

What Happens When We Wrestle With God?

Hosea 12:3–4: *3 In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his maturity he contended with God. 4 Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought His favor. He found Him at Bethel and there He spoke with us.*



Many know the story of Jacob wrestling with an angel. When we just drop in on the account and read what happened, there are many unanswered questions. Why would you pick a fight with an angel anyway? Why would an angel even let you fight? Couldn't the angel have overwhelmingly defeated Jacob even before the altercation began? What could possibly be gained by such a confrontation? Once we begin to understand who Jacob was and the experiences of his life that led up to this confrontation, it all begins to fall into place. What we will find is that Jacob lived a life filled with experiences of great faith as well as experiences of great deception and rivalry. God allowing him to wrestle with the angel gives us a clue as to how God knows us and meets us where we are.

The inspiration for this particular episode came from a dear brother in Christ, Jerry, who gave a sermon at a Bible convention called, "Wrestling With God." We asked him for his notes because we knew this would make a great podcast. Thank you, Brother Jerry!



Jacob had a respectable family tree. His grandparents were Abraham and Sarah, and his parents were Isaac and Rebekah.

Jacob's birth is in some ways a preview of his life. When his mother Rebekah was pregnant with him and Esau, God revealed a prophecy to her about her twins:

Genesis 25:23–26: *23 The LORD said to her, Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger. 24 When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. 25 Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau. 26 Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them.*

It's like Jacob was saying from the womb, get back here—you can't go ahead of me!

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Jacob = Supplanter

A SUPPLANTER IS ONE WHO TAKES THE PLACE OF ANOTHER, LITERALLY "ONE WHO TAKES THE HEEL." THERE IS AN ELEMENT OF BEING DECEITFUL—"ONE WHO FOLLOWS AFTER WITH INTENT TO DECEIVE."

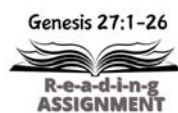
Jacob was the second born twin who was, nonetheless, prophesied to be the higher ranking of the two. The two brothers grew up to manhood, and sure enough, Esau sold his birthright as the favored firstborn to Jacob for a bowl of stew. The supplanting had begun.

The birthright has to do with both position and inheritance. The firstborn son generally inherited the leadership of the family and a double portion of the paternal inheritance (**Deuteronomy 21:17**). This would have been important in Jacob's family, not only because of their physical wealth but also because of the special covenant promises God had made to Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, then to Isaac, Jacob's father, that would continue down the bloodline.

With God's promises of special covenant privileges on the line being sold off by Esau for a bowl of stew, we tune into the story several years later. When their father Isaac was very old, he asked Esau, his firstborn, to hunt some game and prepare a meal, and then Isaac would bless Esau as his firstborn. This was the formal blessing based on the birthright.



Apparently Esau had no intention of telling his father he had sold his birthright to his brother. He went off to hunt so he could receive the blessing from his father.



The supplanting, this replacing of Esau with Jacob, continued as Rebekah heard what was happening and devised a plan. She instructed Jacob to deceive his old and frail father so Jacob could receive the blessing instead of Esau.

The plan worked! Jacob received a very specific blessing, as Isaac thought he was blessing Esau:

Genesis 27:27-29: 27 *So he came close and kissed him; and when he smelled the smell of his garments, he blessed him and said, See, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed; 28 now may God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and an abundance of grain and new wine; 29 may peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you; be master of your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be those who curse you, and blessed be those who bless you.*

This very detailed, specific and powerful blessing was formally handed down from Abraham to Isaac. Now, it was handed down from Isaac, the promised seed, to the man he thought was Esau, the next promised seed. But it was Jacob—Isaac was deceived!

He thought it was Esau, as Jacob was wearing his brother's clothing and smelled like his brother.



Esau showed up later and was taken by complete surprise:

Genesis 27:32–37: 32 *Isaac his father said to him, Who are you? And he said, I am your son, your firstborn, Esau. 33 Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, Who was he then that hunted game and brought it to me, so that I ate of all of it before you came, and blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed.*

Isaac trembled violently—he knew from that prophecy given to Rebekah that the younger son would be greater than the older. Bible commentaries differ on the reason for this strong reaction. Was he afraid because he realized he had made a mistake, or did he realize he had been about to go against the will of God if he would have blessed Esau instead of Jacob?

It's hard to say—this violent trembling indicates something is awry. Isaac was very old. It could be that his mind just then remembered the prophecy and was relieved he had unintentionally blessed Jacob instead of Esau. It is a profoundly emotional moment for both of them.

