

Forty Days in the Wilderness: How God Turns Trials into Triumphs

Week 3: PERSONHOOD (P. Theresa)

I want to welcome all you to our weekend services including those of you joining us online. We are currently in our series "Forty Days in the Wilderness: How God Turns Trials into Triumphs."

Throughout this series we have been discussing how challenging times in life, like the experiences of the Israelites in the desert and Jesus in the wilderness, aren't just hardships; they're actually opportunities for growth and learning. These seasons of struggle can feel tough and even make us think we're alone, but they often prepare us for something greater.

In the first week, P Mark dug into what the wilderness really means. The biblical narrative starts off with a victorious moment for the Israelites as they celebrate their escape from Pharaoh. But then they hit a rough patch, wandering in the desert and facing a tough situation without water, which leads to complaints. This quick shift shows that life can change drastically, and we need to understand these wilderness phases of life or else, like the Israelites we might find ourselves stuck in the wilderness. Let's not pitch a tent, get comfortable in stuck in the wilderness, AMEN?! We are passing through the wilderness.

In the second week, we looked at how the wilderness is a time for preparation. Just as Jesus started His ministry after a challenging time in the wilderness, and Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt following his own tough experiences, we learn that these trials aren't random. Instead, they're about preparing us for what lies ahead. God uses these times to shape us, not to punish us.

Ultimately, we are learning that these wilderness seasons should encourage us to not just get through hard times, but to embrace them. We should see them as part of God's bigger plan for our lives which leads us to today's message on Personhood. I am so excited about the word personhood because, honestly, I struggled with it for many years. Only within that last couple of years have I truly felt a sense of peace in my personhood. When talking about one's person or their state of being, we are in essence discussing a person's identity. I looked up an illustration on identity and I found a perfect one to how us where we don't want to end up.

The dilemma of an unclear sense of personal identity was illustrated by an incident in the life of the famous German philosopher Schleiermacher, who did much to shape the progress of modern thought. The story is told that one day as an old man he was sitting alone on a bench in a city park. A policeman thinking that he was a vagrant came over and shook him and asked, "Who are you?" Schleiermacher replied sadly, "I wish I knew." - Unknown

Let me ask each of you, "If you were asked, 'Who are You?'," how would you answer? Would you, like the German philosopher say "I wish I knew" or would you say "I don't know" or would you proceed to give your list of achievements and life history? Who are you? Turn to your neighbor and say who are you? Turn to your other neighbor and say, Do you know who you are? What we will learn today is summed up in another quote whose author is unknown yet still rings out so true. That is...

"In the wilderness, we discover not only who we are, but Whose we are." — Unknown

When we know who we belong to, then we begin to truly understand who we were created to be. Unfortunately, or actually I should say, fortunately, in order to truly know our identity and walk in our divine personhood, the Lord must refine our character and strip away all that is within us that is not of HIS making. Thus, our need for the wilderness.

You see, as we grow up, our environment, our family, our education, our choice of friends, decisions we make, all have an impact in part in who we become. Amen? That is why we try to encourage our children to be careful with what they are consuming. What comes out of us when we are squeezed is greatly determined by what we have allowed to come into us.

Along our journey we start to believe certain things about ourselves and therefore act accordingly. We hold onto who we think we are, but, here it is church...

"The wilderness is where God strips us of the lies we believe about ourselves and replaces them with the truth of who He created us to be." — Unknown

In the wilderness Jesus faced the temptation to define Himself by worldly influence and power and yet he did not fall to those temptations. David had to decide what kind of king he would ultimately be, and the Israelites had to shed their slave mentality to walk in their sonship. God uses the wilderness to shape our identity and reveal who we were created to be.

Why does God take his children through such a testing season? Well in the words of John Bevere, "God is raising a generation of people who will manifest His glory, not their on - a people made in His image, walking in His character" (*Victory in the Wilderness*, Bevere, p. 57).

Today we will look at a biblical narrative that truly shows how one is transformed in their identity and literally gets a name change. It is the story of Jacob. It is a long narrative, but we will focus in on a very significant turning point in Jacob's story found in Genesis 32:21-32. Before I get there in the story, I have to give you the cliff note version of what happens leading up to this moment in the story.

In the Bible, Jacob's story includes stealing his brother's birthright, marrying two wives, and wrestling with God. Although Jacob's descendants became the heads of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, his life was marked with struggle.

Jacob's early life

- Jacob was born to Isaac and Rebecca (Isaac being the promised son of Abraham and Sarah). He had a twin brother Esau
- Jacob stole his twin brother Esau's birthright. In Jewish law, the firstborn receives an inheritance double the size of his brothers. This is standard practice as recorded in Deuteronomy 21:17: "Allot to him a double portion of all he possesses; since he is the first fruit of his vigor, the birthright is his due." But it's not only a physical inheritance but also a spiritual one. The first born would also become the priest of the family
- Jacob deceives his father in giving him the first born son's blessing
- Jacob fled to his uncle Laban's home in Haran because his brother wanted to kill him.
- Before he gets to his uncle Laban's home, Jacob had a vision (Jacob's ladder); he has a divine encounter with the Lord and makes a vow with God Genesis 28:20-22

- Now the next approximately 21 years after that, he works hard and struggles. He struggles with his uncle, he struggles with his wives, it was one thing after the next.

