

## **Wrestling God**

**Genesis 32:22-31**

**my\_prayer@JC.God, part one**

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## **Introduction**

*Pray, and let God worry -- Martin Luther*

*Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire? -- Corrie Ten Boom*

*Of all the duties enjoined by Christianity none is more essential and yet more neglected than prayer. -- François Fénelon*

*I have so much to do that I spend several hours in prayer before I am able to do it.—John Wesley*

*"Heaven is full of answers to prayers for which no one ever bothered to ask." Billy Graham, Encounter Weekly, 1996*

When you hear these kinds of quotations, how do you feel? What does it make you think? Does it make you think that you should pray more? Does it create a feeling of guilt or conviction?

Most Christians feel that their prayer life is inadequate. They feel like they should pray more.

This seems to parallel the subject of communication within relationships – everyone feels they could improve on communication in relationships. And that is what prayer is – communication with God. But should a healthy prayer life be elusive? I don't think so. I believe it should be a very natural and rich part of the typical Christian life.

During the current series, it is my prayer, hope and goal, to deepen our conversations with God and to see some of you grab hold of the value of prayer like never before. This series will carry through the National Day of Prayer – which takes place on the first Thursday of May. Prayer changes things. Prayer changes us.

Today we are looking at Jacob. He is one of the Patriarchs. He is the father of the “12 tribes of Israel”. But before he was named, Israel, his name was Jacob, and his life was one of confusion, deception, conflict and heartache.

He was born the twin of Esau, and came out of his mother's womb clutching his brother's heel. He ends up taking advantage of his older brother in order to steal his birthright (inheritance) and later steals his father's blessing.

He fell in love but was tricked by his future father in law into marrying her sister. Eventually he married both sisters and had children from both of them as well as their servants. This may be alarming to all of us, but let's not forget that this took place before Moses was even born, long before the law was given. This is just what people did back then. Today he would be no different morally than a person who has slept around with four or more people. I'm not justifying his behavior, I'm just saying, don't be shocked by it. God had a plan for him in spite of his issues.

In Genesis 32 we find him in a scary place. The last time he had seen his brother, his brother had sworn that he would kill him. He contacts Esau and his messengers come back and tell him, Esau is on his way here with over 400 men. Jacob believes Esau is capable and determined to wipe him out. Esau was stronger, was a hunter and Jacob knew that he had treated him very poorly.

Jacob feels trapped and afraid.

He comes up with an expensive plan to protect himself. He works the plan but that night he is

stressed out.

In the stress of that night, he ends up in a fight that he doesn't expect -- one he wasn't even looking for.

Please open your Bible to Genesis 32

- I. <sup>22</sup> That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. <sup>23</sup> After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. <sup>24</sup> So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.

This is a strange story. Jacob, anticipating a war with his brother, divides his belongings and his family. He settles down for the night alone, and he gets into a fight with a stranger. The Hebrew doesn't distinguish between boxing and wrestling, and there was no official there to set the rules and to officiate, so it is safe to say that this was a serious fight. I come from a family of wrestlers and wrestling coaches, and I know what a difficult sport it is. In college wrestling there are 3 periods – 3 minutes long, 2 minutes long and 2 minutes long. This is a total of 7 minutes. Those seven minutes can be exhausting.

Jacob wrestles his opponent all night and refuses to give up.

He is exhausted, sore and possibly even bleeding.

He cannot gain an advantage. He cannot defeat his opponent. He will not quit but at the same time he cannot beat this man. It is a stalemate of iron wills.

He doesn't know who he is fighting.

**We have our nights of struggle and we don't always know our opponents.**

Jacob was in the middle of a conflict with his brother. This had him completely stressed out.

But his real battle was with someone else. A mystery man whom he wrestles during the night.

Our struggles are rarely physical.

Yes, we have our nights of physical suffering. You battle through pain, injury and illness.

We also have our struggles from work: Passive aggressive behavior that undermines us and hurts us. We lie awake, unable to sleep. Immoral, hurtful behavior hurts us, so we worry. We agonize over it. We pray.

We struggle with relationships. The conflicts hurt our heart....

We struggle over our finances. We spend the night worrying about our children, our friends, our own guilt.

Ephesians 6:12: We wrestle not against flesh and blood

When we stay up at night and worry, who are we really wrestling? Is God there in the middle of what we identify as a problem? Is it possible we are fighting him as much as we are dealing with a "situation"?

