

River. Nonetheless, God does have a new name for each one of us. This new name reminds us of who we really are, to whom we belong, and what our true calling is. 1 John 3:1 says “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are.”

We are God’s beloved! That is our true name, our deepest identity, and our divine calling. We may find ourselves struggling with negative images about ourselves. Perhaps, we struggle with poor self-esteem. Or we may feel that we have sinned too greatly to be worthy of God’s love. Yet the truth of the gospel is that each one of us is deeply loved, accepted, and forgiven by God in Jesus Christ. Indeed, we have been God’s beloved from the beginning of time.

What is your name? God’s question invites us to face up to ourselves. It usually takes rigorous self-examination, a radical self-honesty, and much reflection on the way we have been living. Becoming honest with ourselves opens our lives to the incredible depths of God’s grace and acceptance and power. Let us open our hearts and minds to God for finding our true self and know that we are beloved and accepted by God in Jesus Christ.

Questions for Reflection

1. How do you feel about your name?
2. In what ways can you identify with Jacob?
3. What kind of inner change do you want God to bless you with?
4. What does it mean for you that your new name is “God’s beloved”?

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Questions God Asks Us (2)
What Is Your Name?
Genesis 32:22-28
Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

Do you have a name? I believe every one of us has a name? Do you still have a nickname from your childhood? I have a Korean name, a nickname, and an American name. Names are important. We come into this world without a name. Our name is the first gift we receive from our parents. It is the way in which we are recognized, loved, and remembered.

In the Bible, names carried a much greater importance. They were not just ways in which people were called. Names were given to describe the essence of a person’s character. It is the same in Eastern Asian culture. For example, my Korean name, *Insun*, means “kind-hearted person.” Names in the Bible also symbolized the hopes, expectations, and dreams that the parents had for their children. Names in the Bible described who you were and what you were meant to become.

Today’s God question comes from a well-known story in Genesis 32. Jacob was on his way home to meet his brother, Esau. The last time he had been with Esau was when he cheated him out of his blessing, and Esau vowed to kill him. Since then, Jacob had been alienated for twenty years. Esau’s coming to meet him with four hundred armed men made him anxious. Jacob sent his family ahead and went down to the river Jabbok on his own. There he wrestled with God throughout the night. That is when God asked him, “*What is your name?*” (27) When Jacob answered this question, he experienced a miracle of inner change. He faced up to who he was, experienced God’s blessing, and became more truly God’s person.

Today’s God question, “*What is your name?*” can help us become honest about who we are and receive the blessing that God wants to give. When this happens, we will be given a new name, just like Jacob,

that will indicate God's will and purpose for our lives. The Hebrew meaning of the name Jacob was "cheat" or "deceiver."

Jacob certainly lived up to his name. He deceived his father, his brother, and his father-in-law. He lived his life by deceit. The turning point in his journey began to take place only when he faced up to God's question "*What is your name?*" and became honest about who he really was.

For over twenty years Jacob had intentionally avoided using his own name. Once, when he brought his father some roasted goat, he pretended to be his brother. He put on his brother's clothing, covered his arms and neck with goat hair, and said to his father who could not see, "I am Esau." When Jacob told God, "My name is Jacob," (27) he was acknowledging who he was and what he had done. He was Jacob, who had cheated his brother, deceived his father, and tricked his father-in-law. It was a moment of radical self-honesty that opened up the way for God to give him a new name.

Jacob reminds us that if we want to experience inner change, we must tell God who we truly are, revealing all of ourselves. We need to acknowledge God's presence in our anger and fears, our prejudices, our dishonesty and deception, and our lustful desires and addictions. God confronts us with a question that challenges us to become totally honest and real. God asks us, "*What is your name?*"

When we face up to ourselves, we experience God's blessing. God loves to bless, and these blessings come in different and surprising ways. Often they are connected to what we need most. Sometimes God blesses us with the gift of forgiveness, or with a deep affirmation of our worth, or with a renewed sense of belonging, or with a fresh awareness of God's Spirit. All these blessings contribute to the miracle of inner change.

In Genesis 32, Jacob was frightened and worried. He went down to the Jabbok River. There he wrestled with a mysterious stranger. In the midst of this wrestling match, an important exchange took place between him and God. First Jacob cried out, "*I will not let you go*

unless you bless me." (26) Immediately God responded, "What is your name?" Jacob knew that it was God's nature to bless, and he needed that blessing. However, God did not immediately bless him; God wanted to know his name. There is a clear message here for those of us in crisis and in need of God's blessing. We must tell God our names and share with God who we really are and what we have done. If we want God to bless us, we need to face up to ourselves honestly.

The miracle of inner change involves one more aspect. It is the most important and wonderful aspect: God gives us a new name. When we face up to ourselves before God, we are always given a new identity. This new identity tells us that no matter who we are or no matter what we have done, God has a new future for us. We are not defined forever by our past sins and failures.

We can find the power of a new name in Jacob's story. When Jacob acknowledged his own name before God, God said to him, "*Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel*" (28). In those days the name "Israel" carried a powerful meaning. By giving Jacob the name Israel, God was saying to him, "You are no longer Jacob the cheat, the deceiver, the one who always skirts the issue. From now on you are Israel, the one in whom God rules, the one whose life is now tied up with God's purposes, the one who is able to face hard things head-on."

Jacob immediately began to live up to his new name. We do not see him tricking or deceiving again. There was a new humility in him. When he eventually faced his brother, he bowed before him seven times; and they were finally reconciled after all those years. There was also a new courage. He was now prepared to meet Esau himself, instead of sending others in his place. Jacob was no longer an escapist. He changed into someone who was willing to face up to matters. His new name had empowered a new way of living.

You may ask, "How do I find out what my new name is?" Obviously we cannot physically imitate Jacob's experience alongside the Jabbok