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# **The Transformation of Jacob**

**# 710-B**

**Series: God's Living Legends (Part 1)**



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# The Transformation of Jacob

Our mobile unit from Station W-O-R-D has been parked in front of Isaac's house now for several weeks. At times we thought we were watching a soap opera. At times we thought it was a situation comedy. At times it was a real tragedy. I think most of us have been painfully aware that what we have been viewing at Isaac's house is not at all unfamiliar to most of us. We have seen the perfect wedding, the problem pregnancy, rebellious children, and the undertones of real conflict within the home. We have seen conflicts between father and sons, conflicts between father and mother, conflicts between son and son. We have seen Isaac endeavor to be obedient to God. Again and again God has promised that one day the whole world would be blessed through Isaac's family. But it has become increasingly difficult to believe with every passing chapter that this would be true.

In our last lesson, we saw Isaac, now an old man, not knowing when his time of departure would come, virtually blind, call in his eldest son to bless him before he died. We sort of imagined what it would have been like if he had written "Dear Gabby" and described his five greatest problems as his life drew to a close. You may remember that he had been the victim of *discouragement*, *disability*, *division*, *deception*, and *disappointment*. We sort of imagined that he might well have said, "Gabby, what do you think of a life like that?"

Gabby might have answered,

*Dear Isaac,*

*No matter how it looks, you are a fortunate man. Fortunate because the plan of God has not changed. He still uses seemingly unusable men and He can still use your sons, Isaac. Fortunate because the Word of God has not changed and not one word of His promises has ever failed to come true. So God still plans to use your boys. And lastly, Isaac, the love of God has not changed. He still loves you and He still loves your boys*

## The Transformation of Jacob

*as much as He ever did. As much as He ever could. In other words, don't lose hope, Isaac, for whether you live to see it or not, the plan of God, the Word of God and the love of God go on.*

Now Isaac and Rebekah fade from the forefront of our scene. Brother Esau, now stripped of both birthright and blessing, gallops off into the sunset to Ishmael's house to take still another wife. The entire story line now descends upon Jacob. You do remember Jacob, the deceiver, the supplanter, the liar, the cagey kid, momma's boy? Maybe a potential prospect for the Mafia, but hardly a candidate for spiritual leadership. Ah, but some of you may be thinking as I did, *just the kind of guy that God might be glorified through if He ever really got his attention*, like taking a man whose joy in life was tracking down and imprisoning Christians and turning him into the spiritual leader of the early church. You get the point. So this lesson follows the footsteps of Jacob. We see what can happen to the life of a rebel when God finally gets his attention.

I would like to forewarn you that this is a message of hope. It is what God has been leading up to all the time. Our title for this lesson is "The Transformation of Jacob". It covers Genesis 28:10-33:20.

As we left Jacob in the last lesson, he was fleeing for his life from his brother Esau. Esau, you recall, had been swindled by a team of experts, namely his mother and his brother. He had decided that his dad didn't have long to live and once Dad died and everybody was mourning, he planned to bump off baby brother. Now if this was a television series, we would have had four dramas leading up to the great event with media banners, "Who Shot Jacob?" You may remember that Mom gets wind of Esau's scheme and lies again to her poor, blind husband to get him to send Jacob away. So Isaac, a man of his word, renews his blessing to his deceiving son and sends him on his way, supposedly to look for a believing wife. Our story takes up here as the fugitive races for safety to the house of grandfather Bethuel, to stay with Uncle Laban.

Up until now we find no evidence that God played any part in Jacob's life. The only reference to God he ever made was a sarcastic lie when his dad asked him how he had killed and prepared the game so quickly. You may remember he answered,

## The Transformation of Jacob

“The Lord your God helped me do it.” But God had His eye on Jacob. You may wonder why. He loved him. He had a plan for him. He was waiting for Jacob to have a need in his life in order to get his attention. Enter NEED. There must have been the fear of being humiliated, hunted, and murdered by his own brother. There must have been the loneliness, never being able to return home. He was certain that Dad would probably die before he could return. At long last there must have been some guilt. Guilt over what he had done to his dad and his brother.

