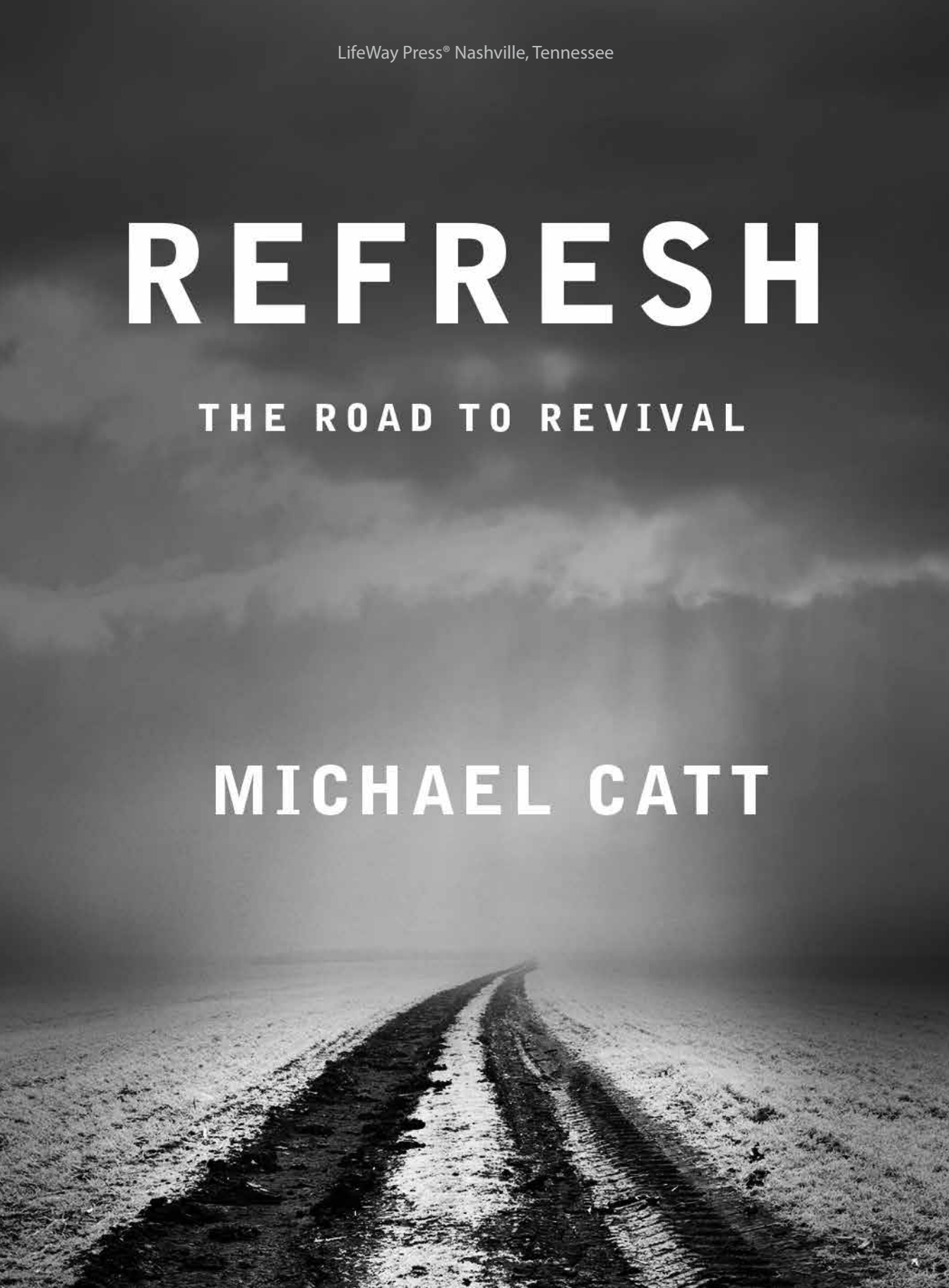


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REFRESH

THE ROAD TO REVIVAL

MICHAEL CATT



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Michael has been the Senior Pastor of Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia, since 1989. The church has changed from a neighborhood church to a regional, multi-ethnic congregation with members from eleven nations.

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In 2003, he founded the ReFRESH® Conference (www.ReFRESHconference.org), a time of seeking the Lord for spiritual awakening and revival. The conference has been hosted in Albany, Georgia; Branson, Missouri; and Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. Plans for future expansion of the conferences include New England and the Midwest.

