



## LESSON 4 // DEALING WITH DEFICITS

One of the areas the Lord wants to restore in us is our character. The story of how God restored Jacob in the Old Testament provides some important instructions for us in this regard. Notice the following verses about God's work in Jacob's life:

**Genesis 32:24-30 (NLT)** *This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. <sup>25</sup> When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket. <sup>26</sup> Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." <sup>27</sup> "What is your name?" the man asked. He replied, "Jacob." <sup>28</sup> "Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won." <sup>29</sup> "What is your name?" Jacob asked him. "Why do you want to know my name?" the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there. <sup>30</sup> Jacob named the place Peniel (which means "face of God") for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared."*

What we can learn from this story about God's restoration in our lives?

### 1. We all have character deficits.

We often hear about financial "deficits" related to balancing a budget. But there is another kind of deficit that is more dangerous—deficits in our character.

A deficit is something lacking in us, the absence of needed strength and resources. Jacob struggled with terrible character deficits. Even his name points to this: in Hebrew it means "supplanter, deceiver, conniver" and Jacob lived up to this name. Unfortunately, for many years he didn't even recognize his character flaws.

The fact is that we are all "Jacobs." We all have areas in our character that are mean, stubborn, ugly, unruly, rebellious and deceptive. We are all born as sinners and fall short of God's standard.

**Romans 3:23 (NLT)** *For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard.*

### 2. Character deficits detour us.

God had a great plan for Jacob's life (see Genesis 25:21-23). Left to himself, and to his character flaws, Jacob would not experience the fullness of this plan. His character deficits would have detoured him from God's best.

In fact, for twenty long years, Jacob was limited and haunted by his lack of character (see Genesis 31:38-41). He desperately needed to be restored but didn't realize it.

The same is often true for us. Many of us live detoured lives in some way because of character issues we are unaware of or unwilling to address. We will not be able to find and fulfill God's plan without experiencing God's restorative work—the restoration of our character.

### 3. God persistently targets our character deficits.

Because the quality of our character is so essential to finding and fulfilling God's best for our lives, God targets it. He goes after things in us that are in the way of His plans and His best.

God did this in Jacob's life. The most exciting part of Jacob's story is how the Lord delivered him from himself—from his own bad character. Jacob's deliverance and restoration came as a result of the encounter he had with the Lord in Genesis 32:24-30. Although he had known God for many years, Jacob had not allowed the Lord access to his character. Finally, God got his attention.

- In this encounter, Jacob came to the point of genuine conviction about his character. He repented and allowed God to break, restore and transform him.
- That evening Jacob was alone with God and he wrestled with an angel sent by God. This wrestling match is a picture of the battle for surrender in Jacob's relationship with God. Would he fully and completely surrender his nature—his flawed character—to the Lord?
- The result of this wrestling match was a new brokenness in Jacob. His restoration and transformation was so real and so powerful, the Lord even gave Jacob a new name—"Israel," meaning "prince with God" or "one who has power with God."

**Genesis 35:1-7 (NLT)** Then God said to Jacob, "Get ready and move to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother, Esau."<sup>2</sup> So Jacob told everyone in his household, "Get rid of all your pagan idols, purify yourselves, and put on clean clothing."<sup>3</sup> We are now going to Bethel, where I will build an altar to the God who answered my prayers when I was in distress. He has been with me wherever I have gone."<sup>4</sup> So they gave Jacob all their pagan idols and earrings, and he buried them under the great tree near Shechem.<sup>5</sup> As they set out, a terror from God spread over the people in all the towns of that area, so no one attacked Jacob's family.<sup>6</sup> Eventually, Jacob and his household arrived at Luz (also called Bethel) in Canaan.<sup>7</sup> Jacob built an altar there and named the place El-bethel (which means "God of Bethel"), because God had appeared to him there when he was fleeing from his brother, Esau.

Jacob was a changed man! And what God did for him, He will do for you. He will restore your character when you allow Him to break and transform your heart.

### Discussion questions

1. What is a character deficit? Why is it important to acknowledge that we all have character deficits God wants to address?
2. In what ways do character deficits "detour" us from God's best? How have you seen this at work in your life?
3. What part of your character may be in need of restoration and transformation? What would it take for you to surrender to God's work of restoration in that area?