Jacob's marriage

- Jacob fell in love with his cousin Rachel and worked for Laban for seven years to marry her.
- Laban tricked Jacob into marrying Rachel's older sister, Leah
- Jacob worked for Laban for another seven years to marry Rachel.
- Then he worked for Laban another 7 years becomes wealthy with sheep flock and struggles with Laban to leave and return to his home
- Laban finally allows for him to leave
- Jacob is now full of fear to face his brother Esau so to appease Esau he sends a gift to subdue his anger in hopes that Esau would forgive him. However, we see throughout the story that Esau did not hold this birthright in high regards because he traded it for a mere meal. He also did not honor the Lord's command to not marry foreign wives which would lead to pagan idol worship.

Now this is where we pick up in the story. Genesis 32: 21-32 HCSB,

21 So the gift was sent on ahead of him while he remained in the camp that night. 22 During the night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female slaves, and his 11 sons, and crossed the ford of Jabbok. 23 He took them and sent them across the stream, along with all his possessions.

Jacob Wrestles with God

24 Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 25 When the man saw that He could not defeat him, He struck [touched] Jacob's hip socket as they wrestled and dislocated his hip. 26 Then He said to Jacob, "Let Me go, for it is daybreak."

The dislocation of his hip caused Jacob to walk with a limp which was very significant. It served as a lasting reminder of his encounter with God that would transform him forever. It would remind him of where he wrestled with a divine being—often interpreted as an angel or a theophany of God Himself.

(Note: Expound on significance of the Hip; in wrestling or Jujitsu)

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

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

"Jacob," he replied.

28 "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."

The first thing we see is the limp Jacob now has is a reminder of his divine encounter which led to his identity change. Jacob had spent his life striving, scheming, and wrestling for blessings. He wrestled with his brother Esau, Laban, and even God. At Peniel, he refused to let go until he received a blessing. In response, God changed his name from *Jacob* ("heel-grabber" or "deceiver") to *Israel* ("he struggles with God" or "God prevails")

This was the moment Jacob went from an insecure man always trying to prove himself by being self-reliant to a true son of God who can fully trust and depend on his God. After his wrestling match, he could no longer rely on his own strength—he literally walked differently. His limp was a reminder that his victories would now come through God's power, not his own efforts. Through this blessing from this divine being, many believe is God himself, Jacob finally receives acknowledgement and affirmation he always sought after from his earthly father. He deceived his earthly father to receive a blessing. But now he wrestles with God and receives a blessing from His Heavenly Father.

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

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

Interestingly, the man never tells Jacob what his name is and I'm sure there is a reason for that. Regardless, the point is Jacob was wounded, yet blessed! This is something we see often in the life of believers. We may not get a physical limp like Jacob, but God often uses our wounds or

weaknesses to ultimately draw us closer to Him and make us more dependent upon Him. Paul speaks of the thorn in his flesh and how God spoke to him and said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfect in weakness” (1 Corinthians 12:9).

30 Jacob then named the place Peniel, “For I have seen God face to face,” he said, “and I have been delivered.” 31 The sun shone on him as he passed by Penuel—limping because of his hip. 32 That is why, to this day, the Israelites don’t eat the thigh muscle that is at the hip socket: because He struck Jacob’s hip socket at the thigh muscle.

One commentary said, “Jacob’s limp wasn’t just a physical disability—it was a spiritual testimony. It symbolized the moment he stopped wrestling against God and started walking *with* Him.”

My personal testimony - orphan spirit

An orphan spirit is a state of mind that can cause feelings of loneliness, abandonment, and isolation. It can develop from a history of rejection or abuse, or from a child rebelling against their parents.

Characteristics

- Feeling alienated, isolated, or insignificant
- Feeling like you'll never have what you need
- Feeling like you're always in competition with others
- Feeling like you're searching for significance
- Being hypersensitive

Some believe that an orphan spirit is a demonic spirit that invades a person's mind. Others believe that it's a mindset that develops from sin.

Overcoming an orphan spirit

Some say that you can overcome an orphan spirit by recognizing that it's a lie from the enemy, and by receiving God's love. Jesus told his followers, "I will not leave you as orphans" (John 14:18).

Sonship is all about our true identity as believers. We are not defined by what we do, or by our achievements but rather by whose we are. As

Children of God we belong to him and have been granted a spirit of Adoption.

15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, “*Abba*, Father!”¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children (Romans 8:15-16 HCSB)

He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will (Ephesians 1:5)

Our worth or value, comes from whose we are not what we do. Our journey through the wilderness allows us to embrace our status as adopted sons and daughters in God’s family. This new identity will shape our lives and should guide our actions.

OG DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the statement “I know who I am” make you feel? Right now, how would you answer the question “Who are you?” How would you have answered that same question in the past?
2. What do you sense is being stripped away from your personhood so that your true self can shine through? According 2 Corinthians 5:17, In what ways has the old gone and the new come?
3. What do the following words mean to you: security, freedom, and submission?
4. What’s the difference between serving for personhood and serving from personhood?