

Week Five: *Becoming a Standout*
Genesis 32:22-28

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. Have you ever experienced family drama? The most serious kind where you're not sure if relationships could ever be repaired? How did that feel? How did it affect the rest of your life?
2. Before we dive into the events of this week's scripture, let's back up a little and see what has been happening prior to these events. Up until this point Jacob has lived a pretty interesting life; he's been on both sides of some shady dealing. He's stolen his brother Esau's birthright and been duped by his father-in-law, Laban. Where Jacob is concerned, he's definitely given as good as he's gotten. If Jacob is a standout, it's mostly for being up to no good. When we catch up with him, he's just pulled up stakes in the middle of the night and left his father-in-law behind, taking all his possessions, his wives (Laban's daughters) and children with him. Read Genesis 32:1-21. What is Jacob trying to accomplish?
3. If you were Jacob's brother, Esau, and you heard that Jacob was heading your way with his entire family, what would you assume Jacob wanted?
4. Describe a time when someone assumed a motive of yours that was not true. How does that make you feel to know someone made those types of assumptions about you? (Maybe it was the situation with a family member in question #1?)
5. Jacob's reputation preceded him and he knew it. He used gifts and messages of humility to help soften his brother toward him. What types of things have you used? Were they effective in accomplishing your goals for them?
6. Jacob's generous actions and posture of humility did indeed soften Esau toward his brother. As you finish your FIFTEEN, consider again your example from question #4. If the situation has been resolved in a positive way, give thanks to God for that result. If not, ask God to give you the wisdom and humility to find a way to repair the situation.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

7. Have you ever been a part of a group with a reputation? Maybe it was a high school clique, sports team, or a particular career. Maybe your family of origin had a reputation. How does it feel to be lumped in with that group, fairly or not?
8. Read Genesis 32:21-24. Speculate why Jacob might have wanted to spend some time alone.
9. One of the challenges of being a part of a group is living up to the expectations of the group. Maybe everyone in your family has great singing voices, but you do not. Or maybe everyone expects you to be the one to come up with the solutions to problems. How might separating yourself from the group for a period of time help you to see yourself more clearly?

10. Are there other ways alone time helps you?
11. Another challenge of being a part of a group is being identified with them by others, whether or not you actually have the attributes expected from being a part of that group. Did the group you identified in question #7 give you a group reputation or was it something you had to overcome?
12. We don't know Jacob's exact reason for being alone — maybe he just needed some time to relax, maybe he was coming up with a plan B if the gifts did not work on his brother, maybe he was hesitant to go back to the land of his birth. Or maybe he hoped God would show up. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer by asking God to come close to you. Then spend time just talking to Him about whatever is on your mind.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

13. Read Genesis 32:22-26. Verse 24 may be one of the most understated descriptions of one of the weirdest stories in Scripture. If you have ever seen any of Peter Sellers' Pink Panther movies, you may remember a character named Cato, who was hired by Sellers' character to attack him randomly in order to keep his reflexes and martial arts skills sharp. Peter Sellers' character is never surprised; he just springs into attack mode. How would you feel if you were alone and suddenly found yourself in a wrestling match?
14. If Jacob was surprised, it is not evident by what we read. He just wrestled with the "man" until he incapacitated Jacob. What did he do to Jacob in verse 25? Why might he have done that? (Instead of, say, twisting his arm?)
15. Yesterday, we speculated on why Jacob was alone in the first place. Maybe Jacob had good reason for staying behind, or maybe he was planning an escape out the back door. Now with his hip wrenched, he was going nowhere but facing the man. What did the man ask Jacob in verse 26, and what was his response?
16. By Jacob's response, we can see that Jacob knew that this was no ordinary man. He knew that he was wrestling with God Himself. Do you ever feel like that? In other words, do the events in your life sometimes seem like God is trying to get your attention about something? What do you do (or would you do) if you felt God was trying to get your attention? How could you be certain it is God?
17. Do you ever wrestle with God because of hardships in your life or challenges that you face? Describe some of the ways you wrestle with God.
18. Some scholars think the man was an angel, but many believe he was the pre-incarnate Jesus. In any case, Jacob knew it was God and he was not about to let Him go without a blessing. Jacob knew the value of a blessing (he'd already stolen one from his brother!). If God were in front of you right now, how would you ask Him to bless you? Close your FIFTEEN by asking Him for His blessing.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

19. Jacob was a man that stood out, and not necessarily for good reasons. He was wealthy and powerful, but he was on the run and scared to move forward. Read Genesis 32:27-28. What had just changed for Jacob?
20. Since the man was God and already knew Jacob's name, why would He ask Jacob his name?
21. There was no mistaking this moment for Jacob. The man plainly asked Jacob his name and declared a new name for him. What things change when you change your name?
22. In American culture, many women change their last names to be the same as their husbands' when they marry. What does that type of name change say about a woman's identity?
23. Do you still use the name your family of origin called you when you were growing up? Why do some people stop using those names and use a more formal first name?
24. Jacob had a new name, Israel. A new name for a new season. How might a new identity give Jacob courage to move forward with his plans?
25. What is one of the hardest things about establishing a new identity?
26. It's very hard to shake off an old identity. God chose to give Jacob a new name to help him grasp a new identity and to help signify to others that Jacob was not who he used to be. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to show you if the way others see you reflects who you truly are or who you want to be. Ask Him for the courage to help you change that.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

27. How do you feel about your name? Do you like it? Is it so common that you were forced to use a last initial to identify your elementary schoolwork, or is it so rare you'd never find it on a key chain? Are people surprised when they meet you because your face doesn't match the name? Something else?
28. On week four, we looked at the importance of a God-directed journey on being a standout. Like Jacob, Peter was a man that struggled with his identity. Read Matthew 16:13-18. What did Jesus declare for Simon Peter?
29. What had Simon just done prior to this?
30. Look again at Genesis 32:25-28. What had Jacob acknowledged?

31. Like Jacob, Peter's shift in name came after Peter declared the truth of who Jesus truly was. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-18. For followers of Jesus, what do we now have?

32. What does it mean to you to know that Jesus offers us a new identity, one that is found in Him and free from the baggage of our past?

33. Close your FIFTEEN by asking God to help you use the identity you have in Christ to stand out and make a difference in the lives of those around you.