Michael served as the President of the 2008 Southern Baptist Convention Pastors' Conference, representing over 42,000 churches. He has spoken at conferences, colleges, seminaries, rallies, camps, NBA and college chapel services and often speaks to ministries such as Life Action, Student Leadership University, and The Billy Graham Training Center at The Cove. He has served the Southern Baptist Convention as an IMB Trustee, President of the Georgia Baptist Convention's Preaching Conference, and as Vice President of the Georgia Baptist Convention.

Michael holds degrees from Mississippi College, Luther Rice Bible College and Seminary, and Trinity Seminary. He and his wife Terri have been married since 1974. They are the proud parents of two grown daughters, Erin and Hayley.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a path to revival worn throughout the pages of Scripture and the annals of church history. Churches across America are realizing that we need a fresh touch from God. The principles contained in this study will help your church focus on the essential elements of revival.

This study covers three main topics—the power of desperation, surrender, and persistence.

DESPERATION (WEEKS 1-3)

Brokenness is not something we sign up for, but it is a necessity if we are going to be useful. When we are weak, He is strong. In the darkest hour He shines the brightest. In the pit we find the bottom is solid ground. The power of desperation is something the world cannot comprehend. In a world where strength is lauded, we see that broken people have unexpected power with God. The blessings of the broken and surrendered are immeasurable.

SURRENDER (WEEKS 4-6)

Revival is key to our survival. Our churches do not need a tune-up of old programs or a face lift. We need an overhaul. We don't need help, we need deliverance. God is looking for a remnant, for kindling wood to start the fires of revival. And it all begins with surrender. We must surrender ourselves to God in total abandonment, for there is power in surrender.

PERSISTENCE (WEEKS 7-8)

When we work, we work. But when we pray, God works. When we pray, we partner with God. He is not interested in our innovative methods. God is moved by the prayers of simple saints who learn in the quiet place to lay hold of the throne of grace. Prayer is not incidental to the work of God—it is the work!

The Bible Study Book includes a small-group experience for 9 small-group sessions as well as short daily individual study. You can also find a Leader Guide in the back of the book to help you facilitate this experience in a group setting.

Blessings on you as you seek God through this study.

WEEK 1

THE WAY UP IS DOWN

GENESIS 32–35

DAY ONE

THE HUSTLER

Have you ever been backed into a corner? Have you ever felt you had no way out of a situation? What did you do? How did you respond? Did you pull away from God or cry out to Him?

Jacob was a master at maneuvering his way out of tight corners. All his life he was known as a schemer, hustler, and supplanter. He was always trying to get the upper hand. You find Jacob constantly trying to wiggle and squirm his way loose from a situation, looking out for number one. (Read Genesis 25–31 to refresh your memory about Jacob or read about him for the first time.)

Complete the following statements:

All my life I've been known as _____

I have always tried to _____

But one day, life caught up with him. He realized he was backed into a corner with nowhere to go. God had boxed him in and pinned him down for the count. It brought him to a point of desperation.

I know people who believe that professional wrestling is real. I have a man on my staff who was a professional wrestler before he was saved. He knows better. The matches are planned, rehearsed, and fixed. The outcome is determined before the wrestlers ever enter the stadium.

I am not a wrestling fan, but I find myself drawn to the first recorded wrestling match in history, located in Genesis 32. Jacob never had a chance; it was a fixed match. There was no doubt who was going to win this one. Jacob wasn't slick enough to slip out of God's hold. God met him and pinned him until he cried out in desperation.

While we know Jacob as one of the patriarchs, it's important to remember that he was not a perfect man. He was flawed. He was deceptive. From the moment of his birth, he was wrestling to get his way. And what he didn't get by depravity, he got by encouragement. Rebekah, his mother, encouraged him to deceive his own father, Isaac. But ultimately Jacob was to blame for his choices. He chose to deceive his father. He chose to lie. His pattern was lying and deception.

Jacob was an unlikable man. He was like the bully you despised in high school, the one you never wanted to turn your back on. The boy you wouldn't want your

Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that He could not defeat him, He struck Jacob's hip socket as they wrestled and dislocated his hip. Then He said to Jacob, "Let Me go, for it is daybreak."

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

"What is your name?" the man asked.

"Jacob," he replied.

"Your name will no longer be Jacob," He said. "It will be Israel because you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed."

Then Jacob asked Him, "Please tell me Your name."

But He answered, "Why do you ask My name?" And He blessed him there.

Jacob then named the place Peniel, "For I have seen God face to face," he said, "and I have been delivered."

