

What Is Your Name?

Genesis 32:22-27 NIV

What is your name? Do you like the name that was given to you? In our culture, we name people after family members as a way to honor them, but we also name our children after celebrities, or just because we like the pronunciation of a certain name. But in the Hebrew culture, specifically during Biblical times, names were given for specific reasons and purposes.

Names in the Bible have a meaning, and beyond a meaning, they speak of the essence, call, and the destiny of the person. So, names were given not only to honor family, or because the name sounded cool, or it was the name of a famous person. Names were given with a purpose and a destiny in mind.

For instance, the first woman was named *Eve* which *means* among other things, *the mother of all life*. Very appropriate, isn't it? Moses was given his name because he was drawn out of the waters, and later in his life we see how God, through Moses, drew the Hebrew people through and out of the waters. The angel told Mary and Joseph, "*You will have a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins*" (Matt. 1:21 and Luke 1:31). These are few examples of how names in the Bible speak of the essence, the call and the destiny of people.

If you do research on the names of God in the Bible, you will realize that the list is very extensive. The number of names used to identify God is in the hundreds. Why? In our limited language, we are trying to express and explain the nature, essence, and character of a God that goes beyond our comprehension. So, we use certain names and terms to make reference to the essence of God and what God does. For instance, **Proverbs 18:10** says, "*The name of the Lord is a strong tower...*" Is that the name of God? Well, at least we can say that "strong tower" is describing the caring and protective nature and essence of God.

What I want you to see is that Biblically speaking, names have to do with the essence, the heart of people. So, if names have to do with the essence and the heart of people, what is our real name? Our real name is the one we carry in each of our hearts. Perhaps, your given name is Joshua, Martha, Adam, or Laura, but your real name is the one you carry in your heart.

There is this story in the Bible that tells of Jesus going to a specific region outside Jewish territory. The Bible says that Jesus and the disciples went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. This is what happened.

"They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, a demon-possessed man from the town met him. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!'" For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot

and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.” Luke 8:26-29 NIV

I want you to see the condition of this man. He is in a very sad and extreme situation. From the text, we learn that this man:

1. Lived in a cemetery. Perhaps, this man lived in this solitary, dark place because his life stunk. His life was so decomposed, rotten, and depressed that he secluded himself.
2. Was undressed. The lack of clothing tells us that this man had lost his dignity. The first thing Adam and Eve noticed after the fall was that they were naked. In other words, they noticed they had lost their dignity.
3. Hurt himself. From the same account in the Gospel of Mark, we learn that this man cut himself with stones. Why? Perhaps, he was self-inflicting physical pain in order to get rid of his spiritual aching or at least to relieve the nonphysical discomfort. Isn't that what we do at times when we fail, when we sin? We beat up ourselves emotionally and more.
4. Broke irons and chains and no one could keep him calm. In other words, he was out of control.

I am fascinated by the way Jesus addressed this man. The Lord asked him one question, “**What is your name?**” (v. 30). From the reading, we know that Jesus wanted to set this person free. The Master wanted to bring change to this man's life and transform the way he was living. To accomplish this, Jesus asked this man one simple but meaningful question, “*What is your name?*”

By the answer this man gave, and the way Jesus accepted his reply, we know that the Lord was not asking him for his given name. Jesus was not interested in the name that was on this man's birth certificate. Jesus was going to the heart of the issue. Jesus was asking this man to name the things he had in his heart which were causing his condition. In other words, Jesus was saying to this person, “What is the reason of your agony? What is the cause of your behavior? Why do you do this? What is your name? What is the name you have inside, in your heart?”

Sometimes we are confused about our real name, that name we carry in our hearts. This is why Jesus told this man, tell me the name of the demon you have inside. This is how this man responded. “*My name is Legion,*” he replied, “*for we are many*” (Mark 5:9 NIV).

Of course, I am not saying that you are possessed by thousands of impure spirits, but we have to admit that there are things that control us. Even though we are not demon-possessed, I would say that sin puts us in situations very similar to that of this man who was controlled by an impure spirit. Our sins, and sometimes the sins of others make us feel depressed, make us lose our dignity; make us fight with ourselves down to the point of having no self-control.

There are things that lead us to act in ways we don't want to; and unless we name and face those things, we are not going to be able to experience liberation and receive the abundant life Jesus wants us to have. Unless we confront our real name, the one we have in our hearts, we are not

going to experience any transformation. We will spend our lives bound in chains until we acknowledge and call out the names buried within us.