Now guilt is not all bad. Guilt is only bad when you have no place to take it. When you hang on to it, it is like a disease; it will eat you alive. But if it is the vehicle to lead you to a sin-bearer, a Savior who takes it from you, then guilt serves a precious purpose indeed. So God strikes while the iron is hot. Jacob is on his way from Beersheba to Haran. The sun goes down and he can't see anymore, and he stops. He puts a rock under his head for a pillow and goes to sleep. He must have been tired. There we pick up the story in Genesis 28:

And he had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending upon it.

And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants.

“Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.”

And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven.”

(Genesis 28:12-17 NAS)

### JACOB'S CONVERSION

I believe this is the point of Jacob's conversion. At last he recognizes a need for God, and God confronts him. Now notice

## The Transformation of Jacob

how God did it. First God gets his attention. He always does. In this case, He uses a ladder that stretches all the way to heaven with an eternity full of angels running up and down. It got his attention all right. All at once he was thinking about heaven and the seemingly impossible task of getting there. Then God says, “Wait, I will come down to you. I will make a way for you.” The angels indicate that God is saying, “I will even come for you.”

Next, God introduces Himself. It isn’t enough to know there is a way to heaven. You have to know that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob *IS* the way to heaven. You don’t trust a plan, you trust a person. Our ladder to heaven is Jesus Christ.

Finally, God reveals a gospel of grace. Up until this point, Jacob had done nothing to merit the favor of God. He deceived for his birthright and deceived for his blessing. He was a liar, a trouble-maker, and a thief. He was in that unregenerate condition when God said to him, “Jacob, I will give you the land. I will bless your descendants. I will be with you. I will bring you home. I will not leave you.” Grace. Before Jacob had so much as said, “Yes, Lord,” God had engraved on the tablets of eternity a life of blessing and usefulness for this deceiving son of Isaac. You may think that he doesn’t deserve it. Isn’t that great! Neither did you. Neither did I. It is called grace. God commended His love toward us in that while we were yet liars, deceivers, cheaters, and murderers, Christ died for us. Total, unmerited favor.

We read that Jacob rose early. He makes a pillar of his pillow and he worships. Something has happened to Jacob. No crowds, no hymns, no cards to sign, just Jacob and God alone in a field. That is all it takes. Jacob re-names this place Bethel, meaning “The house of God”. He makes a vow to God that if God will keep him and safely bring him home, *then* God would be his God. The stone would be God’s house, and all that he received, he would give a tenth back to God. You may think that sounds a little childlike, “God, if you do this, I will do that.” Perhaps, but God isn’t afraid to be tried. It was all of grace anyhow. All He had asked of Jacob was to trust Him. Jacob said, “Yes.” Converted? Yes. Transformed? The process was beginning.

The relationship between God and Jacob had now been established. God promised that He would never leave him or forsake him. Now God had to work it all into his life. There begins the process of transformation. Conversion takes but a moment. Transformation takes a lifetime. Don’t you wish Isaac had been

## The Transformation of Jacob

a fly on the wall to see it all happen? You ask yourself, “Where is Isaac? What happened to him?” Stay tuned, we will find the answer at the end of this lesson.

So there you have the confrontation. Now comes the humiliation. Now the man *with* God must become the man *of* God. This involves trials. Newly converted Jacob continues his journey to Laban’s house. Out walks Rachel, tending her father’s sheep. Here we go again, one generation later. Let’s read in chapter 29:

And it came about, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother’s brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother’s brother, that Jacob went up, and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well, and watered the flock of Laban his mother’s brother.

Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted his voice and wept.

(Genesis 29:10,11)

My first thought is that this guy is a little bit of a fast mover. He had only known her ten minutes and already he kisses her and cries. But this is a wholesome, acceptable custom because two verses later we read:

So it came about, when Laban heard the news of Jacob his sister’s son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house.

(Genesis 29:13)

Now if you will pardon the summarizing, I am going to capsulize this next period in Jacob’s life. In verse 15 Laban tells Jacob that he is welcome to stay with them, but Laban wanted to pay him something for his labors. Laban tells Jacob to name the salary. Laban had two daughters, Rachel whom we have already met, and Leah her older sister who, for several reasons, didn’t ring the same kind of bells in Jacob’s mind. Jacob answers Laban, “I will work for you for seven years for your younger daughter, Rachel.”