—Genesis 32:24-30

daughter to date. The sad truth is, in many ways, we see too much of ourselves in Jacob. Often when we look in the mirror, we are looking at Jacob.

Some of you are more like Jacob than you want to admit. You can't keep a job, but it's always someone else's fault. Your wife has been insisting that you see a counselor for your anger, but you tell her you can handle it. Maybe you've listened to sermon after sermon on the victorious life, but you are wallowing in defeat because you keep trying harder instead of trusting completely. Like Jacob, some of us insist on learning everything the hard way.

Often when we look in the mirror, we are looking at Jacob.

Do you agree or disagree with the statement in the margin of this page? Agree _____ Disagree _____

If you agree, how do you see Jacob in yourself?

What area of personal change do you need to surrender to the Lord?

Jacob was a natural deceiver—a family trait. He convinced his brother Esau to give up his birthright. Their mother convinced Jacob to deceive his father in order to receive the family blessing. Later, Laban, his uncle and father-in-law, tricked him into marrying Leah instead of Rachel. The philosophy of life in this family was, "The ends justify the means."

Jacob was like a lot of believers today. They've learned the ways of the world. They know how to scheme to their advantage. They sing on Sunday about the cross and then live in deception, manipulation, and lies during the week. What happens on Sunday has very little to do with how they live the rest of their lives. Until ...

Until they face a crisis. Until the bottom falls out. Until their lies come back to haunt them. Until they meet their match. Until the seeds they sow reap a whirlwind of unbearable consequences. Then, backed into a corner, they become desperate for God.

Is there someone who fits the description in the paragraph above who you need to pray for? Do you need to ask someone to pray for you?

DAY TWO

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

As you move from chapter 31 to chapter 32 of Genesis, you find Jacob in a precarious position. Behind him was Laban, so there was no turning back. Ahead was Esau, so what was in front of him wasn't very appealing either. He had cheated his brother out of the birthright. For decades he feared Esau would find him and kill him. As far as he knew, Esau still wanted to kill him.

Are you living in fear of being confronted by your sin?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you trying to run from your sin? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Jacob was confronted with the possibility that his sin would find him out. What if Esau was bent on revenge and retribution? Jacob was without excuse, and he knew it. After all he had done to Esau, his conscience was pricked with the thought of his sin and deception. Over and over again Jacob was reminded of the fact that he was headed for a confrontation with his past and his sin. What he didn't know was that God was going to confront him before he ever got to Esau.

I would have never chosen Jacob. But God sees what we cannot see. He saw Jacob and knew he could become Israel. He saw a twister and supplanter and knew that one day he could learn to trust God at a whole new level.

Do you find it hard to love the Jacobs of this world? It's probably because you've convinced yourself that you are better than Jacob. Maybe you think God loves you more than He loves Jacob. But God loves Jacobs—the ones we tend to write off. We give up on them, thinking they aren't worth our time. That's because we've got our eyes on the problem and not the process.

Do you tend to keep your eyes on the problem or the process?

Explain.

Maybe, just maybe, you are a Jacob reading this book. You're wondering, *After all the lies, deception, and conniving, can God ever use me? Why would God want to use me? Is there hope for me?*

Maybe you are a Jacob, or you know a Jacob. Jacob is the one who says he wants to serve God but tries to do it in his flesh. The one who uses human

God loves Jacobs—the ones we tend to write off. We give up on them, thinking they aren't worth our time. That's because we've got our eyes on the problem and not the process.

Sin deceives us into thinking we can negotiate with God. It deludes us into believing that we can get better in our flesh.

methods and strategies in hopes of attaining the blessings and promises of God. The one who sees life as one extended negotiation process, constantly looking for loopholes in lordship, obedience, and holiness.

At the end of his life, Jacob gave a brief biographical sketch to Pharaoh: "My pilgrimage has lasted 130 years. My years have been few and hard, and they have not surpassed the years of my fathers during their pilgrimages" (Gen. 47:9). Scripture interprets the word "hard" in a number of ways. It is translated: evil, distress, adversity, affliction, calamity, mischief, trouble, wretchedness, and wickedness. It reminds us that sin is extremely destructive.

In other words, in spite of the fact that God redeemed his later days and renamed him, Jacob viewed his as a wasted life. He had spent a great deal of energy and time running from God, fighting God, resisting the Lord, and ripping people off. The good news is that he didn't play the blame game. He didn't point a finger at his mother and say, "She taught me to be this way." He didn't say, "If you knew Laban like I knew Laban..."

