

The Story Begins



DailyLife
Five Oaks Church

Week 11: November 19–25, 2016

Day 1

November 21



Pray / Confess your fears to our Almighty God.

FEAR AND ANXIETY are remedied by greater reliance on God.

Fear and anxiety are two of the devil's greatest tools for keeping us from living the life and accomplishing the purposes that God has planned for us. They have a way of completely taking over our thoughts and actions to the point where all we're doing is worrying and finding ways to play it safe. We see this in the life of Jacob as he prepares to meet his brother, Esau, the man he cheated out of his inheritance.

Like Jacob, we, as followers of Jesus Christ, know in our heads that we serve an all-powerful and loving God, a God who is perfectly reliable and only wants what is best for us. We may even pray to God for protection and relief. But when our behavior shows that we still need to control the situation and to protect ourselves and our stuff, we demonstrate that our hearts and minds still do not truly believe God is enough. More transformation is required.



Read / Genesis 32:1–23



Reflect / Choose one or more of the following for reflection.

Identify one aspect of your life where you struggle to be completely reliant on God. Reflect for a few minutes on why that area is problematic for you, and identify one concrete step you can take to reduce your dependence on self and increase your dependence on God.

Do you believe God is completely reliable? If you said yes, take a few minutes to reflect on why you believe that. It's a critical part of your story that you should be prepared to tell. If you said no, there could be many reasons for that. Take a few minutes to articulate why you cannot completely trust God. Take the courageous step to bring those thoughts and ideas before God, and possibly a trusted Christian friend, and ask for help.

How is your level of reliance on God part of your witness to those whom God has placed in your sphere of influence?

Day 2

November 22



Pray / Thank God for intervening and transforming your life.

GOD IS A God of second chances (and third and fourth and so on).

Struggle, deception, and selfishness best describe Jacob's life to this point. He had deceived his father and brother, was forced to flee his family, and was deceived by Laban after many years of labor. Despite all that, God still had big plans for Jacob. God had Jacob just where he wanted him. Jacob was in need of a transformation that would allow him to accomplish everything God had planned for him, and God knew exactly how to bring that about.

It's beyond our ability to fully comprehend this, but like Jacob, God truly has a plan for every person. Every human was created in God's image, but because of sin, we cannot live out that plan without a transformation. God intervenes in each of our lives to bring about that transformation, but it's up to us to recognize and respond as Jacob did: "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (verse 26).



Read / Genesis 32:24–32



Reflect / Choose one or more of the following for reflection.

What circumstances and people has God used to intervene in your life to bring about transformation? How have you responded?

What does the fact that God initiated the wrestling match with Jacob tell you about God? How does it give you hope for your life and for the world that we live in?

Why does God require that we respond to his interventions rather than just forcing us down the path he desires?

Day 3

November 23



Pray / Ask God to help you be honest in all of your actions.

REAL TRANSFORMATION OFTEN starts with pain.

There are many things about this story of Jacob's wrestling match that raise questions: Was Jacob really wrestling with God? How is it possible he was winning? The story doesn't deal with those details, so they're not important. What we see is Jacob being drawn into his greatest weakness, believing that he could control the situation with his own strength and wisdom. Just when it seemed he would prevail, his opponent simply touched his hip socket and put it out of joint. In that moment of pain, Jacob realized he was dealing with someone greater than himself, and the transformation began.

Like Jacob, we are all sinners, and our instinct is to rely on our own strength. Our true purpose never will be realized until we begin to draw on the boundless strength of our almighty God. It may take some pain to make that real. Praise God that he loves us enough to make that happen.



Read / Genesis 32:24–31



Reflect / Choose one or more of the following for reflection.

How has God used pain (physical, mental, emotional) to reveal the insufficiency of self-reliance in your life?

How does the realization that God uses pain to bring about transformation impact your behavior when you suffer pain. How does it differentiate you from most of the world?

Recognizing that God is actively pursuing transformation in all humans, how can you support those in your sphere of influence who are suffering pain?

Day 4
November 24



Pray / Ask God to give you the confidence to be truly honest with him.

GODLY TRANSFORMATION MAKES everything about you new.

In our passage today, God confirms the blessing that he gave to Jacob as well as his new name, Israel. Through this blessing, Jacob is transformed and given a new identity, one of strength and honor, and a new clarity of purpose: to be a man whose family God ultimately will use to bring Jesus into the world to bring about the redemption of the world.

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord, we are transformed in a similar fashion, receiving a new identity and a new purpose. In the book of Ephesians, Paul tell us that we are no longer strangers or aliens, but saints and members of God's family. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians that we are a new creation. Our new purpose is clear as well: to love God above all and bring him glory, and to truly love the people around us, reflecting God's love and bringing about the same transformation in them.



Read / Genesis 35:9–12



Reflect / Choose one or more of the following for reflection.

How does your new identity in Jesus Christ change the way you think about your time here on earth?

If you haven't committed your life to Jesus Christ or experienced this transformation, Ephesians 2:19 classifies you as a stranger or alien. Reflect on the benefits of being a family member versus a stranger, or a citizen versus an alien. God wants you to be a member of his family and experience those benefits. Consider making that commitment today!

How are you living out the new purpose that God gives all followers of Jesus Christ? Second Corinthians 5:17–20 summarizes it well: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us.”

Day 5

November 25



Pray / Commit yourself and your family to serving God.

OUR LEVEL OF gratitude to God reveals our level of dependence on him.

Between his departure from Canaan and his return, Jacob encountered God, or an angel of God, no less than four times. These encounters were deeply impactful to Jacob. In each case we see Jacob acknowledging the significance of the event by giving a meaningful name to the site, in multiple cases making a sacrificial offering and a vow. God's presence and provision impacted Jacob, and he needed to respond with gratitude and thanksgiving.

God's blessings and interventions are as common and real today as ever, but it's easy for us to miss them in our busy, information-filled lives. Spending meaningful time with God each day is critical. That daily connection keeps God real and helps us more easily recognize his hand in everything, a recognition that breeds gratitude and increased dependence on Him.



Read / Genesis 35:13–15



Reflect | Choose one or more of the following for reflection.

When do you struggle most to recognize and incorporate the reality of God's presence into your daily activities? Pray about one concrete action you can take to change that.

How is open and regular gratitude to God a critical part of your witness?

Regularly recalling times when you clearly encountered God and his blessings in your life is a good way to keep your level of gratitude to God high—and increase your level of dependence on him. Take a few minutes to recall recent such situations and spend some time in prayer, acknowledging your dependence on him.

Portions of this study were adapted from The Gospel Project Chronological: The Story Begins, Vol. 1, Adult Personal Study Guide ESV (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Christian Resources, 2015). Used by permission.

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