

## Identity Part 3

### Genesis

We've been in a series on identity as we look at the life of the Patriarch Jacob a man whose identity was so altered that his name was changed from Jacob to Israel.

Remember that so far we've said that -

Identity is your truest self. It is the fountain head of who you are - you act the way you do because of your identity.

**Proverbs 23:7** As a man thinks within his heart, so is he.

It is impossible to perform consistently in a way that is inconsistent with how you see yourself.

#### **THREE APPROACHES TO IDENTITY:**

We said - there are three approaches to how people develop and cultivate an identity -

1. **Look Outside - That's the traditional approach - Culture Names You.** They tell you if you are hitting the mark or missing it.
2. **Look Inside - Modern Approach - Name Yourself** - Have you ever heard someone say, "I'm trying to find myself"? They are saying, "I am searching for who I am, my identity".
3. **Christianity says - Look Up - Christ Names You** -

FOCUS ON HIM... as you find Him, you also find the truest YOU.

#### **GOD'S ROLE IN SHAPING IDENTITY:**

Last time we were together we said that God is actively shaping us in a couple of ways -

1. **He Brings us into Difficult Circumstances** - Someone said it this way - there is no TESTimony without a TEST.
2. **He Shows us the Impotence of our Idols.** - In other words he knocks out each crutch we are tempted to rely on other than him.

Well This week I want to wrap up this study by looking at,

#### **OUR ROLE IN SHAPING IDENTITY:**

Think about it, what if you could modify yourself at the very core of your being and shape your identity in a way that will alter your behavior, so that you live like a Christian because that is WHO you are, rather than WHAT you are supposed to do.

#### **It's an awesome thing to see the shift -**

- A person no longer gives because they are supposed to, but now they give because they WANT to.
- Church is no longer a duty, it's a privilege
- Why is it that some people can't MAKE themselves have a quiet time or pray while others build their life around prayer.

Well very simply because the second person has altered their identity to the point that is as natural as breathing to them, the first hasn't.

**TODAY I want to teach you how to modify your inner self -your identity.**

**CONTEXT:** Remember when we last looked at our brother Jacob he had been deceived into marrying two women Leah and Rachel. The two girls basically began competing against one another to see who could give the most sons to Jacob thus winning his attention and affection. A birthing war began between the two women. Once they had birthed all the babies they could produce they convinced Jacob to take their servant girls as wives and a few more children were born till Jacob had 12 sons and 1 daughter.

After some time of debating with his crooked step father Jacob and after God appears to him in dream and commands him to go back home to the promised land and he begins to head that way.

Jacob had been away from home for twenty years. Now he was coming home, but it was not a totally happy homecoming. He felt the weight of the world on his shoulders. He carried a burden that all people either have carried, are carrying, or some day will carry. The burden of making peace with a person you have seriously offended.

Now, we know how the Old Jacob dealt with Esau, but what about the new Jacob? How will he approach Esau.

**TEXT: Genesis 32:1–32 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. <sup>2</sup> And when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called the name of that place Mahanaim. <sup>3</sup> And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, <sup>4</sup> instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. <sup>5</sup> I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.'"

Well that's a change - before he wanted to take, but now he wanted to give.

<sup>6</sup> And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him." <sup>7</sup> Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, <sup>8</sup> thinking, "If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape." <sup>9</sup> And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac. O Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,' <sup>10</sup> I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. <sup>11</sup> Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. <sup>12</sup> But you said, 'I will surely do

you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’ ”

Do you see what he’s doing? He’s not conspiring - he’s praying. Then notice what happens -

<sup>22</sup> The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. <sup>23</sup> He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had.

*It was there in that time of loneliness, and reflection that something very strange happened. Jacob felt a shove, then he felt someone grab a hold of him, a strong presence that seemed to toss him around like a rag doll.*

<sup>24</sup> And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.

Now, keep in mind, we have access to information Jacob did not have we have the rest of the story. We have commentaries on this passage. We can look up and see that Jacob is actually wrestling with the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, before we get to explaining why Jesus wrestled with Jacob - stop for a moment and recognize how odd this is. Jacob had prayed to Jesus to deliver him from Esau. One would think Jesus would attack Esau, but no he came after Jacob.

Have you ever noticed - that if you take all of the prayers or Paul in the New Testament and examine them closely, there is not a single prayer for God to change someone’s circumstance - he ALWAYS prays for God to change the person.

So, Jacob says - Lord - Help me with Esau and God says well I’m going to have to do some wrestling with you to fix things with Esau.

That’s this is not WWF wrestling, Macho Man Randy Savage or Hulk Hogan kind of thing. As a matter of fact, the Hebrew wording indicates that they were kicking up dust as they fought.

Perhaps 6-8 hours they were engaged in strenuous physical combat. Remember by this time in his life Jacob was no pushover. He had developed a measure of manhood himself.

- Remember when he met Rachel, he single handedly lifted the stone from the well that typically required 3 shepherds to move.

If you have not been involved in real man to man combat you really can’t understand how draining and difficult this is.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I remember my first sparring session when I was 16 years old

training in **American Karate**. Our match may have lasted 5 minutes and I was more exhausted than an entire game of basketball.

