

SCRIPTURE

We human beings experience many pushes and pulls within ourselves. We have to wrestle with our choices. We seek what

is good, but we can't always see beyond what appears good. We want to act responsibly but often don't.

The bible contains stories that help us understand the pushes and pulls inside us. From our ancestor Jacob we learn that we must wrestle with God and struggle with ourselves to become the persons we want to be.

Jacob is a younger twin with no right to inherit his father's land or receive his blessing. But Jacob is shrewd. He gets his twin, Esau, to sell his birthright for a meal of lentil stew. Later with his mother's help Jacob tricks his nearly blind father into blessing him instead of Esau. Jacob's name means *he supplants, he tricks*.

Jacob goes north to find a wife. He sees

a young woman named Rachel, bringing her father's sheep to a well. To marry her, Jacob works for Rachel's father seven years. But the trickster gets tricked. Rachel's father gives Jacob her older sister Leah to marry and demands that Jacob work seven more years to marry Rachel.

Jacob has twelve sons and a daughter with his wives Leah and Rachel and their serving women, Bilhah and Zilpah.

To support his large family, Jacob tricks his father-in-law. As wages, Jacob asks for the spotted and striped goats and the black sheep. Then he carefully breeds the flocks so his animals multiply and grow strong.

When God urges Jacob in a dream to return to his home in the south with all his flocks, he sets out. His father-in-law chases Jacob and accuses him of stealing his daughters and flocks. Jacob insists he has worked 20 years for all he has. They work out a peaceful covenant.

Jacob must still face his brother. Messengers bring news that Esau is coming with 400 men. Jacob prays and reminds God, "You said, 'Return to your country.' ... Deliver me from the hand of my brother." Jacob sends droves of sheep ahead as gifts to his brother and has

his family cross the river to camp for the night. Then:

Wrestling with God

Jacob was left alone. A man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" (Genesis 32.24-30).

- ◆ **Who is Jacob wrestling with?**
- ◆ **What is the significance of Jacob receiving a new name?**
- ◆ **What does this story about Jacob tell you about yourself?**



The Spirit of God speaks in Israel's prophets. The prophet Isaiah seeks a way to peace after

he witnesses the Assyrian army destroy northern Israel, devour its vines and orchards, and its cities, and abandon the wounded. Isaiah envisions all nations coming to Jerusalem to learn God's law, the ten commandments of the covenant, so their armies can pound their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Isaiah also describes a leader, just and filled with gifts of the Spirit of God, who will bring peace.

The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and courage, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

Isaiah 11.1-3

In confirmation the bishop prays that these same gifts of the Spirit will come upon each Christian. These gifts help us name and discern the stirrings of the Spirit within our spirits.

The Spirit of God Blesses and Frees Us

In Confirmation the bishop prays that the seven gifts of the Spirit of God will come upon each candidate. These gifts help us name and discern the stirrings of the Spirit within our spirits. To discern what is good, we pray, consult others, consider consequences, ask advice, read the bible. We wrestle with God in our minds and hearts.

Read about each of the seven gifts of the Spirit. Then think of a challenge you face, such as leading a group, choosing a high school, talking out a problem at home. Write on the lines ways each gift can help you discern a course of action.

Wisdom is a gift people build up through practical experience. A wise person knows what to do in many situations and can place happenings in the big picture. A wise believer sees the people and events of human history fitting together in the large plan of God's love for us.

How can the gift of wisdom help me?



Understanding is the gift of thinking and reflecting on experience. People with understanding think things through for themselves and act on their experience and insights.

The gift of understanding?



Right judgment is a willingness to consider the insights and understandings of others about a problem and to plan with them.

The gift of right judgment?



Courage is the strength to do what isn't always easy, to stand up for the unpopular, to speak the truth, to put one's self on the line to do what is right.

The gift of courage?



Knowledge is a gift for seeking out the facts and information necessary to make wise and fair decisions and for developing practical and technical expertise.

The gift of knowledge?



Reverence is a gift for honoring God and others. The reverent person worships God. The reverent person respects every neighbor with the respect we want for ourselves.

The gift of reverence?



Awe in God's presence

is the gift of awe and wonder at God's life-giving and life-sustaining presence in creation and in us.

The gift of awe in God's presence?



The Spirit of God Fills Jesus

Mark's gospel pictures the Spirit ripping open the heavens to come upon Jesus at his baptism.

A voice from heaven claims Jesus is "my Son, the beloved." The voice affirms and blesses Jesus. God becomes one of us in Jesus to make known with a human heart and human hands that God blesses and loves all of us.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn open and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. A voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Mark 1.9-11



◆ What does this gospel story tell us about who Jesus is?

◆ What does the heavens tearing open tell us?

◆ What does the dove descending on Jesus tell us?

◆ What does the voice tell us about who Jesus is?

◆ How does God bless and love you?

Luke's gospel sees the Spirit of God at work in Jesus from the beginning of his life.

Mary conceives Jesus by the Holy Spirit. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God" (1.35).

On a Sabbath in his home synagogue, Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah how the Spirit will anoint a prophet to proclaim a year of God's favor. When he finishes reading, Jesus announces he is this Spirit-filled prophet, who will bring good news to the poor. A year of God's favor is a jubilee year, a year for setting debtors free from prison, forgiving their debts, and returning land they had to sell.

When Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Spirit has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Luke 4.14-21.



◆ What actions identify the Spirit of God at work in Jesus?

How Does the Spirit Act in Us?

In the sacrament of baptism Christians receive the gift of becoming God's sons and daughters. In confirmation, the sacrament that completes baptism, the Church anoints every Christian with the gifts of the Spirit.

The Spirit acts in Jesus to bring the poor good news. If the Spirit acts in us the same way, the Spirit will urge us to identify people who need healing and justice and respond to them. How can I expect the Spirit will act in me?

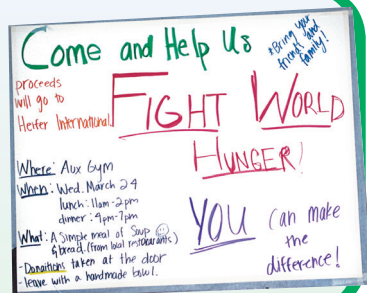


What is a way you use the gifts of the Spirit to lead?

What is a way you bless your family?



What is a way you can bring good news to someone who is poor?



What is a way you use your gifts to bring people together?



Who Are We?

The apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Rome about how the Spirit cries out in them. Find and read this passage in your bible—Romans 8.15-17. Then read Chris Morris's story below.

"My dad left when my mother was pregnant with me. My scout master, my pastor, friends of the family were role models for me, but you can't replace the father figure. I started to bond with my scout master, and I know he respected and liked me, but when his own son came around, I saw how differently he treated him. I had to deal with it.

"For nine months when I was 14, I cried myself to sleep every night. In this time I found the best father in the world, and that's Jesus Christ, God. I've turned to him many times.

"I went to Boy Scouts every Monday night. The guys in the troop might not have really liked me, but they treated me as part of the group. I changed. A year later I had 10,000 friends. But I

would not have survived without God. I put my life in his hands.

"It's amazing how God works in my life. For some reason I told my weight-lifting partner about my crisis at 14. It turns out that he was going through almost the exact same thing. His parents were both sick, and he had no one to talk to."

How is Chris's experience like what Paul describes to the Romans?