Okay, so oops! A misunderstanding occurred; let's just reverse the blessing and give it back to Esau. Why didn't this happen? In those days, a person's word was their word. Once it was given, it could not be taken back. It was solemnly given and received.

Let's see what unfolds in the next verses:

34 When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father! 35 And he said, Your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing. 36 Then he (Esau) said, Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing. And he said, Have you not reserved a blessing for me?

*He took away my birthright was a false accusation. Esau gave it away, but he conveniently isn't explaining this to his father. Back in **Genesis 25:34**, it says Esau despised his birthright. **Hebrews 12:16** calls Esau profane, meaning godless, because he sold it for one morsel of meat. He now wanted the physical advantages of the inheritance, but didn't appreciate the spiritual covenant God had made with this family. There's a birthright, and then there's a blessing. The blessing was considered to be the act formally acknowledging the firstborn as the principal heir.*

For more, see: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/firstborn>

37 But Isaac replied to Esau, Behold, I have made him your master, and all his relatives I have given to him as servants... Now as for you then, what can I do, my son?

It was done. Isaac had given the blessing and could not give it back. Esau perhaps had a moment of regret at this point, thinking he should never have given away his birthright so casually earlier in his life.

Things only got worse from here. This family unit continued headlong into dysfunction:

Genesis 27:41: *So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.*

Esau is angry. *I want that blessing; it should have gone to me!* He began to plan his revenge.

Rebekah hears of this and tells Jacob:

Genesis 27:42–45: *42 ...Behold your brother Esau is consoling himself concerning you by planning to kill you. 43 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise, flee to Haran, to my brother Laban! 44 Stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury subsides, 45 until your brother's anger against you subsides and he forgets what you did to him. Then I will send and get you from there. Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?*



There always had been a rivalry between the twins, and it now became a life and death circumstance because of the irreversible blessing.

When Rebekah says to stay away for a few days *until your brother's anger against you subsides and he forgets what you did to him*, it is wishful thinking. She would never see Jacob again.

Jacob left and would be away for about 20 years. While he was in Haran with his Uncle Laban, he became the victim of lies and deception at his uncle's hand. This humbled Jacob. Among other things, Laban violated an agreement with Jacob and tricked him by giving Jacob his daughter Leah to be his wife instead of his younger daughter Rachel, as Laban had promised.



Jacob worked an additional seven years to earn Rachel's hand in marriage. It is through these two wives and their handmaids that Jacob, at this point, had 11 sons born to him. In these 20 years of being away, a lot is happening in Jacob's life, but it is within the context of being on the receiving end of deceit and lies from Laban. This is the theme of who Jacob has been his entire life.

At this point, Jacob wanted to leave to return to his home, but Laban wanted him to stay (because Jacob was a good worker and Laban's flocks had flourished under Jacob's care). They worked out an agreement as to how they would divide their flocks. Jacob got the upper hand in a somewhat questionable way (he was still walking the line of deception). He ends up with the best of the flocks, but Laban becomes suspicious. So Jacob, again, just like 20 years earlier with Esau, avoided the conflict and left. He takes with him all his family, flocks, servants and wealth.

After 20 years, Jacob is heading back home. This will bring us to Jacob's experience of wrestling with an angel of God.

**PERSONAL
RESTLESSNESS
and
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Jacob's story is real. The heroes are not always the best examples of righteousness, and the villains are not always pure darkness and evil. Through his life journey Jacob had survived through sometimes questionable means while knowing that he would be the recipient of God's very specific blessing. Life experiences may not always be pretty, but they should always lead us forward!

We are certainly not advocating doing deceptive things. But we are advocating paying attention to our lives and learning from the experiences that come our way.

Looking back over Jacob's life helps us see that the challenges and issues of life that we may face are really nothing new.

How will God get Jacob ready for the blessings ahead of him as he journeys back to his home with his family, flocks and household?

God's plans unfold in His time and in His way. As Jacob journeyed home with his family and wealth, God would give Jacob all he would need to elevate him to a level of being a truly blessed example of God's own favor. This growth would happen while he journeyed, and it would show him the humility needed to maintain God's favor. Perhaps humility was the missing ingredient all along the way. Let's see how Jacob begins to truly understand humility—but it will take some pretty hard experiences.

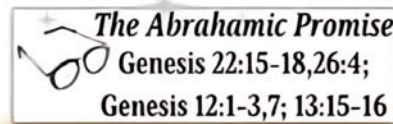
In review, twenty years before he returns home with his family and flocks, he was leaving home, going in the opposite direction, all alone. He left his mother and father.

This is when the well-known account of "Jacob's Ladder" occurs. He dreamt angels were going up and down a ladder between heaven and earth.