Every muscle was tense, your mind is on red alert, sweat is pouring from your brow, you quickly move from flexing your muscles to take a hit, to preparing them to deliver a kick. It is absolutely intense.

But it seems that this was an even match. Both men holding their own, neither prevailing. Until something happened.

<sup>25</sup> When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.

Now, I've never seen Bruce Lee make this move! Dislocate his hip with a touch. My grandmother's hip used to go out of socket, it was horrible pain. Jesus did that to Jacob with a touch.

Do you know what that means? Jesus wasn't really wrestling. It's like with my kids - I used to wrestle with them because I wanted them to be touch. But I didn't really wrestle.

But notice what happens - Jacob, even though he is clearly defeated and in agonizing pain clamps down all the more...

<sup>26</sup> Then he (Jesus) said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

Did you know that - this is where God wants every person in this room?

### **Jeremiah 13:11-12**

11. For as the waist band clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the household of Judah to cling to me declares the Lord that they might be for Me a people for renown for praise, and for glory but they did not listen.

Look at what the Lord says -

<sup>27</sup> And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." <sup>28</sup> Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."

<sup>29</sup> Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. <sup>30</sup> So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered."

<sup>31</sup> The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. <sup>32</sup> Therefore

to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

The next day. He walks into camp. His hair is disheveled, his clothes are torn, his face is dirty, his lip is cut. Somebody says, "Jacob, what in the world happened to you?" He said, "**I just got blessed.**"

## Shaping Your Identity:

### 1. Rehearse *the Story*

<sup>9</sup> And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,' <sup>10</sup> I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.

What is he doing? He's rehearsing the story in prayer. He's preaching the plan to himself. He's reminding himself and God of why he is in the position he is in. AND he's fixing himself right in the middle of the story.

Perhaps the most powerful skill to develop in the Christian life is the ability to preach the Gospel to Yourself.

YOU ARE YOUR FIRST MISSION FIELD.

Have you ever thought about the fact that the FIRST THING God calls you to do after you trust Jesus is Baptism? Baptism is IMMERSING yourself in the story of the Gospel.

It's a dramatic way of shocking your identity to the core. Until you are properly obedient in baptism there are some things that never will line up.

Baptism is a one time thing after you truly get saved.

BUT LISTEN: There is a sense in which every day that follows you have to BAPTIZE your thinking in the Gospel every single day.

Every single person in this building is either consciously or subconsciously seeing themselves as a integral part of a larger story - philosophers call this story the **META-NARRATIVE**. That is a **BIG story in which all of the little stories reside**. Your micro narrative fits within the context of a Meta-Narrative.

NT Wright: "A story...is...the best way of talking about *the way the world actually is*."  
Alasdair MacIntyre: "I can only answer the question, 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question, 'Of what story do I find myself a part?'"

If we are all building upon some story, some narrative the question is, "Which one?"

**The enemy has 1,000's of stories -**

- **Is your story anchored by the sin of your parents? My father was a drunk, so I guess I'll be a drunk.**
- **Is your story anchored by something someone did to you?**
- **Is your story anchored by something you did to someone else?**

**God has only one** and it is revealed to us on the pages of scripture. The world was paradise, sin entered, all the bad stuff that follows was a result of that sin, God sent Jesus into the world to reconcile us to God... from the resurrection on Jesus is making all things new... Ultimately it will result in a brand new heaven and new earth. That's the story.... The big story my little story fits within...

Jacob did that, and you better do it as well...

## **2. Reframe YOUR Personality**

<sup>27</sup> And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." <sup>28</sup> Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."

His name, Jacob, means "**grasper**," because when the twins were coming out of the womb Esau came out first but Jacob's little hand came out right after Esau and grabbed ahold of his heel, like, "Come on back in here; I want to be first"). But the name "Jacob" can also mean, "**deceiver**," and those two meanings pretty well sum up Jacob's life.

Remember how Esau said, "rightly is your name Jacob!"

God said, I'm going to make you **Israel** - which by the way... you only name something you own. What if I walked up to one of these little kids on stage this morning and said... "Hey Timmy, from now on you will be Bob" and "Sally, now will be Louise". I can't do that - why? They don't belong to me... but my kid, I named. When I took a wife, her name changed. Naming points to authority.

Israel is made up of two words "Sara" which means Struggle and "El" which means God, Elohim... So Israel means - God struggle.

So in other words - Jacob from this point on, your life will not be defined by some sin you committed years ago, but rather by the fact that you wrestled with God and prevailed.

IF your identity is going to change you are going to have to let the **SIGNIFICANCE** of the Gospel be greater than the **SIGNIFICANCE** of your sin.

### 3. RePresent *YOURSELF*

What happens next is very important....

#### **Genesis 33:3–11 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. <sup>4</sup> But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

Now that Jacob was reconciled to God, it was time to reconcile with others beginning with Esau his brother. You know in many ways I think it was easier for him to fight Jesus than to make right with Esau.

Did you know that the hardest mission trip to take in all the world is NOT across the ocean, it's not subsaharan Africa, it's across the street.

I know people who would rather take the gospel to ISIS than talk to a neighbor about Christ.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I remember when I came to Christ, I had just moved off to college and really didn't have a lot of people I graduated in the school I went to. When I came to faith one of the most difficult things I had to face was presenting myself to my old friends. They knew the OLD me, not the NEW me.