

Introduction

Are you limping in your walk with the Lord?

The Christian life is often described as a walk with Jesus Christ:

v Romans 6:4 ...we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

v Ephesians 4:1 ...walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,

v Colossians 2:6 As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,

v 1 Thessalonians 2:12 ...walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

When you think of your walk with the Lord, though, you probably don't think of yourself as limping. Yet here in Genesis Thirty-two Jacob's limp is *given* to him by God. It is therefore a gift! One commentator asks,

"...is this a pitiful picture? It is not, as anyone with [spiritual] perception knows. It is a strong picture, for now Jacob is moving forward at the command, and in the power, of God."¹

If limping is beneficial, how are *you* to "limp" in *your* walk with the Lord?

= Limping is not to be confused with stumbling. Stumbling has to do with disciplining. The Bible speaks of weak Christians being stumbled in their walk by more mature Christians who encourage them to sin by promoting Christian liberty in areas that the weak Christian is unsure about.

= Limping is not to be confused with falling. Falling has to do with disobedience. The Bible speaks of Christians willfully falling into sin due to their own disobedience.

= Limping is not to be confused with lameness. In Hebrews 12:13 you are told "...make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be *dislocated*, but rather be healed." Lameness has to do with discouragement. The ones who were described as lame were discouraged in their walk by their many persecutions and trials.

Stumbling, falling, and lameness are destructive to your walk. Limping is something else, something to be desired in your walk with Jesus.

= The thing to be desired is humility. God humbled Jacob through the events and circumstances of Chapter Thirty-two. He had been depending on his own strength, but God showed him only in realizing his own weakness could he be strong in the Lord. His physical limp was a symbol of his spiritual humility. Realized weakness is humility - it comes from being humble before or from being humbled by the Lord.

¹Boice, Genesis, Vol. 2, p. 334

^ God calls His saints to be humble in their walk, to realize their own weakness, so that His power might be made manifest in and through their dependence upon Him:

2 Chronicles 7:14 "if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

James 4:6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

%o If His saints refuse to humble themselves, God is gracious to humble them:

Deuteronomy 8:16 "[God] fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end...

How do we develop a limp? That's what this Chapter teaches us!

Jacob refused to humble himself in his walk and God stepped in to humble him! God will graciously do the same for you - give you opportunities to humble yourself, then step in to humble you. **Either way it is His good pleasure to leave you *limping* - so that in your realized weakness He can be revealed as your strength.**

#1 Humble Yourself Or God Will Bring You To The End Of Your Reasonings In Order To Humble You (v1-6)

In Chapter Thirty-one Jacob had been delivered from the hands of Laban. As he journeyed on towards home he would need to deal with his brother Esau - whose birthright and blessing he had stolen.

Genesis 32:1 So Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.

Genesis 32:2 When Jacob saw them, he said, "This *is* God's camp." And he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

The word for "camp" is "host." A great host of God's holy angels were revealed to Jacob. He was enabled to see into the spiritual realm that surrounds us at all times. He called the place "Mahanaim" - "the two hosts" or "double camp," referring to his caravan and the host of angels.

When you are obediently "on your way," wherever you are is a "double camp"! You see by faith a host encamped about you...

With this amazing guard you would think that Jacob would depend upon God's strength in his meeting with Esau. He did not! He began to reason out how *he* should go about ordering the meeting.

Genesis 32:3 Then Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

Genesis 32:4 And he commanded them, saying, "Speak thus to my lord Esau, 'Thus your servant Jacob says: "I have dwelt with Laban and stayed there until now.

Genesis 32:5 "I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight."

Jacob put the emphasis on the outward blessings he had received while at Padan Aram. "Speak thus to my lord Esau...I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants..." Perhaps he reasoned that Esau, being carnal anyway, would respect him on account of his outward show of prosperity.

Esau seems unimpressed in verse six:

Genesis 32:6 Then the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men *are* with him."

The messenger returned with no word from Esau - only the warning that Esau approached with four hundred men, a considerable army. Jacob reasoned that Esau was coming to attack him, coming to fulfill his oath of twenty years ago to kill him.

See how Jacob's reasoning is prejudiced! As you see later, Esau had no intention of executing his revenge. Why the armed escort? Esau may have thought that Jacob would attack *him* - a thought that never occurred to Jacob in his reasoning! After all, it was Jacob who had always deceived Esau and not the other way around.

