

Jacob Helps Us to Pray

As he prepared to meet his brother Esau after spending twenty years in exile, Jacob prayed to God that he would survive the encounter. The seven points in Jacob's prayer (Genesis 32:9 -12) can help us today as we pray.

Praise God and acknowledge your relationship with Him (Genesis 32:9a): God is the living God of Jacob's grand-father Abraham, father of Isaac, and also of Jacob. Jacob knew God in a person-to-person relationship. (See Psalm 62:1 - 2; Matthew 6:9; John 11:41; Acts 4:24.)

Remember God's Word (Genesis 32:9b): Jacob was in this place because he obeyed God's command to return to Canaan. He was fearful when he focused on himself and his own resources. As he deliberately prayed God's own Word back to Him, Jacob gained confidence. (Compare Genesis 32:9b with Genesis 31:3 and Genesis 31:13.)

Confess your sin and unworthiness (Genesis 32:10a): At one time, Jacob believed he had a right to God's blessing. Now, Jacob blamed his own sinfulness for his troubles. He humbly admitted he was completely unworthy of God's help. Jacob's only "right" to pray was God's grace. (Compare Genesis 32:10a with Psalms 51:1; 103:10 - 12; Daniel 9:9; and 18; Luke 18:9 - 14.)

Thank God for past mercies (Genesis 32:10b): Jacob remembered how much God had done for him in spite of his unworthiness. God's undeserved kindness and faithfulness overwhelmed Jacob and assured him that God would continue to protect him. A thankful heart always strengthens faith. (See also Psalm 57:2; Psalm 62:7; Philippians 4:6.)

Pray specifically (Genesis 32:11a): "Save me for I am afraid." Jacob stated his request as clearly as he could. Do you make vague requests, such as, "Please make me a better Christian"; "Help me to be more patient"? Try instead to pinpoint your prayer as Jacob did. Pray definite requests such as, "Give me control over my temper in my meeting today"; "Give me kind words for each person at the dinner table tonight"; "Help me to set aside 30 minutes today for Bible study"; "Save me from every depressing thought today as if from a physical enemy." (Compare Genesis 32:11a with 2 Samuel 15:31b.)

Pour out your heart to God (Genesis 32:11b): Jacob did not hide his true emotions from the Lord. Both Scripture and emotional health require you to tell God the details of your trouble. David poured out his deep unhappiness to God in Psalm 142:2; he received comfort and confidence in Psalm 142:7b. The praise of Psalm 144:1 follows the specific cry for mercy in Psalm 143.

Believe God's promise to you personally (Genesis 32:12): Like a small child who says, "But Father, you said". Jacob confidently took hold of God's Word as a personal promise to him. Despite his unworthiness, he came boldly to God's throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16). With childlike faith, Jacob confidently reminded God and him-self that God's Word, God's purposes, and God's promises never fail. (See Isaiah 55:10 - 11; John 14:13 - 14; 1 Peter 1:24 - 25; 2 Peter 1:4.)