

Formation and Identity Retreat

Session Three-Thursday Morning

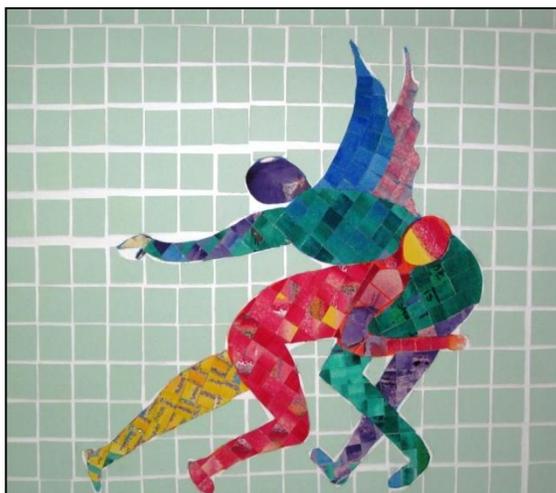
Opening Prayer

O God, I have tasted thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need of further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me Thy glory, I pray Thee, so that I may know Thee indeed. Begin in mercy a new work of love within me. Say to my soul, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away." Then give me grace to rise and follow thee up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

From the Pursuit of God by A. W. Tozar

Scripture Reading—Genesis 32

It is one of the most unusual stories in all of Scripture. Jacob and his God wrestled on a dark night by the river Jabbok. And Jacob prevailed-or did the God-man prevail? With an economy of words, the author tempts us to enter into the mysterious conflict through our imaginations. Along the way we will encounter important Biblical themes-rebirth, naming, intimacy, wounding, blessing, struggle, and mysterious wonder. For writers, poets, and artist, this story is a gold mine of reflection. Take some time to slowly read through this passage a couple of times. If something captures your attention, stop and talk to the Lord.



*The Wrestling Match, 16x20 Mixed Media on canvas
Steven Stuckey 2015*

Reflective Questions

1. In Genesis 32:9-12, Jacob prays to the Lord and admits his

fear and faith struggle. What is your current fear and faith struggle? What promises from the Lord are you holding onto?

2. In verse 27, the God-Man says, "What is your name?" In

Hebrew culture, a name is more than a label your mother yells when she wants you to come in for dinner. The God-Man was asking, "Who are you? What do you long for? What drives you? What about yourself are you ashamed of and want no one else to see?" How would you answer the same question?

3. The passage suggests that confessing who we are to the Lord is the first step in acquiring our new name and identity.

4. How have hardship and struggle helped you to become more of your true authentic self?

Reflective Reading

The point of our lives in this world is not comfort, security, or even happiness, but training; not fulfillment but preparation. It's a lousy home, but a fine gymnasium. It's an uphill bowling alley. The point is not to knock down all the pins (people who do that are usually cheating) but to train our muscles. The ball isn't supposed to reach the pins, the goal. "One step forward, one step backward" is the law here. Progress is a myth. The stronger we get, the weaker we get, the more dependent upon our crutches, our machines. For we misunderstand where we are if we believe in earthly utopias. The universe is a soul making machine, a womb, an egg. Jesus didn't make it into a rose garden when he came, though he could have. Rather, he wore the thorns from this world's gardens...We had better stop looking for alternatives, for escape hatches, for this is our hatchery.

Peter Kreeft in Making Sense of Suffering- page 142

As a person finds himself increasingly drawn into friendship with God he will more and more be driven to do battle with the tendencies in himself which he now sees to be opposed to love. Habits of self-gratification and self-indulgence which at one time he has supposed essential to his peace of mind now take on the aspect of chains which hamper his freedom; they begin to look like spoilt children who for their own sake need a touch of the rod; they appear as false friends who have deceived him with promises they could not fulfill. He is in deadly earnest in his warfare with what he now sees to be the enemies of love. If he is wise he will dwell on the humorous side of his change of attitude and mingle a certain light-heartedness and gaiety with the grimness of the battle. Remembering that love of God and love of neighbor cannot be disjoined he will look for opportunities of doing service to others and he will teach his imagination to dwell on the difficulties and burdens of his neighbor that he may find out ways to lightening them.

Christopher Bryant in *The Heart in Pilgrimage* page 74

In the narrative Jacob does not use his own name for twenty years- it seems deliberately, ominously, lucidly, provocatively- and this is a powerful hint that Jacob is not willing to admit who he is, that he has an incomplete, fragmented identity, that he is inauthentic. God wants to bless Jacob but cannot bless him until he will admit his own name. The evasion seems deliberate. In the story this requires twenty years of reality therapy. God's plot is to bring this man to himself in order to bring him to God and life itself. There can be no blessing ultimately for a trickster since there is no authenticity, no real person to bless. One who enters the world of seeming, of performance, of assumed identities cannot know God, because he cannot know himself...

Down to Earth Spirituality: Encountering God in the Ordinary, Boring Stuff of Life, by R. Paul Stevens, IVP

Within the world in general, and within the world of *Jubilees* and of the sages of Israel in particular, Jesus tells a new story that follows the outline of the old. He creates the parable of the prodigal son following the story line of the saga of Jacob. Like the writer of *Jubilees* he takes liberty with the old story and like the sages he uses old paints to create a new picture. But what is truly startling is that, unlike the writer of the *Jubilees* and the sages, Jesus writes himself into the drama as its hero and main character. Jesus is the good shepherd, the good woman and the good father. The good shepherd is built on Psalm 23, Jeremiah 23:1-8, and Ezekiel 34:1-31, as has been seen. The tale of the good woman mirrors the good shepherd and has behind it various texts in the Hebrew Scriptures where God is described in female terms. The parable of the good father and his two wayward sons borrows from and reshapes the saga of Jacob. Building on the past provides the potential for re-creation for the present and for the future."

Jacob and the Prodigal- How Jesus Retold Israel's Story, by Kenneth Bailey, IVP

Application

What is one thing you want to do next week as a result of your experience at this conference? Write the one thing down in your journal, or consider sharing it with a friend.

Benediction

O Lord, make me childlike. Deliver me from the urge to compete with another for place or prestige or position. I would be simple and artless as a little child. Deliver me from pose and pretense. Forgive me for thinking of myself. Help me to forget myself and find my true peace in beholding Thee. That Thou mayest answer this prayer I humble myself before Thee. Lay upon me Thy easy yoke of self-forgetfulness that through it I may find rest. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

From the Pursuit of God by A. W. Tozar