

“How Can I Change My Life?”

Text: Genesis 32:22-32

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A common question that a lot of people ask is, “How can I change my life?”

What would you like to change about yourself?

- An attitude? A habit? The way you look? Some kind of weakness in your life?
- All of us want to change in some way so we go to seminars and we read books, listen to tapes, try diets. We do everything to see what can change us.
- Maybe we make a change for a while but nothing seems to last. Why? I think it’s because we focus on the externals rather than the internals. For lasting change you’ve got to have a change on the inside and that requires God’s help.

This morning we’re going to look at the story of Jacob in the Old Testament. This is a wrestling match with God. It’s filled with symbolism and principles for us to apply in our lives to show we can change. From this simple story – this wrestling match with God -- we can draw four principles on the four phases God uses in how He changes us.

- Jacob’s weakness was that he was a manipulator, a swindler. His name literally means “cheater”. He was always using people and he was always getting into trouble because he used people.
- This experience transformed his life and from this turning point he was never the same again.

Read Genesis 32:22-32

PRAY!

How does God change us? He uses a four step process symbolized in this passage.

I. PHASE ONE: HE STARTS WITH A CRISIS

- A. Vs. 24-25, *“So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him ‘til daybreak. When the man saw he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.”* In vs. 28 it tells us it was actually God who was wrestling with Jacob in this story.
- B. I know that the point of wrestling is to pin a guy down until he cries “Uncle! I give up!” Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever struggled with something until you’re in despair, ‘til you realize you’re in

a no-win situation? Notice it says he struggled until daybreak. This is a long fight. It lasted all night. It's a no-win situation.

- C. What are you wrestling with this week? What is the problem in your life that you're struggling with and you're getting tired? What is the crisis in your life? Maybe it's an internal struggle and you feel like you're being torn apart. Maybe it's a struggle in a relationship – it's been strained, ripped. Have you ever considered the fact that it is God behind those circumstances? Maybe God is behind that problem, crisis, difficulty, irritation. The point is this: God often uses a crisis to get our attention. Sometimes it's the only way He can get it through our hard heads. He has to. God uses a crisis to get our attention.
1. Are you in a crisis this morning? Congratulations! God's getting ready to change you. He wants to work in your life.
 - It's like the mother eagle. She disturbs the nest so that it becomes so uncomfortable that the little eagle has to jump out and learn to fly.
 2. Point: We never change until the pain becomes greater than the fear of change.
 - Jacob struggles all night. Finally the pain was so bad that he finally had to do something.
- D. God brings a crisis into your life. God loves you just the way you are. But He loves you too much to let you stay that way. If it takes a crisis – you can count on it – He will use it for your best.

II. PHASE TWO IS COMMITMENT

- A. vs. 26, *"Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.' But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'"*
1. Jacob's attitude is persistence. He's determined. He's going to stick with it, fight it out. He will not quit. He's basically saying to God, "I'm sticking with this struggle until I benefit from it! I want something good out of all this. I've made an effort. I've put a lot of energy into this. I've made an investment of time and energy in this struggle and I'm not going to give up!"
 - Some of you have put time and money and energy into your marriage and you feel this way. You don't want to lose the investment you've put in. You're going to fight for the marriage. You want it to work.
- B. The fact is, God often waits to resolve a problem in our lives because He wants to see if we really mean business. Am I serious about change or is this some passing whim?
- C. The normal reaction to our weaknesses and problems is to run from them. Get out of the situation. Leave. Quit. God says, "Let's see how committed you are." Many people miss God's best because they give up too soon. The answer is right around the corner. We are great starters but we don't finish.
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2. I've heard people say, "I prayed about my weakness!" How many times? "Once." We live in a microwave society. We want instant change – now! If God doesn't solve it overnight then forget it, God!
- D. Where's the commitment? First, the crisis, then the commitment. Am I going to stick with it?
 1. I meet a lot of married couples. They're just about to give up when the answer may be just around the corner. I'm grateful that Margaret didn't give up on me. It took some time for God to hone some rough edges off my life.
- E. Galatians 6:9, "*Let us not become weary at doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*" He's saying, "Hang in there!" Be committed to getting God's best. There is hope. You will be able to change, but don't give up!

III. PHASE THREE IS CONFESSION

- A. Vs. 27, "*The man asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob', he answered.*"
 1. Why did God ask his name? Because God wanted him to admit who he was. In Bible times, the name you were given was a description of your character. It was a label. When Jacob said, "I'm a cheater" it was an act of self-revelation, an act of confession. When Jacob said, "My name is Jacob" it was a reminder of all the people he had hurt, all the heartbreak he had caused, all the problems that had been the result of his hang-ups and personality. He was admitting what he was.
- B. Question: If today you were named for your greatest character weakness, what would your name be? Temper? "My name is Temper, I can't keep a lid on it?" Lust? Unreliable? Guilt? Depressed? Worrier? What would be your tag? Greedy? Resentful? -- Confess it!
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- C. The lesson is that I will never be able to change my weaknesses until I admit them. To who? First to yourself. Then to God. Then to at least one other significant person in your life. That's difficult. But the fact is, God won't work on my problem until I admit that I have one. Confession!

IV. PHASE FOUR IS COOPERATION

- A. We have to cooperate with what God wants to do in our lives. Vs. 28-30, "*Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome. Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'It is because I saw God face to face.'*"

1. The moment Jacob began admitting what he was and began to cooperate with God, He began to change. He called the place Peniel which means “the face of God”. Jacob came face to face with God. All of us have to do that some day. You can run from God for the rest of your life but then you can’t run anymore. Jesus came to save us, not to scare us. All of us eventually face God.
- B. When we finally face who we are then God says, “OK, now I can get down to business in your life! We can start working on those character defects, those faults that we both want changed. Relax and cooperate with me and I’ll make those changes that we both want.” God says to Jacob, “I will bless you.”
- C. God wants to bless you, too, just like He blessed Jacob. The first thing God did for Jacob was He gave Him a new name, a new identity. He said, “*Your name is no longer going to be Jacob; it’s going to be Israel.*” Jacob means cheater, swindler, crook. Israel has two different meanings. One, “he who struggles with God” which is true. But it also means, “Prince of God”. God looked beneath all those emotional hang-ups and saw something valuable – a prince, someone He could do something great through, with and to. He changed Jacob’s name and from this point on Jacob was a different person. The entire nation of Israel was name after this man. What a privilege and joy! He changed His identity.

The lesson of Jacob is **You don’t have to stay the same!** You can change. If God can change Jacob he can change anybody. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is in Romans, “*Jacob have I loved...*” If God could love Jacob with all of his hang-ups, I figure he can love me with my hang-ups. He can love you with your hang-ups. God named a nation after this guy.

PRAYER

Father, I want to cooperate with You. I want to trust You to change me. I want to relax and place my life in Your hands. Jesus Christ, I need to change. I want to change. I ask you to help me to change. With Your help I believe I can change. Help me with my unbelief. Lord, today, turn me into a prince or a princess. Change me. Make me what you want me to be. Father, thank You for Your word. Apply it to each of our lives where we need it most. In Jesus’ name. Amen.