Men, we might try that with these young guys who come courting our daughters. “You mow my yard for the next seven years and she is yours.” Can’t you hear it? It seems a little unreasonable, but it was Jacob’s idea. Really, I think it was God’s idea. Jacob needed now to have character worked into his life. Character takes time and hardship. Now if you young men think this is a hard sentence for our daughter’s hand, you memorize verse 20:

## The Transformation of Jacob

So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.

How about that? What has happened to the old romantic stories? The love songs that we used to be able to understand the words. I believe God is an incurable romantic and I love it. The Bible is a treasure-trove of love stories. The greatest of them is the story of God's unchanging love for us, love that cost Him the life of His own son.

Greater love hath no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.  
(John 15:13 NAS)

If we were writing this I think it would go something like this: Seven years would pass, they would rush into each other's arms and live happily ever after. Sorry. God has some deeper surgery to do on Jacob's life. His purposes are lined with character. Character, remember, takes time and hardships. You will never believe what God allows to happen in this budding new believer. He gets deceived. Can you imagine? Jacob the deceiver is beaten at his own game. Most of you know the story: at the end of seven years, the marriage takes place. The big event becomes a reality. But guess what old Laban does? He plays a little switcheroo; you know, the kind that Jacob and Rebekah did to dear old Dad. He slips Leah into Jacob's tent instead of Rachel. So here Jacob has worked seven years for the wrong woman.

When Jacob wakes up and realizes what has happened in verse 25, he cries out, "I've been deceived!" Can't you just see God in heaven with His notebook of love writing down, "Jacob experienced deceit for himself. He is learning patience. At last, my kind of man." Then generous Laban tells Jacob that he can have Rachel, too, only he would have to work another seven years. I don't know how all the mother-in-law stories got started, but this sure could have started the "Don't Trust Your Father-in-law Club". So Jacob now has Rachel, but he is stuck with Leah too. He loves Rachel but he tolerates Leah.

Now these gals get into a contest to see who can have the most kids for Jacob. The next chapter unfolds the world's first baby boom. They had to start a private school just for Jacob's kids. Conflict and competition were a way of life. Here we go again. Jacob seemed to handle it. He seemed to be growing up. Life and responsibility have a way of doing that. Can you imagine being married to two jealous sisters who couldn't stand each other? You can read Genesis 30 and 31 for the details, but I will



## The Transformation of Jacob

summarize it. Jacob, humiliated by his prospective father-in-law, stays and serves and prospers. Soon bitterness develops between Jacob and Rachel's brothers, too. So Jacob takes his wives, his children, and his servants, and he secretly departs from Laban's house. Laban pursues him and a heated argument occurs. We don't have time to deal with it here, but in chapter 31:42 Jacob gives God the credit for protecting him and he and Laban make a covenant. It is a good covenant. It is also a good verse to memorize and go over with your new son-in-law if your daughter gets married.

If you mistreat my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no man is with us, see, God as a witness between you and me. (Genesis 31:50 NAS)

In verse 55 Laban arises, kisses his sons and daughters and blesses them, and departs and returns in peace. So Jacob has been confronted by God and given Him his life. Then comes the long process of trials where he is deceived and where conflicts must be resolved God's way. Jacob must learn to live with the day-to-day pressures and learn to be God's man. Now comes the real test that God had been working up to all of his life. God still had some unfinished business with Jacob before he could be God's finished product. That unfinished business was called brother Esau. Chapter 32 begins like this:

Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him.

And Jacob said when he saw them, "This is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim.

Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

He also commanded them saying, "Thus you say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now;

and I have oxen and donkeys and flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight."

And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."

Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies;

(Genesis 31:1-7 NAS)

## The Transformation of Jacob

It is now time to get Jacob's attention again. Now God could deal with him on a whole level of life, spiritually. He had walked with God for many years. Now the fruits of his trials have come to be tested. You can just hear Rachel whisper in his ear, "This is a test." I get so excited reading this because it is proof again of a transformed life. Jacob did what Jacob should have done. He went to God.

And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who didst say to me, 'Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,' I am unworthy of all the loving kindness and of all the faithfulness which Thou hast shown to Thy servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies.

Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me, the mothers with the children.