The account continues with Jacob being given God's very specific promises:

Genesis 28:13–15: *13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. 14 Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.*

This is the Abrahamic promise that was passed down to Jacob through the blessing of his father, Isaac. As the verses continue, Jacob creates an altar and calls this place Bethel, meaning “house of God.” His grandfather Abraham had done something similar back in **Genesis 12:7-8**. This place had a very holy significance. We can be sure that Jacob remembered this powerful promise through those 20 years of being away.



Jacob is on his way back home to Canaan, and again he is given an experience with angels. This shows us God's providence in his life:

Genesis 32:1-2: *1 Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him. 2 Jacob said when he saw them, This is God's camp. So he named that place Mahanaim.*

Jacob names this place *Mahanaim*, the plural word for encampment, meaning twin camps or two camps. Why? We're not told, but perhaps Jacob saw them as military camps, located there to warn him of a potential upcoming hostile encounter.

Several Bible commentaries suggest Jacob named this area “Twin Camps” because he and his company are sharing the space with God's presence—that God is with him in this upcoming meeting with Esau.

Whatever the reason, he must have been comforted that angels of God were near. He now has to best figure out how to communicate with Esau. He sends messengers to find Esau and notify him of his coming.

Remember, they have been apart for 20 years, and the last time they saw each other, Esau had said he wanted to kill Jacob. As we go through these next scriptures, remember that Jacob's life experience to date has been full of deception, rivalry and trickery.

Notice how now there is no deception or trickery, simply a humble greeting. Life lessons appear to be taking hold:

Genesis 32:3-5: *3 Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau... 4 He also commanded them saying, Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now; 5 I have oxen and donkeys and flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.*

Jacob shows great respect to his brother by calling him *lord*, even though God said Jacob would rule over Esau. Jacob will share his father's blessings by offering Esau some of his herds.

Jacob is being very magnanimous, trying to show he did not have any hard feelings. He had been blessed with a great fortune, and he was ready to share with Esau.

Sometimes grudges are not easily forgotten:

Genesis 32:6–8: *6 The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.*

That's not a good sign! Remember, the last thing Esau said to his brother was, *I'm going to kill you.* You don't need 400 men for a happy family reunion!

7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies; 8 for he said, If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape.

Smart plan, as worst case, at least half of the family survives! But he still fears losing everything unless God intervenes. This is a difficult and scary “What do I do now?” moment. There is panic—they are in the middle of nowhere, far away from where they are going. The only thing to do is move forward with all the family, all the cattle, and all the household to face these 400 men. This doesn't look good.

Jacob's response is to humbly pray and to claim what God had already emphatically promised him 20 years before:

Genesis 32:9–12: *9 Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you, 10 I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies.*

He appropriately recognizes God's abundance in his life.

11 Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children.

This seems to be where his “wrestling with God” begins, and it starts with prayer: *You said this, God, but I am afraid of what I'm facing and need assurance and something to hold onto because I fear the loss of my family.*

Jacob had no idea how this would turn out. He had to face the fact that his entire family's life was at stake because of what he had done decades earlier.

But he continues by reminding God of His covenant promise:

12 For You said, I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.

For you said—he shows faith and courage in God's promise to him, knowing he has no way to defend himself. Yes, he saw angels in a dream 20 years ago, and now angels at Mahanaim, but no evidence of angels who will fight on his behalf.

Over the next two days, Jacob repeatedly worked at appeasing his brother by sending many gifts to him. He presented them in a wise and humble way, sending them in waves, each group with a spokesman proclaiming them as a gift to Esau from Jacob. He continues to send Esau cattle and gifts to soften the anger he thinks is on the other side.



He had to keep his family moving. Finally, Jacob had all of his goods and family cross over the brook Jabbok, and he alone remained behind. He is all alone, it is getting dark and there is no place to go. There are 400 men in front. The family, herds and households had separated. It was just him; it's quiet and it's dark. Jacob was again alone, just like he had been 20 years earlier when he had the dream of the ladder of angels when he received God's powerful promise.



He would again be visited by an angel, but this time it would be VERY different:

Genesis 32:24-28: *24 Then Jacob was left alone, and a man (an angel) wrestled with him until daybreak. 25 When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, Let me go, for the dawn is breaking. But he said, I will not let you go unless you bless me. 27 So he said to him, What is your name? And he said, Jacob. 28 He said, Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.*

Jacob wrestles with the angel for hours! We will look at the detail in the next segment.

**PERSONAL
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God knew that beneath all of the supplanting and deceiving interactions of Jacob's life was a heart that could humbly serve Him. He allowed Jacob to experience deception from both sides as well as large doses of life insecurity. All of these things would contribute to Jacob growing into the faithful servant of God's will that he was chosen to be.

