

Alright. I just came off a week of leading worship for our Grace Kids' camp, and while I was singing and dancing with children every day having so much fun, I was also attempting to write this message. And I'm gonna tell you right now, I think Grace Kids' camp, which is essentially our version of a vacation bible school - I think it had an impact on the way this message came together. Think of this message as vacation Bible school for adults. Ok? I'm going to tell you a Bible story.

This is a story of deceit. Of cunning deception and trickery. This is a story of rivalry - arch rivalry. A story of betrayal, and a brilliant scheme. This is a story about wrestling. About brotherhood.

This is the story of the Macho Man Randy Savage and Hulk Hogan.

APRIL 23RD, 1989. I was a 7 year old girl. And my older brother loved to watch WWF wrestling.

And as his little sister - I was never going to win the battle royale over who got the remote control - I was never gonna win that fight - so I watched a lot of wrestling! And I remember this particular match, between the legendary Hulk Hogan and the infamous Macho Man Randy Savage.

It went like this:

The Macho Man was a heel. A "heel" is a bad guy in pro wrestling. This bad guy, this heel, was led into the ring by his new manager - bad gal "Scary Sherri."

She fought dirty. She wasn't on the good side.

She wasn't on the side of truth, justice, and the American way. She was a heel, for sure. But for every heel, there's a hero.

Enter "The Hulkster."

In the 1980's Hulk Hogan was the proverbial 'good guy.' He was everyone's favorite - he was my brother's favorite for sure!

The Hulk would proudly strut to the center of the ring with his signature move: tearing his paper thin bright yellow tank top, and giving them one of these _____. And one of these _____. - I know I'm totally indulging my inner 80's child right now, but if you didn't grow up in the 80's - I'm just sorry, I'm sorry for your childhood. Because the 80's ruled!

Before the fight even began, Macho Man, the heel, was already fighting dirty! He threw a folding chair at an unsuspecting Hogan, but Hogan wasn't phased at all as he just casually caught it with 1 hand. The crowd went bananas.

The fight lasted a little over 10 minutes. And it was glorious. It had all the moves that made a wrestling match in the 80's so magical. There were pile drivers, and clothes lines, knee drops and elbow drops - at one point the Macho Man took his sparkly cape and threw it over Hulk Hogan's head, and our hero was rendered completely helpless, because there was a thin piece of cloth covering his face. - **Now, why he couldn't have just taken the cloth off his face hardly matters**, because it was the 80's and in those days: We! Believed! Anything! The Hulk was blind. He couldn't see. The drama was over the top! Ultimately the match ended when

Scary Sherri attacked the Hulk from behind, distracting him, giving Macho Man the perfect opportunity for a sneak attack. The Macho Man knocks out the Hulk, and is declared the winner by a count out. He wins the match, but only through deception.

He played dirty. And he won.

Deception.

This is a story of deceit. Of cunning deception and trickery. This is a story of rivalry - arch rivalry! A story of betrayal and a brilliant scheme. This is a story about wrestling. About brotherhood.

This is the story of Jacob and Esau.

I mean, the story of Jacob and Esau.

These 2 had been wrestling each other since before they were born! Literally! Even in the womb, the drama was over the top! Jacob and Esau were twins, born to Issac and Rebekah, who we heard about last week. And Genesis gives us an account of these twin brothers actually wrestling in the womb!

Genesis 25:21 says that

"...Rebekah became pregnant with twins. 22 But the two children struggled *with each other* in her womb.

That word used for 'struggle' here comes from a Hebrew word that means to crack in pieces, literally or figuratively - to break, bruise, crush, ***to struggle together***. This was no ordinary 'kicking' in the womb. This was violent.

And it was serious enough that Rebekah sought help! In her agony she asked the Lord "Why is this happening to me?"

23 And the Lord told her, "The sons in your womb will become two nations. From the very beginning, the two nations will be rivals.

One nation will be stronger than the other; and your older son will serve your younger son."

Now, this is a really unusual distinction.. ***Your older son will serve your younger son?*** That just wasn't how things were done. That defied the natural order of things. The older son was granted the 'birthright' and the 'blessing' of the family. That means he got the larger cut of the inheritance - 2 times the inheritance of the second born. And this apparently was still true, even in the case of twins born only seconds apart.