For Thou didst say, 'I will surely prosper you, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'"  
(Genesis 32:9-12 NAS)

So Jacob, filled with consternation, prays. He began by worshipping God for who He is and for what He had promised: His worth and His Word. Then he worships God for what He has done: His works. Then he sees himself in the light of God's worth, God's Word and God's works and he finds himself insignificant and unworthy. Then he tells God just what is on his mind. He says, "God, I'm scared to death of my brother. Only You can save me." Lastly, he comes back to God with a promise that had not yet been fulfilled. This is a beautiful pattern of how to pray when in trouble. You will find it throughout the entire Old Testament as saint after saint after saint beseeches God with this same pattern.

Jacob didn't act presumptuously after he prayed. He didn't assume there would be no conflict. He assumed that God would take him through the conflict so he prepared for the conflict. He divided his entourage into two groups, gave his servants gifts of appeasement for his brother, sent his wives back across the river for safety, and then he sat to await the outcome. That is so often what God is waiting for, to get us alone and afraid.

## The Transformation of Jacob

### THE TRANSFORMATION.

God had gotten Jacob's attention and then some. Now He contends with Jacob for total control of his life. Now listen to these verses:

Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.

And when he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him.

Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."

And he said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed."

Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there.

So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved."

Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Peniel, and he was limping on his thigh. (Genesis 32:24-31 NAS)

The rest of this story is almost incidental. The crux of it all was in those eight verses. Here is the making of a man of God. He reaches another crisis point without which there could not be the depth of experience necessary to have the kind of relationship God wants. First God had gotten his attention and Jacob committed his life. Then came the years of growth, the deception, the difficulty, the disagreements. Jacob had to trust Him in the marketplace of life.

Now God gets his attention again, this time for a deeper work of grace. There was a new need, despair. Jacob cries out to God only to find out that the need itself was not what God was after; God was after the man, the rest of the man. Jacob had learned to walk with God. Now God wanted him to learn to rest in the God he had learned to walk with. It was not a new commitment, but a total surrender. Jacob wrestled until the matter was finished. That is the key. God didn't make it easy for him. God wanted to be sure that he wanted it for himself, not for what God could give him. So God changed his name to indicate that He had changed

## The Transformation of Jacob

his character. God left his mark on Jacob. He changed the nature of the *way he walked*, no longer by his own strength. Now he limped. He could only rest his weight on God. Jacob had already surrendered to God. What Esau did to him now was incidental. But what Esau did was not coincidental; it was a natural result of what had already taken place.

### THE RECONCILIATION.

Then Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four-hundred with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids.

And he put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last.

But he himself passed on ahead of them...

(Genesis 33:1-3a NAS)

Has there been a change in his life? Just a few verses ago, he sent his family across the river to hide and he sent someone else to do his dirty work. Now he is running in front of them.

...and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

Then Esau ran to meet him and embrace him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

(Genesis 33:3b,4 NAS)

Then Esau asks, "Why the gifts, brother?" Jacob answers, "Because I wanted to find favor in your sight." But Esau said, "I've been blessed, too, I have all I need."

And Jacob said, "No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then take my present from my hand, for I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably."

Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey and go, and I will go before you."

(Genesis 33:10,12 NAS)

Jacob insists that it is not necessary and proceeds with joy to Succoth and then onto Shechem to purchase his land, and builds an altar to God. You say, "Wow! God sure understands happy endings." He sure does. But you haven't seen anything yet. Wait until the happy ending He has planned for us; and it won't be long. Here were the boys who had hated each other, deceived each other, set out to destroy each other. Here was the deceiver and the wild man embracing each other as brothers. Here was Jacob the liar, the cheater, the thief; converted, conformed,

## The Transformation of Jacob

confounded, and committed to a totally yielded life with God. God had a plan, remember? Rebekah cried, “If it be so, then why?” God said, “I have a plan, that is why. Give me time, Rebekah, and I will perform My purposes.” Isaac, blinded and baffled by the hatred and godlessness in his home, seemed to wonder what was going on. But the plan of God had not changed. Remember? The Word of God had not changed. Remember? The love of God had not changed. So we concluded that Isaac should rest in the promises of God, content that it would turn out okay.