Facing our real name is called confession. When we don't confess, we enter in a detrimental state. This is how David put it into words: *"There was a time when I wouldn't admit what a sinner I was. But my dishonesty made me miserable and filled my days with frustration... until I finally admitted all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, "I will confess them to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone."* **Psalm 32:3, 5 TLB**

There is liberation by admitting the name(s) we have in our hearts. The demon-possessed man was delivered after he confessed and named the things that controlled him. Then, he was not demon-possessed anymore. After he confessed the things he had inside, he acquired a new name.

Solomon wrote, *"Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy"* (Proverbs 28:13 NIV).

Maybe, it is hard for you to relate to this story of the demon-possessed man. So, allow me a few more minutes to use another illustration.

There is this guy in the Bible by the name of Jacob. His name does not have the nicest meaning. Jacob literally means *he grasps the heel*. Those of you who know the story may remember that Jacob had a twin brother. When the twins were born, Jacob, who was the younger brother, came into the world holding onto the heel of his brother Esau. Jacob means *he grasps the heel*, which is a Hebrew idiom for *he deceives*. That's why I said that the name Jacob does not have the nicest meaning. It means deceiver, cheater, phony, supplanter.

Jacob deceived his father in order to receive the blessing that belonged to his older brother. Jacob not only deceived his father, but also betrayed his brother. He was a manipulator. For this reason, Jacob fled to a foreign land and stayed there for about 20 years. During this time, Jacob created a big family, worked hard and acquired great wealth. "Even though he became very prosperous his conscience saw something else. Jacob saw his world shadowed by his guilt."¹

After 20 years, Jacob decided to go back to his homeland and face his brother. As he got closer to the place where he grew up, "old memories awakened, old fears rose up from the past"² and Jacob did several things to placate the anger and hate he assumed his brother Esau had against him. Jacob sent his brother all kinds of gifts hoping to win his favor. So, Jacob sent his animals and all his possession, his servants and his family and spent a night by himself. This is how the Bible tells the story.

*That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So **Jacob was left alone**, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man*

¹ The Interpreter's Bible, p. 723

² Ibid.

*saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. **Genesis 32:22-27 NIV***

I do believe that more than a physical wrestling match, this was a spiritual wrestling. This story "is dramatizing here the consequences that comes to every soul that has tried too long to evade (avoid) the truth about itself."³ I do believe that this mysterious man (some people say was God the Son) was wrestling with Jacob because he wanted "to revive the sinking spirit of the patriarch and to arm him with confidence in God."⁴ Jacob wanted a blessing, but he was asked to confess his real name before he could receive the blessing. In the end, Jacob did what we all must do. He faced his failures, his weaknesses, his sins, and all the things that were hurting him. By doing this, Jacob received his blessing – a blessing came in the form of a new name. This is what happened,

*The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome." **Genesis 32:27-28 NIV***

Jacob wrestled with God all night. It was an exhausting struggle that left him crippled. From this moment forward, Jacob will no longer walk with arrogance; he will have a limp. But here is the good news. Jacob will no longer walk with pride, but neither will he be called a deceiver, a traitor, or coward anymore. Jacob confessed, found mercy, and was given a new name.

One of the meanings of this new name, Israel, is this: **He Will Be Prince with God.** From deceiver to prince! That's what God does when we confess and seek Him with repentant hearts.

Invitation to Confession

Today, I want to invite you to come to the Lord in prayer and answer the question, "**What is your name?**" Like the story of Jacob, this is between you and God alone. I encourage you to come before God in a moment of confession and reveal your name to him. Come to the Lord and speak your heart, "Lord, my name is arrogance, greed, lust, deceit, envy, jealousy, hate, anger, resentment, impatience, slander, self-pity, bitterness, stubbornness, the need to be right and win, egocentric, guilt, shame... but I want your blessing. Give me a new name."

Prayer...

Declaration of Pardon

Dear church,

- We are not enemies of God... The Lord has called us friends.

³ Ibid.

⁴ <http://biblehub.com/genesis/32-24.htm>

- We are not unworthy... we are redeemed.
- We are not failures ... The Lord has called us princes and princesses, beloved children of the King of kings.
- You are not dead in your trespasses anymore... As Max Lucado puts it, you are *“spiritually alive. Heavenly positioned. Connected to the father. A billboard of mercy. An honored child.”*

That’s your name: Beloved Child of God.