

# Jacob's Limp

By Pastor Alan Utting



*'The place you think disqualifies you may be the very place God chooses to use you most.'*  
Christine Caine

Our Lord is not concerned with us making a great name for ourselves, chasing personal fulfilment, or even promoting impressive doctrines. His primary concern is the establishing of His kingdom and the bringing of glory to His name. Looking back over the years, I have often thought that I was working for His glory. Yet, on reflection, I can see that at times my motivations were mixed and not entirely pure. God, in His wisdom, still allows me to carry a limp, a reminder to remain dependent upon Him and to live for His glory. What about you? What is your limp?

## Bible Perspective

Genesis 32:24-28 'So Jacob was left alone. A man struggled with him until morning. The man saw that he couldn't win. So he touched the inside of 'Jacob's hip'. As Jacob struggled with the man, Jacob's hip was twisted. Then the man said, 'Let me go. It is morning.' But Jacob replied, 'I won't let you go unless you bless me.' The man asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob,' he answered. Then the man said, 'Your name will not be Jacob anymore. Instead, it will be Israel. You have struggled with God and with men. And you have won.'

Paul metaphorically mentions his 'limp' in his Corinthian writings, listing his accomplishments including education, status as a Pharisee, and spiritual experiences before mentioning his thorn in the flesh. 'Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me' (2 Corinthians 12:7). We don't know what that thorn was, although I think it could have mainly been the burden he carried in supporting churches he planted. It is interesting how God often uses very painful situations to bring glory to Himself and Paul rejoiced in these hardships as it extended God's kingdom for the glory of God. That gave Paul great satisfaction.

The Bible is full of people who struggled with weakness. Moses stammered, Jacob was deceitful and fearful, David wrestled with lust, Jeremiah felt too young, Hosea was married to a prostitute, Peter acted impulsively, and James and John were unaware of self-centredness. Yet, God use them powerfully.

## Observation

1. Some of my most fruitful experiences have occurred when I feel unwell, stressed or have a sense of inadequacy. Probably most Christian workers would feel the same way. Even Jesus experienced similar dilemmas when we look at His ministry.  
For example, in John 12 we read that a group of men of Greek origin were keen to meet Jesus no doubt hoping to see something spectacular like one of his miracles. However Jesus depicting his death says, Jesus replied, 'The hour has

come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me' (John 12:23-26). In these verses Jesus is foretelling His death and resurrection. Bonhoeffer says: 'When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.' Are you willing to pay the price?

2. Over the years I have met many remarkable men and women of God who appear highly fruitful in their ministries. They are gifted, capable, and often seem to have everything in order. Yet as I have come to know them more closely, or have read their biographies, I have discovered that their effectiveness has come from a deep dependence on God. Many have carried, or continue to carry, significant personal hardship.

I think of a woman I know who built a global children's ministry yet lives with constant physical pain. Others face disunity within their teams, unjustified criticism, or the heartache of rebellious children. Most Christian workers carry struggles in various areas of life and some serve on the edge of burnout. I do not believe that a calling to pastoral ministry automatically means one will remain a pastor for life. Even so, I have been surprised by how many gifted leaders begin strongly but step away from ministry after only a short time. At times, I cannot help but wonder whether the challenge of dying to self plays a part in this.

3. Sometimes challenges are a result of spiritual warfare or simply living in a fallen world. It's important to have a supportive team for prayer and advice, and a wise mentor can be especially helpful.
4. All people in ministry experience hurts. Avoid becoming cynical and quickly extend forgiveness. Don't let the limp grow bigger than it needs to. The Lord's promise is to sustain you no matter what you are going through. 'Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up' (James 4:10). If you don't humble yourself, then God may but His way can be more painful.
5. 'Only to the degree that all our own power is dismantled will God be able to give the fruits of the Spirit and build up his kingdom through us, in us, and among us. There is no other way. If a little power of our own were to rise up among us, the Spirit and authority of God would retreat in the same moment and to the corresponding degree. In my estimation that is the single most important insight with regard to the kingdom of God' (Eberhard Arnold).

What limps are you experiencing? God's promise is 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness..... When I am weak, I am strong' (2 Corinthians 12:9,10).

'These are the ones I look on with favour: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word' (Isaiah 66:2).

## Resources

Roy Hession, *The Calvary Road*