

The Gathering Church
Debbie Ferguson message 8/23/26
My Story Matters - Overview

Getting to know each other's story

I Need God
God Desires Me
Rejoice through Trials
Reasons to Rejoice
Peace in Hope

Holding On to God: Wrestling but Never letting Go!

Debbie's name sake, Deborah, and in scripture, the name Deborah functions as a bridge that mirrors Jacob's personal transformation and the destiny of his descendants.

Background story: Starting in Genesis 25: Jacob steals Esau's birthright and his blessing and flees. Jacob marries Leah, then Rachel, and determines to go home to his family of origin after 14 years, but he fears Esau's anger. Jacob name means deceiver and he was driven by fear, so how is that parallel with my name?

My "thorn in the flesh" as a young person was anger and frustration, quick reactions, wanting my way.

- A Personal Story: My brother's Shawn's death: he was 16 years old, and it happened on a church trip. I wanted to trust God, but I became angry.
- I received counsel that "God is big God who can handle my anger". I was never taught to work through my anger in a healthy way. As a result my anger began to turn to bitterness - it took root in my life. It became my "besetting sin", a specific weakness that is a temptation to go to from time to time.
- Also, while Dan was in seminary, I put on the persona of a Pastor's wife. A few years later at a Church Retreat, a woman prayed over me "for my salvation"! I knew I loved God, believed in what Jesus did for me. On the outside, I was indignant, but on the inside, I wondered if there was truth to the statement.

You can see the parallel as Jacob returns home...

Genesis 32:1-2 1 Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 2 When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is the camp of God." So he named that place Mahanaim [two camps – God has used this place several times in the scriptures 2 Samuel 2:8, 12, 29, and

The idea of "two camps" shows the importance of uniting human efforts with God's supernatural provisions.

This is the "place" where heaven meets earth.

- I need God and He desires me.

Genesis 32:3-5 3 Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. 4 He instructed them, "You are to say to my master Esau, 'Your servant Jacob says: I have been staying with Laban and have remained there until now. 5 I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, menservants, and maidservants. I have sent this message to inform my master, so that I may find favor in your sight.'"

The importance of identifying fears you need to bring to God, as well as your main thorn of the flesh.
Jacob's was deceit, mine was anger.

Ephesians 4:26-27 ²⁶ **"In your anger do not sin"** Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold.

- My tendency toward being bitter was a stronghold.

Jacob is left alone

The importance of knowing that sometimes deep spiritual growth often happens in solitude.

- I read the book "Let Prayer Change Your Life" by Becky Tirabassi, and, after reading it, I accepted the 1-year challenge to spend one hour every day for a year in prayer. While our children napped, I sat at my dining table while the kids napped and spent one hour each (week) day with God for a year.

- God began a transforming work in me, and I am still a work in progress.

Ephesians 4:22-24 ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, **to put off your old self**, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ **to be made new** in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ **and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**

(Dan interjected that an extravert (tendency to love being around people) needs to journey toward stillness and quiet/solitude in prayer, whereas an introvert (loves solitude and quietness) need to transition to be more outgoing.)

Jacob clings to the man of God despite being injured, this shows the importance of clinging to God in the hardest parts of life, showing perseverance in spiritual struggles

Genesis 32:25 When the man saw that he could not overpower Jacob, he struck the socket of Jacob's hip and dislocated it as they wrestled.

- Caleb's Accident – 3 weeks of a coma – As a parent I was injured...
 - My first response was anger (the opposite of rejoicing) and I thought of

Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, **REJOICE!**

- Text from Karen Onovi, "Look for the little things I could rejoice in"
 - Later that day was the moment I surrendered Caleb to God,
 - And had peace about whatever would happen
- Upon reflection – I realized that the transforming work God had done in me when working through my deep-rooted anger over my brother's death was pivotal in how I chose to respond to Caleb's accident.
- In fact, it wasn't just Caleb's accident. Within 3 months we had a TBI, a dislocated shoulder, and a broken back. To top that, Caleb had 2 other serious accidents in the next 2 years
 - Broken pelvis, broken wrist, collapsed lung
 - Broken Tibia and Fibula

- I did NOT want to go back to a bitter heart

The importance of refusing to let go! Persistence in faith is the anchor in dark times

Genesis 32:26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

- Through the years, God has continued doing a work in me
 - Less selfish and defensive
 - More patient
 - Can actually slow down and weigh the importance of how I am feeling
 - Even able to let it go when I realize it is not important
 - Or talk (not argue) about the issue

Shifting from everyone to "The One" narrows the focus to the persistence and effort required for deeper spiritual encounters, emphasizing the need for perseverance.

Genesis 32:27-28 What is your name?" the man asked. "Jacob," he answered. 28 Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans, and you have overcome."

- PABC – Our experience leaving
 - God called me to stay at PACA, I did NOT want to stay
 - It has been healing to stay and work through the hurt and ANGER
 - The response Dan and I have had in the hurt, and anger has not taken root in my heart, it is not turning to bitterness

Jacob's name is changed to Israel, symbolizing his transformation through wrestling with God.

Genesis 32:29-30 And Jacob requested, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed Jacob there. 30 So Jacob named the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

- I am not held to my past,
 - This is what it means to be a "new creation". (2 Corinthians 5:17) The importance of knowing your identity in Christ. Jacob's name did not stay deceit. He was called to a new identity in Christ: Israel. My name has not stayed anger. I have been called to rejoice, and I find peace in that.
 - Anger is not my identity

Jacob gives a name to the struggle: The importance of remembering that transforming works in our lives happen through wrestling with God while holding on to him, so we can view the struggle as deeper intimacy with God.

Genesis 32:31-32 The sun rose above him as he passed by Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was struck near that tendon.

- I believe we have been able to walk through very difficult years without sinning.
 - **Ephesians 4:29-32** ²⁹ *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.* ³⁰ *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for*

the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

- We were purposeful to go to God first prayerfully and with fasting.
- We were purposeful to keep quiet to others and not add to their hurt or anger.
- We have been purposeful to have interactions with people who have hurt us, but deal with them in kindness
- We have been purposeful to pray for the same people who did wrong to us.

Israel is left with a limp: The importance of looking back at wounds (Jacob's limp / Caleb's Ebenezer is an incision scar in his abdomen) as a reminder for our need and dependence on God.

Genesis 33:4 But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept.

- We have been purposeful to rejoice over the small things
- We have been purposeful to seek God's will and focus on what He has called us to do
- We have lived purposefully to avoid grieving the Holy Spirit through the transforming healing process

Persistent Prayer Mirrors Jacob's Wrestling with God.

The importance of knowing that persistence in prayer doesn't have to look like one hour each day sitting at the dining room table with my Bible.

It can also look like constant conversations with God; continually opening one hand to give him my "stuff" while gripping tightly to his garment "will" and never letting go.

The importance of knowing your identity in Christ. Jacob's name did not stay deceit, he was called to a new identity in Christ, Israel.

My name has not stayed anger, I have been called to rejoice, and I find peace in that.

- Where I am currently;
 - Imagine one hand releasing my "stuff" to God, while the other holds tightly onto God.