Rebekah gave birth to twins! And Genesis 25 verse 25 tells us that

25 The first one was very red at birth

and covered with thick hair like a fur coat. So they named him Esau.

Names were significant. They established something 'factual' about you. These names were very practical and descriptive, like in the case of Esau. They looked at Esau, he was a super hairy baby - so they named him 'hairy'. Esau means 'hairy.' And Jacob... Well, Jacob was given an even less flattering name:

26 Then the other twin was born with his hand grasping Esau's heel. So they named him Jacob.

Jacob was the name chosen for the second twin, because it sounds like the Hebrew words for 'Heel' and "deceiver." He was born with his hand gripping the heel of his twin brother Esau. They wrestled with each other in the womb, and it seems from this description that they were vying for position even in birth! The drama in this story is over the top! Jacob, in stubborn determination WOULD NOT LET GO of his brother's heel. So they named him Heel - deceiver - "Jacob."

Imagine going through life with that name. Hello, my name is deceiver. What a burden that had to have been for Jacob. Deceiver. Liar. And boy would he live up to that name! So how is it then, that Jacob - the heel, would become a hero of our faith? Why are we still talking about him?

Jacob was indeed FULL of flaws, BUT his story will show us that:

God is bigger than our flaws. He desires to change us from the inside out. He will give us a new name, and bless us so that we can be a blessing to those around us.

The bulk of our story today takes place **in Genesis chapter 32**. And as you are turning there, or following along on the Grace Church app, let me welcome those of you who are joining us online. Welcome to all of you **out there**. We're glad that you're joining us. And welcome to all of you **in here** who are joining us in person today. Thank you for being here. I am always happy to be able to see all of your faces!

Ok, we're diving into the meat of our story but before we do, I have to give a quick caveat. The story of Jacob is a MASSIVE one. Jacob is a hugely important element of our family tree and we can not overstate his significance. And I only have about 30 minutes to tell you about a man who's story spans 25 chapters in Genesis!! So I'm hoping that something in this message will spark your curiosity enough to make you want to go and read about him yourself. There's so much packed into the story of Jacob, and today we will only be scratching the surface.

10 minutes

So far in this series we're calling "Family Tree" we've seen that our family history is full of deeply flawed individuals who become unlikely heroes.

Heroes like Abraham, and his son Isaac. God promised that He would bless all the nations of the earth Abraham's family line. But, in both Abraham **AND** Isaac, father **AND** son, we see a pattern - of fear that leads to panic, that leads to lying in a desperate attempt at self preservation!

In fact, fear, insecurity, panic, and dishonesty all become traits that will mark this family for generations. This family is full of flaws. But:

God will show them that He is bigger than their flaws. He desires to change this family from the inside out. He will give them a new name, and bless them so that they can be a blessing to those around them.

Despite Abraham's obvious flaws, God kept His promises! And the original plan to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham's descendants continued with his grandson - Jacob.

Now, as we said before Jacob was born vying for position, grabbing onto his twin brother's heel. He never was content with being the second born. He knew the fullness of the inheritance belonged to his older twin brother, Esau. And as he grew up, we see in Jacob a young man who is obsessed with obtaining that inheritance by any means necessary.

His brother Esau was a hunter. The outdoorsy type. Adventurous. Hairy and rugged. Scripture tells us that Esau was his father's favorite. But Jacob was a homebody, with a quiet temperament. He didn't go out hunting. He was the stay at home type. And he was his mother's favorite.

We can already see what's happening here. The stage is being set. Lines are drawn and there are clear divisions within the family. Clear favorites. And it doesn't take long before we see some of this family's dysfunction start to emerge.

One day, rugged hairy Esau returns home from the wilderness exhausted and hungry. Twin brother Jacob - the homebody - is making some kind of red lentil stew. Esau says he's starving, and asks his brother to give him some soup.

But Jacob, obsessed with getting his hands on his brother's inheritance, plays hardball! He's so quick with his response in Genesis 25:31. Without skipping a beat he replied: "All right... but trade me your rights as the firstborn son."