- II. <sup>25</sup> When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

My son and I used to have some wrestling wars. They would go on for hours and included all kinds of crazy maneuvers including spins, throws nearing the ceiling, jumps off the couch, flying kicks and tickle torture. When my son got older we ended up buying Nerf weaponry and we had a blast with our combat. We didn't even break too much furniture.

This is what I believe is happening here. God, the all powerful One, is testing Jacob to see at what point he will yield.

God doesn't overpower us. He works with us. He gently tries to get us to yield. "The man" says, "This guy is never going to give in. I guess I'll end this." And with a touch, he inflicts and immediate injury upon Jacob.

With a touch, Jacob becomes a broken man.

In an instant, after a long struggle, Jacob discovers that he is outmatched. This is a fight he is going to lose. In fact, he has now lost the fight. In his defeat, he is a changed man.

### **Painful situations are the most transformational.**

What were the circumstances like when your life changed?

"We change our behavior when the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the pain of changing. Consequences give us the pain that motivates us to change." – Henry Cloud

When my son Levi was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade my dad called and invited him to attend a Jr. High wrestling camp in Oregon.

The problem was that he was the youngest kid there and he had never wrestled before. What this means, is he was signed up to get beat up for a week...(tell the story).

Example: Conflict in a marriage can be the pain for behavioral change. Wherever you find battles, ask yourself how you might be able to change for the better.

III. **26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."**

I love what Jacob does here. He stops fighting and he clings to the man who has injured him. He realizes that this is no ordinary man. This man is divine. He goes from fighting onto God to holding onto God. He could no longer run. He could no longer fight. He is weeping according to Hosea 12, and seeking God's blessing.

### **Instead of fighting God, hold onto God.**

God is never your enemy. Some here have been fighting God long enough. Resisting His will. Arguing with Him. The problem is that I always lose my arguments with God. I wonder why that is? I always lose when I fight against His will. Stop fighting. Instead, grab onto God with that same stubborn tenacity, and seek His blessing.

### **Instead of refusing to yield, seek His blessing.**

This is where we say, "Not my will, but yours be done."

- IV. <sup>27</sup> The man asked him, “What is your name?” “Jacob,” he answered. <sup>28</sup> Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,<sup>[f]</sup> because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”

With God’s blessing Jacob experiences a radical change in his life. He had struggled with God and lived a life of conflict. That is now part of his past.

- **Jacob:** deceiver (trickster)
- **Israel:** overcomer

The fight that Jacob had with God is a picture of prayer. It is that restless night of turmoil that comes out of fear and conflict with his brother. As he struggles with that situation, he is struggling with God. As we have honest conversations with God, over the struggles of our lives, we are changed.

### **Prayer changes us**

Jacob emerges as a new person with a new name. He is radically changed. He sees that God is in the middle of his struggles. God is in the middle of his battle.

While I pray about my struggles, God isn’t just changing my circumstances, He is changing me.

There are many times where I wish I could change things for my wife. For my children. For the church. I pray for change. And as I pray for change for others, God changes me.

I remember that God cares more about me than He cares about my circumstances. With this injury, Israel is no longer going to be known for his physical strength. He is going to be known for his spiritual strength.

- V. <sup>29</sup> Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.” But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there. <sup>30</sup> So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”

Jacob saw that he was fully at the mercy of God.

He couldn’t twist God’s arm. God couldn’t be manipulated. God couldn’t be controlled. Jacob had met him match. God wouldn’t say uncle. God couldn’t be used. God took away Jacob’s strength.

**Mercy:** *The compassionate treatment of an offender who is under one’s power.*

**God is not to be manipulated**

**Instead He is our source of mercy**

If you’re going to fight, fight for God not against Him.

## Conclusion

The final picture from this story:

<sup>31</sup> The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel,<sup>[h]</sup> and he was limping because of his hip.

### ***Prayer changes things:***

**Us** (Who we are, our identity and our destiny. It is in the dark nights of our soul that the lies are dealt with and God changes us)

**Our view of God** (He will not be “used”. We are at His mercy.)

**Our situation** (When we change, our situation changes. When we change, all our relationships change. When we change, our view of the world changes.)

*Identify the struggles of today – relationships and circumstances. Instead of manipulating and controlling, bring those to God. Wrestle with Him. Better yet, cling to him and let Him change you.*

Ending announcements: Newcomer’s fellowship & refreshments