

Icebreaker:

God changed Jacob's name to Israel. Do you like your name? Why or why not?

Questions:

1. Why would Jacob want to be alone on the eve of Esau's arrival? Why would God wrestle with him then? Have you ever wrestled with God on the eve of something important or frightening?
2. Do your relationships (with God or others) often feel like wrestling matches? Is that good or bad?
3. Is it easy or difficult for you to sacrifice in order to attain a blessing? Can you think of a time when you were blessed and walked away with a limp?
4. If you are comfortable, share a "name" (or nickname) that you connect with your own life (either given to you by others or yourself). Is this name helpful for you and your relationships (with God and others) or does it hinder your relationships?
5. What did Jacob learn from his encounter of wrestling with "the man"? For the ancients, what might it have meant "to see the face of God"? Do you fear seeing "the face of God"? Why or why not?
6. What does it mean to have your identity in Christ? How do you live that out practically?
7. Are you wrestling with anything in your life right now? How could God help you or engage with you in your wrestling?

Prayer:

As your group closes in prayer, please pray for the following needs in our church family.

prayer requests

> Prayers of healing for Joan Gall and Ken Miller.

Requests from ZPC's February Prayer Calendar:

> Pray for ZPC's Sunday morning ministries including the Greeter Team, Welcome Center Team, Coffee and Donut Ministry, Brunch Team, and Usher Ministry who extend love and compassion to our congregation and to our visitors.

Leaders Meeting | See most of you on Sunday at 12 pm in Room 202

Leaders Notes:

Again, here is a famous story in Genesis and in Jacob's life. He wrestles with a man all night and gets a new name – and Jacob believes he saw God face to face. His life and his future are changed. Even today his new name, Israel, stands for a nation that is home to the Jewish people. Wrestling with issues, wrestling with God and our names and identities are all wrapped up in this story and those issues relate to us today.

[Question 1] Jacob may have wanted to be alone to pray more with God, as he did earlier in Genesis 32. The man (God?) may have wrestled with him then because he was in crisis as he readied to meet his brother who may want to kill him. When we are facing surgery, the illness of a loved one, or the loss of work we too may want to wrestle with God begging for his blessing and help.

[Question 2] If you are passionate about the issues in your life and your prayers, you may very well wrestle with God. God's people in the Bible often wrestled with God – see Psalm 40 for one example. In our closest relationships, where we have built trust we can often wrestle as well. If it is not done in a hurtful way but in an honest way, wrestling with God or friends can be good.

[Question 3] Jacob's hip was touched by the man and he limped as described in Gen. 32:25 and 31. Following Jesus often costs something, sometimes sacrifice. And yet with the cost comes blessing – by being obedient to God. Examples might include serving someone else ahead of your own needs – it costs you getting what you want first - maybe money, time, or time with loved ones.

[Question 4] Names often come with meaning – family heritage, etc. Jacob's name means "heel grabber" or "deceiver." His new name Israel means "he struggles with God." His new name helps. Names people give us, or nicknames, can be hurtful, funny, or lift us up depending on their meaning. What's your experience?

[Question 5] Jacob learned he could struggle with God and survive. He learned he could see God face to face and survive. It gave him some confidence going forward. The nation of Israel can be characterized too as a people who have struggled with God and others and have overcome. We should not fear seeing God, but long to see his face and to draw close to God.

[Question 6] Our identity is that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). We are made in God's image. We carry God's Spirit in us through the grace of Jesus Christ. Our identity should not be wrapped in our worldly successes or failures. When we have our identity in Jesus, then we can live more freely loving God and neighbor rather than just worrying about ourselves.

[Question 7] Typically we wrestle with God about justice or fairness, about why bad things happen, and things we don't understand. We can look to the truth of scripture that God is just, the world is not fair, and whether we understand or not, God walks with us through hard times and things we can't control.