

## Middle/High School Sunday School Lessons by

**rfour.org**

**Year 1: Session 1** – Getting to know Jacob, a patriarch

**Class 2: Genesis 32:6-8, 22-31; 33:1-11**

*Jacob wrestles with God because he's scared of his reunion with Esau*

### CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Give background on Jacob up to this story
- Mention significance of name changes in other Bible stories
- Focus on how Jacob lived into his given name (“Grasper”)
- Note how Jacob’s name change to “Israel” also changes Jacob’s body, decisions, and interactions; he is transformed.

### Materials needed:

- Movie clip (streaming of clip is available on rfour.org site)
- Devices that show the movie
- A game of jacks for every two or three students
  - Note: For this lesson, I couldn’t find any jacks to buy, so I bought bouncy balls and eraser heads (for pencils) at the dollar store. One bouncy ball + 6 eraser heads = a game of jacks per team

## THE LESSON

### OPENING PRAYER

### OPENING QUESTION

- For the opening question for today’s class, I [the teacher] will ask the question, and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we’ll go around the circle.
- When it’s your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- *Here’s this week’s question:* What’s something that you were afraid to do, but then you went and did it despite your fear?

## REVIEW and then TRANSITION to MOVIE CLIP

- In the last class, we talked about Jacob stealing the birthright (with his mother's help) from his brother Esau.
- This enraged Esau so much that he said he was going to kill Jacob.
- So Jacob ran away.
- In today's story, we'll read about Jacob's reunion with Esau...*twenty years* after Jacob ran away.
- As we'll see, Jacob is very scared.
- The night before he is to meet his brother, Jacob has a troubled night's sleep, to say the least.
- One of the things that happens during the night, is that Jacob's name is changed from Jacob to Israel.
- There are a few Bible stories like this, where a character's name is changed. Abram and Sarai are changed to Abraham and Sarah. Jacob is changed to Israel. Much later on, the disciple Simon's name is changed to "Peter." Often, people think that the apostle Paul's name was changed from Saul, but that's not the same type of name change. Paul is the Greek name for the Hebrew name of Saul. The *meaning* of his name does not change, whereas with the other examples, the meaning of the name is changed.
- First name changes are not something we deal with much in our own lives. Nowadays, if it does happen, it usually happens when we get a nickname when we join a team or a tradition.
- We're going to watch a short clip now of three youth receiving new names because they are now "ninjas" from the movie "3 Ninjas."
- Let's see what happens

## WATCH MOVIE CLIP

### ASK/TELL

- What were the three new names? (Rocky, Colt and Tum-Tum)
- Were reasons given for each name? (Yes)
- Can you remember what the reasons were? ("Strength" for Rocky, "Energy" for Colt and "makes decisions with his gut" for Tum-Tum)
- Did the kids seem to like/think the names fit them? (Colt had to think about it, but yes, they all seemed pleased with the names)
- So this is what name changes usually involve: It describes the person AND it is in the context of a certain type of relationship (in this case, ninjas!)
- The same things hold true in today's story about Jacob's name change
- But before we see how Jacob's name change takes place, there's a little bit of background needed that will help us understand what's happening in today's scripture story.

## BACKGROUND of scripture story/Review

- After Jacob leaves his home, he travels quite far to live with his uncle, Laban.

- Once there, Jacob works for Laban and over the course of 20 years, becomes quite wealthy.
- He also gets married (to two wives). With these two wives (Leah and Rachel), he has 12 sons and one daughter (that we know of)
- Although this sounds nice, in all the stories about Jacob, we see that Jacob continues to live like his name suggests (Jacob means “Grasper”), where he keeps grabbing at things he thinks should be his.
- And he grabs at those things, often, by being sneaky and deceptive (just like we saw in the previous story)
- To be fair, his uncle Laban acts no better and does the same things to Jacob.
- About 20 years after leaving home, Jacob has a dream where he understands that God is telling him to return to the land of his birth. (Gen 31:11-13)
- Jacob is obedient and makes his way back home. But this means he has to deal with Esau, who 20 years ago, wanted to kill Jacob.
- So Jacob’s very much afraid about meeting/seeing Esau.
- And that is where today’s scripture story begins
- Note: We’re really reading two different stories, but because they fit together so well, we’re going to read both of those stories.