Wouldn't it be great if Isaac were here to see it all? If he could have lived long enough to see his boys united and the mantle of spiritual leadership firmly in the grasp of a godly Jacob? God never promised him that he would live to see it, did He? Let's turn to Genesis 35 where we get an exciting bit of news.

Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years.  
And Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, an old man of ripe age; and his two sons Esau and Jacob [together] buried him. (Genesis 35:28,29 NAS)

Praise God. Isaac was there all the time. He saw it all. A gracious God kept him alive all those years and allowed him to see the promises of God come true. He saw his boys become men, God's kind of men. What a God of grace.

In closing, I would like us to take a look at four important principles. These principles surfaced through the transformation of the life of Jacob.

Principle 1 has to do with faith, God's kind of faith. This is the kind of faith that never stops believing. Isaac had that kind of faith. The kind of faith that blessed Jacob the deceiver because God had made him a promise, and God keeps His promises. It was not because he saw in Jacob any signs of spiritual hunger. All he saw in Jacob was a hunger to take care of #1 at anybody's expense that got in his way. Now the principle of three lessons ago must stand. We can't control how our children turn out. They may never fulfill our hopes and dreams. Many of God's don't and many of ours won't. But the other side of the coin is this—most of us give up too soon. At the first sign of rebellion, we throw up our hands in hopelessness. Or after seeing seeds of character weakness, we assume there is nothing God can do with this one. Or after a few years of bitterness and destroyed reputations, we assume they have passed the point of no return. Wives have the

## The Transformation of Jacob

same problem with unbelieving husbands. They may even have a promise from God that one day things will change. Then the ultimate happens, unfaithfulness or rejection, and they throw up their hands in defeat. Isaac waited a long time, but it wasn't long to God. God was doing a work in Isaac's life, a deeper work that could only be done in the shadows of time. Wait. That is God's most beautiful word. It isn't a "No" when God says, "Wait," it is a "Yes," with the gift of character attached to it. I want to share a poem with you entitled "Wait".

### WAIT

Desperately, helplessly, longingly, I cried;  
Quietly, patiently, lovingly, He replied.  
I pled and I wept for a clue to my fate...  
And the Master so gently said, "Wait."

"Wait? you say, wait?" my indignant reply.  
"Lord, I need answers, I need to know why!  
Is your hand shortened? Or have you not heard?  
By faith I have asked, and I'm claiming your Word.

"My future and all to which I can relate  
Hangs in the balance, and you tell me wait?  
I'm needing a 'yes' a go-ahead sign,  
Or even a 'no' to which I can resign.

"You promised, dear Lord, that if we believe,  
We need but to ask, and we shall receive.  
And Lord I've been asking, and this is my cry:  
I'm weary of asking! I need a reply."

Then, quietly, softly, I learned of my fate,  
As my Master replied again, "Wait."  
So I slumped in my chair, defeated and taut,  
And grumbled to God, "So I'm waiting, for what?"

He seemed then to kneel and His eyes met with mine...  
And He tenderly said, "I could give you a sign.  
I could shake the heavens and darken the sun.  
I could raise the dead and cause mountains to run.

"I could give all you seek and pleased you would be.  
You'd have what you want, but you wouldn't know Me.  
You'd not know the depth of My love for each saint.  
You'd not know the power that I give to the faint.

## The Transformation of Jacob

“You’d not learn to see through clouds of despair;  
You’d not learn to trust just by knowing I’m there.  
You’d not know the joy of resting in Me  
When darkness and silence are all you can see.

“You’d never experience the fullness of love  
When the peace of My spirit descends like a dove.  
You would know that I give, and I save, for a start,  
But you’d not know the depth of the beat of My heart.

The glow of My comfort late in the night,  
The faith that I give when you walk without sight.  
The depth that’s beyond getting just what you ask  
From an infinite God who makes what you have last.

You’d never know, should your pain quickly flee,  
What it means that My grace is sufficient for thee.  
Yes, your dearest dreams overnight would come true,  
But, oh, the loss, if you missed what I’m doing in you.

“So be silent, my child, and in time you will see  
That the greatest of gifts is to truly know Me.  
And though oft’ may My answers seem terribly late,  
My most precious answer of all is still...Wait.”