Our reasoning is often just like this. We emphasize the outward blessings we have received, and we are often prejudiced in our reasoning.

^ We emphasize outward blessings...

We list our *spiritual* oxen, donkeys, and flocks; our *spiritual* servants. We talk about what God is doing *through* us rather than

about what God is doing *in* us. We speak about who we are teaching rather than about what we are learning - about who we are discipling for God rather than about how we are being disciplined by God.

‰ We are prejudiced in our reasoning...

We have a tendency to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. This causes us to mistake the actions of others and to misjudge their motives. We can easily jump to the conclusion that an army is advancing against us!

= We ought rather to humble ourselves before the Lord. We do so by reflecting inner blessings, and by preferring others over ourselves - just the opposite of what our reasoning would have us do. If we won't humble ourselves then God will design events and circumstances in which He will humble us.

Come to the end of your reasoning and God won't have to *bring* you there!

#2 Humble Yourself Or God Will Bring You To The
End Of Your Resources In Order To Humble You
(v7-21)

These verses give us a hint of the vast wealth that Jacob had accumulated. Reasoning with Esau had seemed to fail; perhaps Jacob's resources could save him. He would offer them to Esau.

Genesis 32:7 So 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.

Genesis 32:8 And he said, "If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company which is left will escape."

Here you see the spiritual blindness brought about by fear. Jacob speaks again of "two companies" as he separates his caravan. What about the Lord's angelic host? What happened to the "double camp?" Fear canceled out faith in what God had shown him.

Genesis 32:9 Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you':

Genesis 32:10 "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies.

Genesis 32:11 "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 *and* the mother with the children.

Genesis 32:12 "For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'"

I want to be careful not to misjudge Jacob's motives in this prayer. It would be wrong to read too much into it. It is interesting to note, however, that while he asked God to deliver him, he immediately took matters into his own hands the next day. He sounded humble: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant..." But he depended on his own resources: "I have become two companies." He had not yet realized his own weakness. He was *not* humble.

Genesis 32:13 So he lodged there that same night, and took what came to his hand as a present for Esau his brother:

Genesis 32:14 two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams,

Genesis 32:15 thirty milk camels with their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten foals.

Genesis 32:16 Then he delivered *them* to the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass over before me, and put some distance between successive droves."

Genesis 32:17 And he commanded the first one, saying, "When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going? Whose *are* these in front of you?'

Genesis 32:18 "then you shall say, 'They *are* your servant Jacob's. It *is* a present sent to my lord Esau; and behold, he also *is* behind us.'"

Genesis 32:19 So he commanded the second, the third, and all who followed the droves, saying, "In this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him;

Genesis 32:20 "and also say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob *is* behind us.' " For he said, "I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me."

Genesis 32:21 So the present went on over before him, but he himself lodged that night in the camp.

Again Jacob appealed to Esau's carnality. He had once bought Esau's birthright with a bowl of soup. Now he would buy his forgiveness with this world's goods - with lots of bowls of soup! He had sought the presence of the Lord, but he was depending on the present he could send to Esau.

= Your resources can keep you from being humble before the Lord. In First Timothy 6:17 you read,

1 Timothy 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

Riches can lead you to be haughty rather than humble as you depend upon them rather than upon the living God. Come to the end of your trust in riches and in resources and God won't have to *bring* you there.

End Of Your Relationships In Order To Humble You
(v22-23)

Genesis 32:22 And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok.

Genesis 32:23 He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had.

Jacob, in his prayer, had expressed concern that Esau might take up the sword against the mothers and their children. Yet he sent them *ahead* of him - appealing to Esau's compassion - but nevertheless putting them in harm's way! He was depending on relationships rather than depending upon God.

= Relationships with others are an important part of the Christian life...

Sometimes, though, we put relationships with others *ahead* of seeking the Lord - looking for help and depending upon others more than we do the Lord. This isn't good for us or for others!

^ It isn't good for us because no one can minister to us the way Jesus Himself can. Benny Hester: "Though some know me well/Still nobody knows me like You."

%o It isn't good for others because it puts them in harm's way. They are asked to fulfill a role that only Jesus can, and we can't help but becoming disappointed in them at some point.

Come to the end of your dependence upon relationships and God won't have to *bring* you there!