Whoa?! It was like Jacob had been waiting to catch Esau in a moment of weakness and the minute he detected vulnerability, he pounced!

But Esau, who says he's 'dying of starvation' doesn't really care about his birthright at that moment. He cares about that soup! And look... we've all been there before. Soup is a powerful thing! And at that moment, it's all that mattered to Esau. So he sold off his share of the inheritance for a bowl of red lentil soup.

Now, I wonder if an awnry, little brother Jacob teased Esau with that for years. They were so competitive. They were born rivals. And now Jacob had the upper hand. I wonder if he dangled that carrot in front of Esau, and I wonder if the parents caught wind of this sibling rivalry, this act of bribery. Esau was Dad's favorite. Jacob was Mom's favorite. And we're about to see just how deep this family's dysfunction can go.

14 minutes

The grand deception began with the father. Isaac wanted the blessing to go to **HIS** favorite son. He wanted the full inheritance to go to Esau. But there must've been an awareness within the family of the fierce rivalry between the brothers, because Isaac devised a scheme to pass the blessing onto Esau - in secret.

You see, normally the passing down of the family 'blessing' was a momentous occasion that would involve the whole family, and a big celebratory meal. But Isaac knew the drama that this would cause in his family. So he made a secret deal with his beloved Esau. He said 'I'm about to die, and what I really want right now is a good meal. So go out, hunt me some game, and prepare me a delicious meal.

"Then I will pronounce the blessing that belongs to you, my firstborn son, before I die."

That - is a backdoor deal. Isaac is knowingly circumventing the process by cutting out his wife and his younger son Jacob. He's being shady! But... Mamma was listening at the backdoor. And ain't nobody as slick as Mamma!

She crafted an even grander, even more elaborate scheme to ensure that her favorite son received the full blessing. You can read all about the elaborate scam in Genesis 27 - we don't have time to read the whole story today but I'm telling you the drama in this family was over the top! Rebekah knew that her husband Isaac was nearly blind! So she devised a plan to fake out her husband, and disguise Jacob as Esau.

The plan worked brilliantly! Isaac fell for the scam, and thinking that he was blessing HIS favorite son Esau, he was actually giving the full blessing, the full inheritance to Rebekah's favorite son, Jacob.

Rebekah and Jacob **played dirty. And they won.**

This is a story of deceit. Of cunning deception and trickery. This is a story of rivalry - arch rivalry! A story of betrayal, and a brilliant scheme. This is a story about wrestling. About brotherhood.

And at that moment, BROTHER Esau vowed in his heart that he would kill his scheming twin brother - The thief - who had just stolen everything from him! It was time for Jacob to get out of dodge! His mother sent him away, to her homeland, to live with her brother Laban and to find a wife. She told him to lay low for a while, and let things cool down for a bit. Then he could return home, when Esau had hopefully 'forgotten his anger'. So Jacob went away to Paddan-aram to live with his Uncle Laban.

Here's where we're really going to have to condense the story for the sake of time. But, Tim will talk more about this aspect of Jacob's story next weekend, so make sure you catch his message all about Rachel and Leah next week. But for our purposes today we'll keep it short. Jacob flees to his mother's homeland to live with his Uncle Laban, and it turns out, this guy is also a dirty rotten cheat. It runs in the family! He deceives Jacob and cheats him out of years of his life - altogether, Jacob spent 20 years working for this dishonest scheming Uncle of his!

But after 20 years of indentured servitude, **God told Jacob it was finally time to go back home.**

He said in Genesis chapter 31:3

"Return to the land of your father and grandfather and to your relatives there, and I will be with you."

Return. To the land of your father and grandfather. AND TO YOUR RELATIVES THERE!

That meant Esau, his scorned older *twin* brother.

The one who had publicly vowed to kill him 20 years earlier!

In Genesis chapter 32 WE SEE A JACOB WHO IS CONSUMED BY FEAR!