Have you stopped praying for that one in your life whose life seems so out of control? Or have you stopped praying with faith, believing? I don’t believe an hour went by that Isaac didn’t pray for his boys. His boys were weak, but God was strong. God said, “Wait.” So Isaac waited.

Principle 2 has to do with the kind of men God is looking for. He is looking for raw material, not finished products. What He sees when He looks at a man is not what we see. If you and I were scanning the far east to maintain the lineage of the King, we would not have even considered Jacob. He had too many character weaknesses and no potential. We think we have some kind of spiritual x-ray vision that lets us know who God can use. We are smart, aren’t we? We never would have chosen David; no apparent leadership there. We surely never would have chosen Moses. He couldn’t even talk right. He couldn’t take the job without a spokesman. We never would have chosen Joseph, a spoiled, favorite son. We never would have chosen Peter, a brash, loud-mouthed fisherman. He never could have kept quiet. We never would have chosen Paul, the avowed enemy of the church, a self-righteous murderer. How many of us would have looked in

## The Transformation of Jacob

a carpenter's shop for God?

The key is that God's choices are made from a different set of standards. They are made with additional information. The Scripture says, "*He seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh upon the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.*" You and I have the gall to tell God who He can use, yet the more seemingly unusable, the more God seems to be attracted to them. I think the secret is in what Jesus said, "*Who will love Me most? The one who has been forgiven most.*" So stop telling God, yourself or anyone else that the son or daughter of yours or that husband or wife of yours, or that parent or in-law of yours, is too far gone. Too far gone for God only comes in the grave. You and I would have said that the thief on the cross was too far gone, but not to an omniscient God.

Principle 3 is that no two people come to God exactly the same way. Jacob fell asleep and saw angels running up and down a ladder and God said, "Follow Me." Paul was on the road to Damascus, out to track down the children of God, when a great light got his attention and blinded him. God said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Still others of us were just sitting there mending the nets of life when Jesus stopped, looked at us with that penetrating glance of eternity and said, "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." He will speak to one by the well, one by the sea, one on the highway, and one by a tree.

The truth is that if that loved one of yours and of mine won't darken the door of a church or watch Billy Graham on television, don't despair. When the time is right, God will get his attention. He may be running from the law, running from his creditors, running from his responsibilities, or running from himself. Let him run. He may put his head on a rock somewhere like Jacob, all alone in the wilderness and God will whisper in his ear, "I AM the LORD." It is wrong for us to want to standardize Christianity, to use our experience as the norm and expect God to reproduce it in our loved ones or in our friends. No two men come to God exactly the same way because no two men are exactly alike.

Principle 4 is that though no two people come to Christ the same way, once a person is converted, there is an amazingly similar pattern in the spiritual growth in their lives. The names, the lives, the places and the faces may all be different, but like Jacob, all men must have a Bethel in their lives. It is a time



## The Transformation of Jacob

and a place in their lives when they said “yes” to God. You may remember yours. You may not. Every living person, if he is to be transformed, must first be converted. If you have never personally faced the issue of sin and salvation with God, but maybe just decided to by-pass Bethel and try to “live the Christian life”, you are in trouble. As we said earlier, it is not the *way* you do it, but *that* you do it.

At some point in everyone’s life, he or she must accept themselves as sinners, separated from a holy God and unable by themselves to bridge that gap back to God’s holiness. In some way and some fashion, they cry out to God, “Save me, I am lost.” He will. It is not necessarily essential that you read a little booklet entitled, *Four Spiritual Laws*. It is not even essential that you walk down an aisle. It is essential that at some point in your life, a transaction takes place between you and God where you exchange your sins for His righteousness. For somebody, that transaction may be taking place right now. Quietly give your life to God with all its sin and in return take the life of God with all of its holiness. Even that very second, God says, “I will take my Holy Spirit and place it within your life and I will wrap a seal about you and keep you for all eternity. I will guarantee you all the inheritances that go with being one of the King’s children.”

You can do this right now where you are by saying to God, “Lord, I need You. I am a sinner. I know that You died for my sins. Come into my heart and stay.” Word it as you please, but please word it if you have never done so. Some of you may be thinking that you are not sure. You may think you are a Christian, but you don’t know for sure. My friend, it is the will of God that you know. *These things were written that you might know that you have eternal life*. So before you go any further, you can say to God, “God, I’m not certain I’m a Christian, so I know it won’t offend You if I ask you to come into my heart right now. If You are already there, Lord, just quietly acknowledge Your presence in my life. If not, please come in right now and make my life Your home.”

