessing from God that he is doing the right thing in returning home, or asking for some assurance everything will turn out all right, (i.e. "Please God bless this mess."), or all of the above is unclear.

What is crystal clear is that Jacob knows if he is to receive any blessing from God, it will be by grace and grace alone – by grace through faith that clings to God alone – by clinging to grace alone by faith alone in Christ alone.

But first there is some unfinished business God wants to address.

## **B. GOD'S PENETRATING QUESTION AND GRACIOUS GIFT**

### **WHO'S YOUR DADDY?**

The man doesn't bless Jacob as he requested – at least not yet. Instead he asks Jacob a penetrating question. *"What is your name, son?"* *"My name is Jacob"*, he answered (Gen. 32:27). Literally Jacob's name means 'he who grasps at the heel.' That is, 'one who trips others up.' Figuratively speaking, one who deceives people.

And with that answer Jacob is forced to call himself what he really is. The question is designed to force Jacob to face the truth of what God has always known him to be (and yet loved him still).

Almost sounds like an A.A. meeting... My name is Jacob and I am a very self-centered, self-sufficient, dishonest, deceitful man. My name is Jacob and I am a fraud.

## **WE HAVE ALL MET PEOPLE**

We have all met people (other people of course) who are very proud of the fact that they don't need anyone or anything. Such folks have bought into the foolish fallacy that they are quite capable, thank-you, of handling whatever life may throw at them.

I am woman hear me roar. I am a self-made man. I am the captain of my fate. I did it my way as Frank Sinatra used to boast.

Perhaps you are one of them. And perhaps this morning God is asking you, "*What is your name?*" What are you going to tell Him? How you answer His question has far reaching consequences – both for you as well as those around you.

Perhaps you are here and consider yourself a Christian – you sincerely believe in Jesus but are still trying to manipulate your own life. You make your own plans and own arrangements, ask God to "bless" them – and then wonder why you are *sooo...* frustrated.

What are you wrestling with this morning? Perhaps what is be troubling you at this moment is that it is God who is wrestling with you – and asking you the same question, "*My child, what is your name?*"

## **GOD'S PURPOSE?**

Why does God force Jacob (and us) to do such a thing? Is it because God is the neighborhood bully who gets his kicks out of stealing our lunch money and watching us grovel in the dust? Not at all!

It is because God knows that honest confession, an admission of who and what we are from His perspective is essential. It is because confession is essential *if* we are to come clean and be cleansed from sin.

*"For if we confess our sin, He (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 Jn. 1:8-9).

Confession, in other words, is essential if we are to be changed by God. Being changed from *who we are* into the person God *wants us to become* – person He created us to be in the beginning. Being changed from *what we do* and have done to ourselves into what God *wants to do* to us and for us and in us by His Spirit.

Confession is the first step in being changed from a self-centered, self-sufficient sinner into a humble, dependent seeker of God and His best for us – in this life and the life to come.

As Jacob at this very moment is learning, confession is the key to his being blessed by God. Blessing that Jacob is now understanding comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ – the God-man to whom he and we must cling.

## **A NEW MAN WITH A NEW NAME**

*“Your name will no longer be Jacob but Israel for you have struggled with God and men and prevailed”*  
(Gen. 32:28).

Your name will no longer be Jacob but Israel. God in essence says I know exactly what you are. I know you better than you know yourself. And I still love you dearly. But I also love you enough to know that for me to bless you I need to change you – make you a different man (or woman) – the person I created you to be.

Yes, you are Jacob. You are what you are. But I am giving you a new name – Israel – one who struggles with God and prevails. One who prevails by clinging to Me and looking to Me alone to do for you what you can’t do for yourself – namely change yourself. You’ve tried. Will today the day when you will finally quit?

Perhaps God is saying the same thing to you. I want to make you a new person – with a new name, a new heart, a new character. Less and less a person who prevails by being crafty, to one who more and more prevails by surrendering – by clinging to Me and looking to Me as the source of your true blessing.

God now gives to Jacob His blessings of a new name, a new heart, and a new power. And it is all received as a gracious gift from God. All that Jacob has been striving to achieve by his own skill, strength, etc. he now receives by clinging to God and receiving it as a gift from His gracious hand.

## **REASSURING GRACE**

Back in verse 26 Jacob asked to be blessed by God. Now here in verse 29, comes God’s answer – *“He blessed him there.”* God gives Jacob the assurance he is pleading for.

Notice that the blessing has nothing to do with changing Jacob’s external circumstances – Jacob will have to leave the problem of Esau in God’s hands for now. But the blessing of God has everything to do with God changing Jacob’s heart. The blessing comes as a result of being broken by God:

**I. The God who is more interested in changing us than in changing our circumstances.**

**II. The God who in His mercy and grace breaks us in order to bless us.**

*and lastly...*

**III. The God who teaches us to face the future in humble reliance upon Him.**

### III. THE GOD WHO TEACHES US TO FACE THE FUTURE IN HUMBLE RELIANCE UPON HIM (32: 30-32)

#### A. JACOB'S GRATITUDE FOR HIS PAINFUL YET PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

##### GRATEFUL TO BE WALKING WITH A LIMP

When Jacob arrives in camp early that next morning he is limping. But Jacob isn't complaining. In fact he is grateful to God for His grace. How do we know that? Well, notice Jacob's own words, "*I saw God face to face and was spared*" (Gen. 32:30).

