

Study Guide

Series: Wrestling with God

Monday – Read Genesis 32:1-21. Laban had been a minor threat. Now a frightened Jacob was going to meet his twin Esau, who he perceived as a major threat. The first word he got was that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men—which didn't sound good! Jacob thought strategically, and sent gifts ahead in a way that might be psychologically and physically disarming to Esau. Verses 1-2 say Jacob received a deep sign of God's presence. By verse 7 he was in "fear and great distress." Does fear always show lack of faith, or is it a normal human reaction even with faith? (Don't forget Jesus in the garden - Luke 22:41-44.) When you feel frightened, what is it in your relationship with God that calms your fears? In this passage, for the first time, we see Jacob praying earnestly. In verse 10, he said, "I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant." How do you respond to this part of Jacob's prayer? Can you honestly pray that prayer, or do you believe God "owes you" all you have and more?

Tuesday – Read Genesis 32:22-32. Jacob sent his wives, his sons, his servants and his possessions across the river. When Jacob was alone "a man" wrestled with him until daylight. In the darkness, Jacob somehow knew this was not just a man, and asked, insistently, for a blessing. God gave him a new name, one that echoes even today—Israel. He left blessed and limping! Have you ever wrestled with God? If so, what led you to the wrestling? What was the outcome, and what marks of the struggle do you still carry with you? If not, what is your inner response to Jacob's story? What circumstances or inner forces do you believe might lead people of faith to wrestle with God?

Wednesday – Read Genesis 33:1-20. Jacob (now limping) met Esau. Esau was gracious beyond expectations—an early Biblical picture of God's grace. Jacob carefully kept calling Esau "lord," and himself "your servant." It probably showed both his spiritual growth in humility and his concern for safety in the face of his brother's might. Jacob found a place to settle, and built an altar to God. What signs do you find in this passage of ways that Jacob had grown during his twenty years of exile, and through wrestling with God? As you look back over your own life, what indicators can you see that God has been at work in you? Are there any areas in which Jacob's growth challenges you to follow his example?

Thursday – Read Genesis 35:1-15. God told Jacob to return to the place where he had his dream of the ladder into heaven. Jacob did, and cleansed his household of the "foreign gods" they had carried. He renewed the name Bethel (House of God) for the spot. God spoke with Jacob, and again (or this may reflect a separate tradition behind the story) changed Jacob's name to "Israel." It's been said, "God loves you as you are, but God loves you too much to leave you that way." God loved and led Jacob and his family while they had Laban's household gods with them, but in this passage they got rid of them. Do you have any "household gods"—any attitudes or practices God has been nudging you to change or get rid of? Will you do it?

Friday - Read Genesis 35:16-29. Rachel, Jacob's great love, died giving birth to Benjamin.

Jacob got to see his father Isaac just before Isaac's long, patriarchal life ended. After the years of division, it is a bright spot to read that "his sons Esau and Jacob buried him." Reconciliation is a key theme in Jacob's story. Esau once chose a wife because she would upset Isaac (Genesis 28:8-9). But in Genesis 35:16-29, he joined Jacob, the brother he'd once sworn to kill, to honor their father. What spiritual and emotional choices does it take to keep the past from blighting the present?