#4 Humble Yourself Or God Will Bring You To The
End Of Your Wrestlings In Order To Humble You
(v24-32)

Because of Jacob's experience we often speak of "wrestling" with God to convey the thought of earnestly seeking God in sincere, heartfelt prayer. That is not entirely accurate. Jacob was *not* earnestly seeking God in sincere, heartfelt prayer. As we've seen, he was depending upon his own sources of strength. *God came and wrestled with him!*

Genesis 32:24 Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.

God became Jacob's adversary, not his advocate; He became his enemy, not his intercessor! The blessing didn't come in the strength of Jacob's wrestling. It came when Jacob could no longer resist but could only cling helplessly.

Wrestling matches last only six minutes. There are three periods of two minutes each, and an entire contest consists of only

about ten of these six minute matches.² Yet those who wrestle are often exhausted after this short period of time - so intense is the activity. Jacob resisted God *all night long* - from dark till dawn! It is not a picture of humble prayer; it is a picture of being humbled to pray.

Genesis 32:25 Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him.

Genesis 32:26 And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

This is the first mention of any communication from Jacob, the first mention of prayer. He has been brought to the end of his wrestlings and can only cling - and *now* he prays.

Genesis 32:27 So He said to him, "What *is* your name?" He said, "Jacob."

Genesis 32:28 And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."

The prophet Hosea gives us insight into these verses. In Hosea 12:3-4 you read,

He took his brother by the heel in the womb, And in his strength he struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; He wept, and sought favor from Him...

Jacob had wrested the birthright and blessing from Esau, and he had wrestled against God. These were not admirable things. God was not commending him for them. He commended him for his attitude at birth and at the brook - both pictures of his total dependence upon God to "deliver" him while all he could do was cling!

You see, Jacob didn't win the wrestling match; God did. Jacob's victory was in realizing his weakness. He was strong, tenacious, and determined - wrestling all night, going beyond human endurance. God had to bring him to the end of his fleshly wrestlings in order to humble him.

God asked Jacob what his name was. Jacob confessed it, then God changed it. "I am Jacob," he said; "Deceiver, Supplanter, Heel-Catcher." Having confessed his true character, God could change him to Israel. Concerning this name, James Montgomery Boice writes,

²Ibid., p. 332

"Israel is a compound of two words: *sarah* (meaning fight, struggle, or rule) and *el* (meaning God). Commentators have taken this to mean "he struggles with God" or "he prevails with God..." In other cases, however, of names compounded from a verb and the name of God, God is not the object of the verb. He is the subject. Thus, Daniel means "God judges," not "he judges God." Samuel means "God heard," not "he heard God." If we...follow the same principle of interpretation here, Israel means "God rules," "God commands," or "God prevails."³

God humbled Jacob; now he was Israel - God was ruling, prevailing, and commanding him.

Genesis 32:29 Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell *me* Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why *is* it *that* you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there.

Jacob inquired as to God's Name. He received a question in response. It is a key to remaining humble before the Lord - ask *why*. Search your heart to discover your motives.

Genesis 32:30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

Genesis 32:31 Just as he crossed over Penuel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip.

Genesis 32:32 Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which *is* on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the muscle that shrank.

The Jews commemorated this event by not eating the muscle which is on the hip socket. Memorials and traditions that communicate spiritual truth can be beneficial. They ought to be somewhat natural and ordinary rather than contrived and ornate. As the Jewish mother prepared the meal she could speak to her daughter about Jacob; as the family gathered at the table, the father could continue the story.

= Do you ever feel as though God is wrestling against you? Maybe He is! Come to the end of your wrestlings so He won't have to *bring* you there!

Conclusion

The prophet Micah was told, "...what does the LORD require of you **But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?**" (Micah 6:8). The last phrase could be translated, "Humble yourself to walk with God." In Isaiah 57:15 you read,

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name *is* Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy *place*, With him *who* has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Humility is no handicap. It is of such great value that, if you won't humble yourself, God will work in your life to humble you.

³Ibid., p. 335

You and I should develop a limp in our walk with Jesus Christ. We should humble ourselves before the Lord, not depending in our reasoning, in our resources, or in our relationships, and not being tenacious in our wrestling against God when He is seeking to humble us. Remember the words of James, "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."⁴

⁴James 4:6