**READ Genesis 32:6-8, 22--31; 33:1-11** (recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse)

**Genesis 32:6** The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." **7** Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies, **8** thinking, "If Esau comes to the one company and destroys it, then the company that is left will escape."

**22** The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. **23** He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. **24** Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. **25** When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. **26** Then the man said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." **27** So the man said to Jacob, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." **28** Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." **29** Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there the man blessed him. **30** So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." **31** The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

**Genesis 33:1** Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. **2** He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. **3** He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother. **4** But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. **5** When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." **6** Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; **7** Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. **8** Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company

that I met?" Jacob answered, "To find favor with my lord." **9** But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." **10** Jacob said, "No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor. **11** Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want." So he urged him, and he took it.

## ASK

- 32:6 How many men are with Esau? (400)
- That's a lot of men! What do you think are the possible reasons for Esau having this many men? (1. He didn't know who was approaching, so he's prepared for the worst. 2. He DOES know who is approaching and wants to get revenge. 3. He DOES know who is approaching and is *afraid* of what Jacob is going to do)
- Of these three options, which one does it seem like Jacob thinks is the reason for Esau having that many people? (#2 – That Esau wants revenge)
- 32:7-8: So what is Jacob's FIRST response to hearing this news? (to split his family and possessions into two columns. So, if Esau attacks one column then the other column might get away)
  - This is yet another insight into how Jacob's mind works. He's very smart and calculating.
- We'll talk some more about verses 22-31, but let's highlight a few things, first:
  - Does Jacob receive a blessing? (yes; didn't need to steal one afterall)
  - What is Jacob's name changed to? (Israel)
  - What injury does Jacob receive (his hip gets messed up)
- In Gen 33:3, what does Jacob/Israel do? (he goes to the front of the two columns and greets Esau first)
- How does that reunion go? (really well)
- Verse 9 and 10: What does Jacob want to do for Esau? (Give him presents; the exact opposite action compared to last class' story)
- Also in verse 10, what does Jacob say seeing Esau's face is like? (like seeing the face of God)

## TELL

- This is both a very important story, and one of the few Bible stories that has a happy ending.
- The most important thing about this story is Jacob's transformation in his behavior and how his name change reflects this transformation.
- So at the start of the story, we see Jacob afraid and scheming and up to his usual ways of dealing with the problems before him.
- And they are pretty big problems – Jacob is thinking he's going to die or come very close to it. He's very afraid.
- But then, he does something different than he did in the previous story we read.
- Remember in last week's story where NO ONE in the story interacted with God whatsoever and the result was deception, betrayal, rage and then a tearing/breaking of the family?
- Well, in today's story Jacob DOES interact with God and because he does, the ending of this story is just the opposite of how last class' story ended.

- Now, let's be clear that in verse 22-31, it is pretty difficult to say exactly what is happening. Is Jacob having a very vivid dream? Is Jacob awake and having a mental/psychological tussle in his mind or is Jacob *actually* wrestling a real man? And who *is* that man -- an angel? God? (Some Jewish scholars think Jacob is wrestling with his understanding of who Esau is; others say Jacob is wrestling with the temptations of his grasping self) And WHY does all this wrestling end with a name change, a blessing AND an injury for Jacob?
- One thing that is clear that happens is that Jacob's interaction with God changes how Jacob chooses to deal with his family.
- And that's a BIG DEAL.
- It's such a big deal that Jacob gets a name change out of it AND even his body changes because of it.
- The name change tells us that Jacob (the grasper) is learning to stop depending on doing whatever he possibly can to grab onto what he thinks is his and is instead learning how to seek and pay attention to God and God's direction.
- The meaning of the name "Israel" is not definitive. But it is usually accepted to mean, "One who wrestles with God" or "One who strives with God" or even "One who prevails with God."
- Regardless of the exact interpretation of Israel's name, what we can see is that the name change reflects the change in Jacob's focus: Jacob's focus has shifted from how he can grab whatever he thinks should be his to grabbing onto God.
- We then see how that change in focus changes Jacob's actions. Jacob goes to Esau in front of the columns. And then he hugs his brother. Gives him presents. And shares very kind and beautiful words with him.
- It's like Jacob is a completely different person in chapter 33. And that's the whole point: When we seek God and God's direction, it changes us in ways that are better for us and for those around us.
- But changing is not easy; difficult changes can even leave marks ... like a limp.