No matter what else has happened, you can take a pencil and paper and write this date and this hour down and by it write, “At this time, I became a child of God.” You can put it in your purse, wallet, or Bible, and when Satan begins to hassle you again, you let him know. Every man and woman must have a Bethel.

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Likewise, trials will come into the life of every Christian. God must be real in the disappointments of life, or God isn't real at all. You may not work seven years for the wrong woman, but God has His ways of changing your character through suffering, too. The key is to let Him. Stop flinging your fist at the circumstances of life and trust God to use them to change you and give you a message.

Lastly, I believe there is a Peniel in many of our lives as well. It is a time when, as believers, we can't cope with the pressures of life. The fear of the Esaus of our past seem to blacken the sun and the circumstances of life go out of control. Suddenly we seem to wrestle with God. It is as though He gives us a new name. It is as though He touches us and cripples us from being able to stand or walk without Him. It is as though He says, "Now you are all Mine, what can mere man do to you?" All at once you are set free not to live *for* God, but to let God *be* God in you. If you can identify with that, you may be at Peniel right now. That is what I mean by a message of hope. If God can do it in Jacob's life, God can do it in our children's lives, and in our loved one's lives, and God can do it in our lives. It is called transformation. Transformation happened just as God said it would; just as He revealed in the lives of the living legends of Scripture. Just remember:

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TRANSFORMATION

If God could change old Jacob  
Who so deceived and lied,  
Who couldn't do an honest thing  
No matter how he tried.

If God could send a vision  
Of a ladder heaven bound  
With a company of angels  
Who were running up and down,

If God could save old Jacob,  
The epitome of sin;  
Then you and I can just assume  
No one's too hard for Him.

If God could let old Jacob  
Toil by Rachel and her brothers,  
Only then to be deceived  
As he had done to others,

To teach him how to walk with God  
Amidst life's pain and strife,  
That he might learn the mind of God  
So God could change his life.

If God could take old Jacob,  
Who fearing Esau's sword,  
Would cry out, "God, I'm helpless,"  
Then wrestle with the Lord,

If God could take a man like that;  
So filled with doubts and fears,  
And gently shape a godly man  
Through many patient years,

Does there exist upon this earth  
So devious a man  
That God cannot redeem his soul  
And use him in His plan?

No, if God can change old Jacob  
Then, clear it ought to be,  
That God can transform *anyone*  
Including you and me.

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1- God got Jacob's attention in an unusual way. Up until that time, we see no indication that he was interested in spiritual things. What others in Scripture can you name who were arrested by God in unusual ways? Do you know someone others have prayed for, who with no apparent interest, came to Christ in unusual circumstances? What effect ought this to have on our persistence in prayer?

2- How could God make the promises He made in Genesis 28:13,14 *before there was any response on Jacob's part*? What was the first evidence that Jacob had met with God? Why are verses 16 and 17 so important? What kinds of evidence should we see in those who claim to have met Christ?

3- What kind of injustices have you suffered that seemed as difficult as Jacob having his bride switched for another? How did you respond? How did Jacob respond? What does this indicate to you?

4- What other reunions in Scripture come to mind when you read of Jacob and Esau's reunion? Why was Jacob so afraid? Why did God let him get to that place? What did he do when he became afraid?

5- In chapter 32, beginning in verse 24, Jacob had the most life-changing wrestling match in history. What spiritual parallels can you draw from this passage?

6- What makes the happy ending in chapter 33 so unexpected? What had God done in Esau's life?

7- Why do God's most incredible miracles seem to take so long? Why is waiting the hardest thing we have to do? How does our concept of time differ from God's?

8- Would you have chosen either Jacob or Esau for greatness? Paul? Joseph? Moses? How can we begin to see men and women through the eyes of what they can become? Why are the greatest rebels sometimes the greatest candidates?

9- Agree this week to begin praying again for those you may have given up on because they seemed so far from God. Ask God to take their weaknesses and the scars from their rebellion and use them to draw them to Himself.

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