He is certain that his brother still hates him and he fears for his life! But, anything is better than slaving away for that cheating Uncle of his! So Jacob does what he does best. He schemes. He makes a plan. He sends messengers ahead of him, to 'test the waters' so to speak, and he tells them this in chapter 32 verse 4

4 "Give this message to my master Esau: 'Humble greetings from your servant Jacob. Until now I have been living with Uncle Laban, 5 and now I own cattle, donkeys, flocks of sheep and goats, and many servants, both men and women. I have sent these messengers to inform my lord of my coming, hoping that you will be friendly to me.'"

He's using language like 'my master Esau' and "my lord." He calls himself Esau's 'humble servant.' He's going out of his way to butter his brother up a bit, to show him that he's a changed man. He's humble now. And he poses no threat to his twin.

But the messengers returned to Jacob and reported, "We met your brother, Esau, and he is already on his way to meet you—with an army of 400 men!"

If Jacob was fearful before, he was absolutely terrified now! Esau's coming with an army of 400 dudes! A show of force, for certain. Jacob is sure that vengeance will be swift and brutal. Genesis 32:7 says:

7 Jacob was terrified at the news. He divided his household, along with the flocks and herds and camels, into two groups. 8 He thought, "If Esau meets one group and attacks it, perhaps the other group can escape."

He's preparing for the worst. But he does something remarkable in the next verse. Even though he is still freaking out, he stops planning his next move. He stops scheming just long enough to pray.

9 Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my grandfather Abraham, and God of my father, Isaac—O Lord, you told me, 'Return to your own land and to your relatives.' And you promised me, 'I will treat you kindly.'

Jump down to verse **11**

"O Lord, please rescue me from the hand of my brother, Esau. I am afraid that he is coming to attack me, along with my wives and children. 12 But you promised me, 'I will surely treat you kindly, and I will multiply your descendants until they become as numerous as the sands along the seashore—too many to count.'"

Jacob says "You promised me!" What does he do in his moment of worry? He remembers God's promises. He doesn't retreat. He doesn't run away from his brother, in fear. No. He repeats the promises of God. He stands on those promises. "You told me to return home, and you promised you'd be with me. You promised." Jacob clings tightly to the promises of God.

He holds on in faith, despite his fear and he stays on the path that will lead him directly to his brother. Verse 13 says he stayed where he was for the night. And you know the wheels in his head had to be turning all night, because in the morning he had a new plan. Verse 20:

Jacob thought, "I will try to appease him by sending gifts ahead of me. When I see him in person, perhaps he will be friendly to me." **21** So the gifts were sent on ahead, while Jacob himself spent that night in the camp.

It was a long, sleepless night. A pivotal night.

This is a story about wrestling. It's a story about coming face to face with your worst flaws. It's a story about facing who you are, and who you have been. This is a story about wrestling with a

God, who is bigger than our flaws. A God who desires to change us from the inside out. A God who will give us a new name, welcome us home, and bless us so that we can be a blessing to those around us.

Jacob was all alone in the camp, we are told in chapter 32:24 that

24 a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. 25 When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket. 26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!"

But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

27 "What is your name?" the man asked.

He replied, "Jacob."

28 "Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won."

29 "Please tell me your name," Jacob said.

"Why do you want to know my name?" the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there.

30 Jacob named the place Peniel (which means "face of God"), for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared." **31** The sun was rising as Jacob left Peniel, and he was limping because of the injury to his hip.

Jacob refused to let go. Jacob who held onto his brother's heel at birth. Jacob who wrestled with his brother in the womb, now wrestled with the divine, and wouldn't let go! He held on. He would not let go.

The prophet Hosea said:

Even in the womb,

Jacob struggled with his brother;
when he became a man,
he even fought with God.

4

Yes, he wrestled with the angel and won.

He wept and pleaded for a blessing from him.

This encounter **Jacob has with the angel** is the defining moment of his life. The angel changes his name, but not before making him say it out loud one more time.

WHAT. IS. YOUR. NAME? The man asked.

Jacob. Deceiver. Schemer. Liar. Heel. Thief. Cheater.

He spoke his name out loud, to the Divine. The very admission of his name, an admission of his deepest flaws.