We will never be desperate for God if we blame our environment, our education or lack thereof, our surroundings, our parents, or our circumstances. I've visited prisons and heard inmates blame the system, the man, or their absentee fathers. The reality is this: we do make choices. Two people can be in identical situations, one turns to God while the other shakes his fist at God. One has a pity party, and the other praises God in spite of it all.

We will never be desperate until we face our own depravity. Sin deceives us into thinking we can negotiate with God. It deludes us into believing that we can get better in our flesh. It destroys us by telling us we can get to heaven but avoid a face-to-face encounter with the Christ who demands our whole life surrendered to Him.

DAY THREE

THE POINT OF DESPERATION

God works with us where we are. He refines, rebukes, and reveals as He moves us toward righteousness and personal revival.

We want instant change, but sometimes it takes time to get the junk out of our lives. God works with us where we are. He refines, rebukes, and reveals as He moves us toward righteousness and personal revival.

What "junk" needs to be cleaned out of your life?

In Jacob's dream, given to him while on the run from his murder-minded brother, God made a promise: "Look, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (Gen. 28:15). Jacob woke up from the dream and realized God was in that place!

God is patient. He will pursue us like the hound of heaven because He longs to catch us, wrestle us to the ground, and bring a blessing to us. If there is no willingness to yield, there will never be willingness for God to rule.

God saw something in Jacob that we wouldn't see with a casual glance. Here was a man we would have given up on long ago, but God didn't give up on Jacob. Why? He wanted Jacob to surrender so he could become something by the power of God—something he could never become on his own.

So in Genesis 32, Jacob comes to a defining moment in his life. Through this wrestling match, the deceiver now realized his strength through Jehovah. Where he once tried to prevail in his own strength, Jacob now found God's power to prevail in a new way. He was knocked down so he could one day stand up in victory.

He was knocked down so he could one day stand up in victory.

If the statement in the margin of this page was in the Beatitudes, it might say, "Blessed are you who are knocked down, for you will stand in victory." The Bible is full of counterintuitive messages like that statement. Can you recall any others?

In Genesis 35, Jacob was once again at Bethel, where God renewed the promise to Jacob by changing his name to Israel. "Your name is Jacob; you will no longer be named Jacob, but your name will be Israel. ... The land that I gave to

If we are to be used by God, to see life in a new light, to walk in a new dimension of our faith, we must yield, repent, and surrender.

Abraham and Isaac I will give to you. And I will give the land to your descendants after you" (vv. 10,12). God fulfilled His promise. Jacob lived out a blessed life, but it wasn't without struggle.

I recently pulled down an old copy of A. W. Tozer's classic *The Knowledge of the Holy*. In the preface of that book I found these words: "Modern Christianity is simply not producing the kind of Christian who can appreciate or experience the life in the Spirit. ... The only way to recoup our spiritual losses is to go back to the cause of them and make such corrections as the truth warrants. The decline of the knowledge of the holy has brought on our troubles."¹

Why did Jacob fall prey to deceit? He didn't have a proper view of God, a proper "knowledge of the holy." He wanted God's will, his way. It never works like that. We are so busy with our schemes, dreams, and plans that we make little time for intimacy, holiness, and—yes—desperation. And sometimes, God orchestrates events where He can get us alone and wrestle our stubborn will to the ground.

Jacob, like many of us, knew the promise of the blessing, but he couldn't see how God was going to do it. He was impatient with God's timetable. He must have been convinced the promise was conditional based on something he could do, rather than unconditional based on the wisdom, grace, and love of God. But Jacob didn't get it, and sometimes neither do we. The only way he could see things working out was if he got involved in the process and was proactive. So he stole the birthright, he lied, he manipulated, until—faced with the prospect of losing it all—he met God.

Don't think that we all embrace the idea of "knowing God." Jacob didn't. He was willing to send all he had ahead to appease his angry brother Esau. As Gene Getz says, Jacob was going to "test the waters." He didn't really care what happened to everyone else as long as he could save his own hide. For the longest time, Jacob just didn't get it. He thought he could control his family, his life, and his future. As one writer said, "Striving and resisting become a survival tactic."²

God is faithful to finish the work He has started in us (Phil. 1:6). God confronted Jacob and his deceptive patterns, but He would not leave Jacob where He found him. Salvation must result in sanctification. If we are to be used by God, to see life in a new light, and to walk in a new dimension of our faith, we must yield, repent, and surrender.

DAY FOUR

WHERE THE PAST GOES TO DIE

For Jacob, bribery was easier than humility and brokenness.