## TRANSITION TO ACTIVITY

- What we see with Jacob, when he lives into his name of "grasping" is that he needs to grab at lots of things at the same time, but because he can only hold so much, he ends up having to juggle a lot of things.
- His mind is always busy trying to figure out how to make a situation work out best for him and make everything line up for him.
- This approach, this grabbing/grasping, is a VERY typical approach for us humans, by the way
- So we're going to do an activity, now, that is meant to help us think about how complex our/Jacob's grasping can make things

## EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- Split into teams of twos and threes to play "Jacks"
- Decide who will go first. The person who goes first will do this...

**1 Scatter the jacks onto the playing surface.** Throw them directly in front of you, and try to scatter them evenly, not too close together and not too far apart.

**2 Toss the ball into the air.** Throw it straight up, and give it enough height to give you time to pick up your jacks, but not so high that it veers off beyond your reach.

**3 Pick up a single jack.** With the same hand that you threw the ball with, grab one jack into your hand before the ball bounces.

**4 Let the ball bounce once.** The ball can only bounce one time - if you let it bounce more than once, your turn is over.

**5 Grab the ball before it bounces again.** Use the same hand that you used to pick up the jack.

- The jack must stay in your hand while you grab the ball.
- Once you've grabbed the ball, transfer the jack to your left hand. Continue transferring your collected jacks into your other hand.

**6 Collect all the jacks in this manner.** Keep scooping the jacks one at a time. This first round is called "onesies."

**7 Continue on to the next rounds.** Scatter the jacks again, and this time pick up two jacks each time. This is called the "twosies" round. Next, pick up three each round, then four, then five, and then six.

**8 Move on to the next player after a foul.** Your turn ends and goes to the next player counterclockwise to you once you foul. There are a number of different ways to foul, including:

- Missing the ball, or letting it bounce more than once.
- Failing to pick up the correct number of jacks.
- Picking up the wrong number of jacks.
- Dropping a jack that you've picked up.
- Accidentally moving a jack from its placement on the ground (this is called "tipping").

**9 Pick up where you left off.** If your turn is reached again, start from where you were before your foul.

**10 Keep going until you have a winner or until time is called by the teacher/leader.** The winner will be the first person to complete "six-ies"

## **DO "JACKS ACTIVITY**

### **ASK**

- Was anyone able to pick up all six jacks/erasers in one bounce successfully? If so, that's very impressive! Well done!

- Who was NOT able to pick up all six jacks in bounce successfully? If so, don't feel bad. It's SUPPOSED to be hard.
- What made it hard? (it's hard to grab/manage so many things in such a short amount of time with limited resources – also known as: one hand)

## TELL

- Typically, the world teaches us to live like Jacob: To manage/grab lots of things at the same time with limited resources so that it'll all work out for you (and possibly your family).
- But, it's not easy, right? And supposedly, it's not SUPPOSED to be easy.
- But there's another catch: As we saw in the previous lesson with Jacob, living the grabber/grasper/Jacob way usually ends in hurt and separation
- But there's another option. The way of living that God calls us to.
- And that way is a lot simpler.
- **[DO Quick demonstration with the jacks. Bounce the ball and catch it. Bounce the ball and catch it. Then put the ball down and pick up the jacks with both hands]**
- A lot simpler, right?
- But not necessarily easier. For one, I didn't win the game. Two, I didn't play by the rules and others might not let me play if I kept doing that.
- But I also didn't get all stressed out, frustrated and angry, either.
- Next lesson, we'll look at how even though Jacob has experienced some change in his life, his old way of living has been passed on to his family

## CLOSING PRAYER