But God was bigger than Jacob's flaws. He desired to change Jacob from the inside out. He desired to give Jacob a new name, - No longer would he be called deceiver. He was to be called ISRAEL - a combination of the Hebrew words for 'WRESTLE' AND 'GOD.'

The name Israel depicts the concept of wrestling with, or clinging firmly to God. Holding onto Him. And overcoming.

It is as though God is saying that apart from me, you will continue to deceive and be deceived! Apart from me will continue to be Jacob, but cling to me, and you will be ISRAEL. Hold onto me and you will be blessed. Hold onto me, and you will overcome. Hold onto me and don't let go, and I will bless every nation through you. But you must hold onto me!

Hold onto me!

Jacob is no longer Jacob. He has wrestled with God through the night and has emerged a new man, with a new name, and a new stride..

Now watch what happens here. His circumstances have not changed. As far as he's concerned, his brother still wants to kill him. He's still being hunted down by an army of 400 men. His family is still in danger. If anything, his outward circumstances have appear to have gotten worse! He's exhausted. He's limping from a dislocated hip - painful, no

doubt! But something has changed in his inner-man. There's a boldness there that wasn't there before this encounter with the angel. For the first time, he stops cowering behind the caravan, and he puts himself out front. He sees his brother Esau coming and he bows 7 times as he approaches, with the kind of bow that was normally reserved for royalty! No longer is he Jacob the 'heel grabber.' Now, he bows. No longer is He Jacob 'deceiver' obsessed with obtaining a blessing by any means necessary. Now, he blesses. And what about Esau?

To me, Genesis 33:4 is one of the most beautiful images in all of scripture.

"Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. And they both wept."

Gone was the desire for revenge. Gone was the petty rivalry between twin brothers. Gone was the animosity. And gone was the fear.

Only love remained. There was only love.

And if that image - the image of seeing from a distance, and running to, and embracing, sounds familiar, it's because it's the same imagery Jesus uses in his parable of the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15! This is the parable that tells the story of an estranged son who returns home to his father, broken, and repentant - a changed man. Jesus said:

Luke 15:20

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."

Jesus knew the Jacob story. And he adapted it in his parable of the prodigal son. Jesus knew that the Jacob story is really our story. It's the story of all of us. You and me, and our ancestors.

The story of Jacob is OUR story. It's a story about family, and forgiveness. Redemption, and restitution. It's a story about wrestling with God, and holding onto His promises. I wrestle with God sometimes. Do you? Just like Jacob, our story tells of the power of God to heal broken relationships, and soften hearts. In Jacob's story, we see our own flaws, but even more than that, we see a **God who is bigger than our flaws. A God who desires to change us from the inside out. Who will give us a new name, and promises to bless us so that we can be a blessing to those around us.**

Through Jesus, each one of us has been given a new name. We are sons and daughters of our loving Father who runs to us, and throws His arms around us, and kisses us and welcomes us home!

This is our heritage. This is our story. This is our father welcoming us with open arms. This is the story of our homecoming.

In a moment, we will be taking communion together, as a family. The elements are on the tables near the doors if you weren't able to grab them on your way in. If you are online I encourage you to find something, a piece of bread, or a cracker - something that represents the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, that was broken on the cross, in the greatest act of love and forgiveness the world has ever seen. Through his death on the cross he ran to us. And find something that

represents His blood, the blood of our new name. With his own blood He has washed us and made us His own. By his blood, he calls us by our new name, as He throws His arms around us, and welcomes us home.

The song you're about to hear is a song of confession. Listen to these words and as you hold the symbols of Christ's body and blood in your hands, make this confession your own. Take this time, to confess - Like Jacob did when he told the angel his name. There is nothing you can tell our Father God that he doesn't already know. So be honest. Confess in your heart to Him. But know that Jesus already dealt with that sin on the cross. We take communion to remind us of His ultimate sacrifice of love, and the victory He won over sin and death. So whenever you feel ready, during this closing song - take and eat the symbol of His body which was broken for you. And drink the cup, a symbol of his blood that was poured out for the remission of sins. Do this and remember. Do this and remember HIM. Do this, and remember his promises. Hold on to Him. Hold onto Him!