



# Links Players

## QUESTIONS | WHAT IS YOUR NAME?

*Then he [God] said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have wrestled with God and with men, and have prevailed."  
(Genesis 32:26-28)*

Most of us remember what it was like to be a kid. If asked, "What was your childhood like?" My first reaction would be, "I was a kid with an unbridled imagination."

In my pre-teens, I imagined my identity through characters like Pistol Pete. On any given day, you could find me climbing through the window of the high school gym, practicing behind-the-back passes in floppy socks and black Converse high-tops.

Soon, it was the easiest thing in the world to identify as Arnie. It was "The Sixties," and no one was bigger than Arnie. I was too young to smoke, but I could "hitch my trousers" and pretend to take a mighty lash with a sawed-off driver." Those were the days!

It would not be long before I discovered fumes—"perfumes and gas fumes," that is, girls and cars. If there was ever a time when we wrestled with our identities, it was during those teenage years.

Figuring out who you are isn't an easy task when you are learning to drive, learning to dance, learning to be cool, learning how to woo a girl, and learning how to get it up and down from a bunker when the air smells of Coppertone Sunscreen.

Back in the day, though, it was easier to wrestle with who you are and who you would become. We lived in a world that could safely assume our identities came from above, not from our own inventions.

In the story of Jacob, we witness one of the all-time identity wrestling matches between man and God. Jacob, a duplicitous man always working an angle to deceive people and manipulate situations, encounters God.

In the winner-take-all match, Jacob receives a new identity. Rather than "Jacob," the deceitful scoundrel who is entirely self-reliant, God names him "Israel," the one who would not let go of God—the one who clings to God for his identity and future.

Analogously, our culture is currently wrestling with identity. The disagreement is not merely about politics or morality but about a more fundamental question: "How do I discover my true self?"

From a biblical perspective, the question is not "How do I invent myself?" but rather "Who was I created to be?" Our deepest identity is not found by looking inward but by looking upward—to God and to Christ.

We should understand, even if only in elementary ways, that we are creatures before our Maker, sinners before we are victims, and people in need of redemption before we are self-expressive individuals.

These days, our cultural institutions teach that the "authentic self" is invented by following your feelings, desires, and psychological fantasies. The only moral duty becomes "Be true to yourself."

Faith, family, church, national history, cultural traditions, and external moral obligations, things we once cherished and looked to for shaping our identities, are now viewed with suspicion and as things to jettison.

Rather than listening to Moses and Jesus, our cultural influencers insist that we listen to Darwin, Nietzsche, Freud, and French intellectuals who deny the existence of a transcendent God and refuse to bow before the one to whom we owe honor and gratitude (Romans 1:21).

This raging conflict concerns rival and incompatible visions of who we are and how we are to discover our true selves. Our deepest problem is not that we seek to discover and develop our identities; rather, we seek them in all the wrong places.

When we reject God, his creation order, and his biblical methods for self-discovery, we blindly grope for our ultimate identity through personal autonomy, that is, by refusing to acknowledge that our identity, and thus our obligations, are owed to the Designer of all that exists.

Like Jacob, it's time for a wrestling match with God, both personally and nationally. My money is on God!

**Prayer: Lord! Pin us to the ground until we cry "uncle."**

**READING: Genesis 32**

1. How does Jacob’s new name, “Israel,” illustrate the difference between an identity built on self-reliance and one rooted in clinging to God? Where do you see those two identities in your own life?

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2. The devotional contrasts “inventing” yourself with “discovering who you were created to be.” In practical terms, what does it look like in daily life to seek your identity by looking “upward” to God rather than “inward” to your feelings and desires?

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3. What are some modern influences (media, education, social media, friends, etc.) that try to define who you are apart from God? How have these influences shaped the way you think about yourself, and how can Scripture correct or redirect that?

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4. What might it look like for you personally to wrestle with God over your identity, and what would it mean for you to “not let go” until He blesses and renames you?

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