God didn't have to spare me but He did. God didn't have to save me but He did. God didn't have to forgive me but He did. God didn't have to cleanse me but He did. God didn't have to change my heart but He did. God didn't have to turn my life around, but He did. God didn't have to give me a new name – child of God, child of the Covenant, but He did. And I am so glad that He did – and does. How about you?

##### ETERNALLY GRATEFUL TO THE HOUND OF HEAVEN

Jacob is eternally grateful to God for being *The Hound of Heaven*,<sup>3</sup> for tenaciously tracking him down and accosting Him – as painful as the experience has been. He is grateful for God's willingness to get right in his face, for what the writer to the Hebrews calls God's loving discipline (Heb. 12:4-13). He is grateful because the experience has taught him his need to constantly lean on, rely upon, count on, and cling to God – and God alone. Despite his limp, Jacob feels amazingly blessed by God.

##### MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT

Jacob is grateful because as the apostle Paul years later would also learn...

*"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong"* (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

##### CROSSING THE RIVER – LIMPING INTO THE PROMISED LAND

As Jacob crosses the river and limps into camp on that morning, Jacob is grateful.

For despite his limp, Jacob has moved from being confronted by God – to clinging to God – to counting on God to do for him what he can never do for himself. Despite his limp, Jacob is now walking by faith in humble reliance upon his God. Despite his limp, Jacob understands that by being made lame he has been made whole. By being humbled he has been healed.

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<sup>3</sup> Thompson, Francis. "The Hound of Heaven"

## **PENIEL**

And for that Jacob is grateful – so grateful he names the place Peniel – the face of God. He names the place Peniel, not only as a reminder to himself but also as a testimony both to those who are watching him cross the Jordan River and enter into the Promised land, as well as a testimony to future generations who will need to learn the same lessons of faith

This is where I met God, where I was confronted by God. This is where I met God, where I was confronted by God. Have I told you lately about the day I was changed by God – learned to cling to God? Jacob named the place Peniel because that is where he learned how to walk by faith with a limp – a limp that is a constant reminder of God’s amazing grace.

## **[THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE**

Ron Dunn in his book, *When Heaven Is Silent*<sup>4</sup> describes the scene this way....

Jacob’s family watches him limping toward camp. He looks worn out, his clothes are muddy and torn, yet there is something different about him – he glows with an inner light. As Jacob approaches everyone demands to know what has terrible thing has happened to him and are dumbfounded by his response when he tells them, “*I got blessed last night.*” And as everyone gathers their belongings for the day’s journey you can hear them murmuring among themselves, “*Doesn’t look like any victorious Christian I’ve ever seen.*”

## **BEING CONFRONTED, CHANGED, AND CLINGING BY FAITH TO GOD**

How about you? You may have not been planning on running into God this morning but He has been planning on running into you.

Have you ever had a personal face to face with the God of the Bible – The Hound of Heaven who tenaciously tracks down his wayward children? Have you ever truly experienced what Jesus called being born again – born from above – a new birth that brings with it a new name, a new nature, a new life, and a new hope as you learn to cling to God by faith in Jesus Christ? Are you clinging to and counting upon Jesus and Jesus alone for the forgiveness of your sins and the promised hope of a new life?

## **PERHAPS – JUST PERHAPS ...**

Perhaps you have either been trying to run from Him or trying to hold him at bay as long as you can? If so, then perhaps it is time to stop fighting Him and start asking Him to forgive you – to give you a new name, a new heart, a new life – Jesus called it being born again – born by His Spirit – born from above

Perhaps God has put His finger upon something the two of you need to get settled this morning – once and for all?

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<sup>4</sup> Dunn, Ronald. *When Heaven Is Silent*; Thomas Nelson Publishers, p. 48.

Or Perhaps you are here and you walk with a limp. You are limping and wondering how God could do or allow such a thing to enter your life. Perhaps it is time for a different approach to what God has allowed – to what you don't understand. Perhaps it is time to grab hold of God and the truth that the very thing that has entered your life and brought such heartache, when left in God's hands, can become the very experience He has designed to teach you how to cling more dearly to Him – the very instrument that will change your heart and make you into the kind of person you have always wanted to be – but would never ever become otherwise – the kind of person God created you to become in the first place?

### **TODAY IS THE DAY**

Today can be a landmark day in your life – a day when you leave this place with God's mark upon your life.

Today is the day to walk out of here with a limp but a song of great joy in your heart, facing the future in humble reliance upon Jesus and Him alone.

Today is the hour of grace when your walk will never be the same.

Today is the day to wrestle with God, cling to Him, and “find him to be more than you bargained for.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Patterson, Ben. *Deepening Your Conversation With God*; Bethany House Publishers, p. 133.