

RENAMED

Week 2 | Jacob to Israel | Teacher: Libin Abraham

Sermon Questions for 6.7.2026

OPENER

Have you ever tried to be someone you were not, just to fit in or be accepted? Most of us have been there. We wear different clothes, use different words, and perform different versions of ourselves depending on who is watching. But somewhere along the way, all that pretending leaves us exhausted and empty, unsure of who we actually are.

Jacob is one of the most relatable characters in all of Scripture because his entire life was shaped by that kind of striving. From the moment he grabbed his twin brother Esau's heel at birth, he was living into a name that meant "deceiver" and "heel-grabber." He spent decades chasing approval, grabbing what he could not earn, and running from the consequences. He had success, wealth, and family, but no peace.

Today's message invites us into the moment that changed everything for Jacob: a nighttime wrestling match with God that stripped away every pretense and left him with a new name, a new identity, and a limp that would remind him for the rest of his life that surrender, not striving, is how we receive God's truest blessing.

READ

Genesis 25:26 | Genesis 27:18-19 | Genesis 32:6-7 | Genesis 32:24-28 | Genesis 32:31 | Exodus 3:6

MAIN POINTS

1. Jacob Lived Into a Name That Was Never His True Identity

Jacob's name meant "heel-grabber," "supplanter," and "deceiver," and from the moment he was born, he lived into it. He stole his brother's birthright, dressed in Esau's clothes to deceive his blind father, and spent the next 20 years working for a father-in-law who cheated him at every turn. Through it all, what Jacob was really reaching for was his father Isaac's love and approval, the one thing no amount of grabbing could actually secure.

Comparison was at the root of Jacob's striving. He could not accept who God had made him to be because he was always measuring himself against Esau. When Isaac asked "Who are you?" Jacob answered with the name of his brother. And though he got the blessing that day, he would spend the next two decades enslaved to fear and manipulation, because God cannot truly bless who we pretend to be.

2. God Meets Us in Our Struggle

When Jacob is finally heading home after 20 years, he is terrified. Esau is reportedly approaching with 400 men. Jacob does what Jacob always does: he schemes, sends elaborate gifts, and makes arrangements to soften his brother's anger. But then something unexpected happens. Alone at the river Jabbok, Jacob encounters God in the form of a man, and they wrestle through the night.

The location was no accident. In the original Hebrew, the names Jacob (Ya'aqov), the river Jabbok (Yabbok), and the word "wrestle" (ye'abeq) all share the same root sounds. This was the scripture's way of saying that this single night represented Jacob's entire life finally coming to a head. God did not send comfort or an angel with a gentle word. He met Jacob in the only way that would get his attention: in a struggle.

3. Transformation Begins Where Pretending Ends

After wrestling all night, God asks Jacob a question he had heard before: "What is your name?" Years earlier, Isaac asked the same question and Jacob answered, "I am Esau." But this time, Jacob answers honestly: "I am Jacob." In confessing his name, he was confessing everything it represented, the deception, the manipulation, the striving, the fear.

This moment of honest confession is where everything shifted. God renamed him Israel, which means "one who struggles with God" or "God prevails." Jacob did not prevail because he overpowered God. He prevailed because he finally stopped running and clung to him. Real blessing comes through surrender, not performance. The transformation we seek is often waiting on the other side of the struggle we have been avoiding.

4. God Does Not Erase Our Story; He Redeems It

Even after Jacob was renamed Israel, God continued to call himself "the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6). He did not retire the old name and pretend those years of failure never happened. He held onto them. He identifies himself with people who are unfinished, who are wrestling, who have failed and tried again.

The entire nation of Israel would carry this name and find hope in it because everyone could see themselves in Jacob. If God could choose a man like that, if he could stay faithful through all that failure and deception, then there was hope for all of them too. There is hope for us too. We do not have to get it together before God claims us. He meets us in the struggle, walks with us through the process, and says: I will always be your God.

ENGAGE WITH GOD IN A GROUP

1. Libin opened with a funny story about pretending to freestyle rap in Malayalam to fit in at school. When have you found yourself pretending to be someone you're not in order to feel accepted or belong somewhere?
2. Jacob's name literally meant "deceiver," and he spent his life living into it. How much do you think the labels others place on us shape the way we see ourselves? Have you ever had to fight against a negative label someone gave you?
3. Comparison is described as something that "kills contentment." Where in your life have you struggled most with comparing yourself to others? What has that done to your sense of identity?
4. Jacob was left alone before the most significant moment of his life. Libin said, "God often isolates us before he transforms us." Can you think of a time when a season of loneliness or stillness turned out to be where God was doing his deepest work in you?
5. When God asked Jacob "What is your name?" it was not for information but for confession. What do you think is the difference between admitting who we are to God versus continuing to perform or pretend in our relationship with him?
6. Jacob left the wrestling match with a limp. Libin said God sometimes "dislocates the thing we trusted in more than him." Has God ever removed or weakened something you were leaning on so that you would lean more fully on him? What was that like?
7. God continued to call himself "the God of Jacob" even after renaming him Israel. What does it mean to you personally that God identifies with people who are unfinished, struggling, and still in process?

BOTTOM LINE

The blessing we've been searching for is found not through striving to become someone else, but through honestly surrendering who we are to God and allowing Him to transform us by His grace.