The flesh dies hard. Jacob, on his way back to meet Esau, fell back into his old thought patterns. His actions revealed his inability to trust God with his life. Still unable to completely release himself to the Lord, he tried to make promises of elaborate gifts to appease Esau. For Jacob, bribery was easier than humility and brokenness.

Have you, like Jacob, thought your way was easier than God's? Explain.

When you are desperate, which path are you currently most likely to choose—yours or God's?

"A glimpse of Jesus will save you, but to gaze at Him will sanctify you."
—Manley Beasley

God knew how to get Jacob's attention. When God wrestles with us, He has a twofold purpose: to get us to admit our deception and to reveal what we can be when we are desperate for Him as our source of sufficiency. Jacob named the place of wrestling "Peniel," which means "the face of God." I often heard Manley Beasley say, "A glimpse of Jesus will save you, but to gaze at Him will sanctify you."

List two purposes of God's wrestling with us:

1. _____
2. _____

How have you seen these purposes of God's wrestling in your own life?

This night brought significant change to the once crafty twister. He was unsure if any of his plans would work. He didn't know what tomorrow would bring. He was alone and afraid. But he crossed the ford of the Jabbok. Crossing over the river is essential if we are ever going to move beyond ourselves. Jacob was not only crossing over; he was moving in a new direction. He was leaving the old behind—Laban, his name, his past. He was entering into a new phase in his experience with God.

Jacob looked at his past, and he was ashamed. He looked at his future—at the thought of facing Esau—and he was afraid. It's possible his mind was flooded with family stories of God's faithfulness to his grandfather, Abraham. He knew they were true for Abraham but wasn't sure the same would be true for him. Thus, in spite of all that God had done to preserve Jacob's life, to bless him, and to reveal Himself to him, Jacob was still far short of where he should have been in his walk with Jehovah.

It is true that God often works in a slow manner, refining and pruning us. But there are times when God deals with us suddenly and decisively. This is what happened to Jacob. The Holy Spirit can do more to change your life in five minutes than you or I can imagine. Jacob's encounter with the living God was life-changing. He learned more that night than he had learned his entire life. Scripture says that "a man wrestled with him until daybreak" (Gen. 32:24). This wasn't a fight that was finished in a few minutes. It was an exhausting, stressful, crisis experience. He didn't know if he would live or die. It was hand-to-hand combat.

Finally as the day began to break, Jacob tried to discover the name of the wrestler. The Angel of the Lord turned the tables on Jacob and asked, "What is your name?" Gene Getz brilliantly describes this moment: "When the stranger asked Jacob's name, Jacob must have released his grip and fallen limp at the stranger's feet, whispering his own name in shame. The physical battle was over—and so was the spiritual battle that was far more important than the wrestling match. For most of his life, Jacob had promoted his own agenda. He was self-centered and self-driven. He was used to making his own way in life, deceiving when necessary. He relied on his own strength—both psychologically and physically. ... It was during this moment of weakness, while Jacob was exerting all the human strength he could muster, that God brought him to his knees and changed his name."³

DAY FIVE

THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE DARKNESS

When he limped along, his body would move up and then move down. Jacob learned in his desperate situation that the way up is down.

When a man or woman gets desperate for God, they can get through to God. He is attracted to weakness. Our strengths are no help to Him. Our weakness is where He can prove Himself to be our source of sufficiency. Notice in Genesis 32:29, “And He blessed him there.” He blessed Jacob at the point of his surrender and abandonment. He blessed him in ways he could have never been blessed otherwise.

If Jacob had been given a vote, he would have never chosen to meet the Angel of the Lord. Yet it was a defining moment in his life. It forever changed him. He was struck in the hip, a moment that marked the rest of his life. Whatever others might have thought of his limp, Jacob knew it to be a constant reminder of God’s victory over him. When he limped along, his body would move up and then move down. Jacob learned in his desperate situation that the way up is down.

Maybe you are feeling alone. Maybe you are immersed in a time of darkness in your life. Could it be your sin is catching up with you? Are you tired of running? I’ve got good news for you. God is on the verge of getting you alone with Him so He can get the “you” out of you and fill you with Himself. Your surrender will become His victory ... in you and through you.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

1. A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1961), 6-7.
2. Lloyd John Ogilvie, *Lord of the Impossible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 29.
3. Gene Getz, *Jacob: Following God without Looking Back* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 143-44.

The light at the end of your darkness is a wrestling match where God can change your name, transform you more and more into His image, and then mold you into a witness of His amazing grace.