He was chosen, but that doesn't mean everything came floating to him on waves of glory and comfort. Things came to him in a torrent of experiences, in difficulty and in insecurity. This is where the wrestling comes into play. Jacob is an example of faith under great pressure as he is learning from the lessons of his own life.

When we look back at these experiences of Jacob's life that spanned decades, we can really see how God was methodically teaching him needed lessons!

**Now we have come to the heart of the matter. Jacob will wrestle with God.
What can we learn from this dramatic experience?**

“When you think about it, this image of wrestling had been a major part of Jacob’s life. He was wrestling as he emerged from the womb grabbing Esau’s heel. Later in life, he figuratively wrestled with Esau as he strove for the birthright. When he first met Rachel, he wrestled the stone away from the mouth of the well. For 20 years, he figuratively wrestled with Laban for his family and his possessions. And now, in this culminating moment of his life, when he is returning to the land of promise, he is wrestling with God.”

—Quote from our brother in Christ, Jerry

They fought throughout the night and Jacob would not quit:

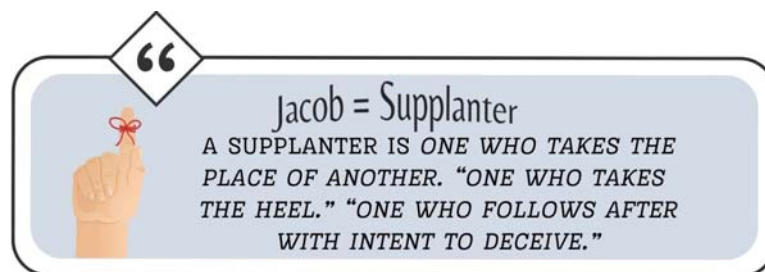
Genesis 32:25–26: *25 When he (the angel) saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob’s thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, Let me go, for the dawn is breaking. But he said, I will not let you go unless you bless me.*

They wrestled through the night, and Jacob didn’t give up. The angel says, *Let me go, for the dawn is breaking.* But Jacob says, *Nope, I’m not letting go.* So, with a touch of the angel’s hand, he dislocates Jacob’s thigh. This is a painful injury.

This desperate determination to not let go shows us how important this battle was for Jacob. He had no other choice in his mind. Perhaps his wrestling with this angel depicted how he had to wrestle with himself at this moment as well. God’s promises were big. Jacob took them seriously and knew he needed to grow into inheriting them.

Just as Abraham’s worthiness had been tested, so Jacob’s would be tested as well. This was a moment of—*God, I need Your blessing. I cannot do without Your blessing. I’m not letting go of Your messenger. I am desperate.*

Genesis 32:27–28: *27 So he (the angel) said to him, What is your name? And he said, Jacob.*



Jacob’s name was associated with deception and cheating. This is who he had been.

*28 He said, Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have **striven with God** and with men and have prevailed.*

Etymology is the study of the origin and evolution of words, and the etymology of the noun “Israel” is complex, with more than one meaning.

He is still called Jacob for several more chapters, but the angel gave him a preview of what was to come.

Genesis 32:29–31: 29 Then Jacob asked him and said, Please tell me your name. But he said, Why is it that you ask my name? And he blessed him there. 30 So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved. 31 Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Peniel (meaning “face of God” or “facing God”), and he was limping on his thigh.

Jacob finally lets go because he's blessed by having his name changed, just like his grandfather Abram had his name changed to Abraham. The sun rose and Jacob was left limping.

Several key points:

1. Jacob's tenacity was to not just fight, but to hold on even when physically defeated. He couldn't win that battle, but he hung on anyway as he searched for a blessing. This shows us the tenacity of his character. God would give him the name He would forever call His chosen people.
2. We can't help but think Jacob's life would show us what Israel's national existence would look like. Israel as a nation would indeed struggle. It is a struggle for all of us to live up to God's expectations, providence and direction.

Jacob hung on. By hanging on and being defeated, he actually won a significant battle.



Big picture lesson: It's a blessing to strive with God. Wrestling or struggling with God was a core part of Israel's very existence. Israel wrestled at times with their faith and trust in God. How many times did they ask to go back into slavery as they journeyed in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt?

Even in Judaism today, the symbol of Jacob wrestling with the angel is used to represent deep questioning of the faith, where a question may be more valuable than an answer,

teaching exploration and not necessarily discovery. Religious Jews are encouraged to both challenge and submit to God.

We need to take the lessons of Jacob wrestling here and ask, What about us? How are we following after God's will, God's word, and God's way? Being a Christian is not an easy task because it requires trial and tribulation, difficulty and uncertainty, just like Jacob.

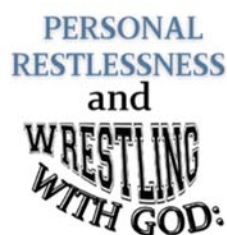
What Jacob did, what he went through and the growth that resulted are examples for us to follow in this wrestling, this holding on, even while in pain and completely exhausted. He held on, Why? *I need Your blessing.*

Jacob's wrestling and the angel's blessing would result in a complete reconciliation with Esau:

Genesis 33:1-4: *1 Then Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. 2 He put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. 3 But he himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. 4 Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.*

We see this incredible reunion, but Jacob couldn't have predicted how it would go. So, he went way out in front of everyone and saw his brother in the distance. Jacob bows to the ground and gets up to walk a little further. He bows again and does it again and again seven times. He shows submission, wanting a reunion and reconciliation, not a war. Esau sees his humility, and the reunited brothers hug and weep together.

What a powerful result of wrestling with the God through the angel that brought the two brothers back together!



Jacob's encounter with God's power through an angel would end up being a life changing experience. Jacob's raw tenacity to receive God's blessing would open the door to the promise that had existed all along. Jacob simply needed to express his need for God's direction. Jacob's wrestling was his need for God being manifested.

After several other difficult experiences, Jacob was again directed by God:

Genesis 35:1-3: *1 Then God said to Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel and live there, and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau. 2 So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments; 3 and let us arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.*

This sounds like a fresh start—no more false gods, clean yourself up, even physically change your clothes (clothes in the bible can represent character—see **Jude 23** and **Ephesians 4:22-24**.)

We are God's chosen people, so we will act like it! Notice Jacob is instructed to return to Bethel where God first appeared to him when he was running from Esau. God had been faithful to Jacob for these last 20 years. Jacob builds the altar and calls the place *El-beth-el*, which means “God’s house of God.” God’s presence was strongly made known here.

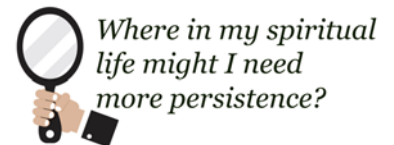
All the wrestling, all the deception, all the lies, all the questionable activities have been peeled away from Jacob. What is he left with? We have been blessed! This is what we’re going to do. We are going to restart our lives because God is with us and has been even when we couldn’t see it before.

The drama here cannot be overstated. The message shows us that God understands where we are and presses us to want His direction!

**For Jacob, the wrestling experiences of his entire life and especially with the angel had molded him into a man that God could build a chosen people out of.
Can our wrestling with God do the same?**

It can if we are determined to continually draw closer to God. The real key to wrestling with God is our “why.” Are we wrestling to get away from Him or from some life challenge or are we wrestling to understand and find His guidance and blessing? Sometimes we have to hold on for dear life so we can have Him ahead of us.

“Wrestling with God” is a metaphor for spiritual struggle, perseverance and transformation.



The book of Psalms has 150 chapters of significant testimonies about God’s care. One reason the Psalms are incredibly uplifting is they show us what life really looks like under the surface. Psalm 88 is one of those Psalms that lays out our wrestling with God in a straightforward, blunt way. There are “no holds barred” in this wrestling match. It poignantly describes a deep and difficult experience.



Psalm 88 is often considered to be the saddest Psalm in the Bible—it is depressing! But like Jacob, sometimes we have to develop through the difficulties of life in order to find great blessing. God understands the depth of our despair, and we are grateful His divine plan has an answer for all.

Why choose one of the most depressing Psalms in the Bible to finish this story? When we overlay Jacob’s experience over the darkness and difficulty of the Psalm, we see how we might feel, but we also see the hope God offers us through faith in Him.

The night he wrestled with the angel, Jacob was alone in the dark with no idea what to do. There is no clear path before him:

Psalm 88:1–3: (ASV) *1 O Jehovah, the God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee. 2 Let my prayer enter into thy presence; incline thine ear unto my cry. 3 For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draweth nigh unto sheol (grave).*

I am ready to give up. I have had enough, and I have nothing left. Jacob must have felt like this as well when his family was confronting 400 men and one vengeful brother. *My life is drawing nigh to just darkness and nothingness.*

We might feel like this sometimes, especially if we experience depression and anxiety. Sometimes all we can see is darkness. We are ready to give up.



Resting in our Wrestling: This kind of despair appears many places in the Bible. God does not discourage it; rather, He has it in His word to show us that the depth of our despair is NOT deeper than the depths of His compassion.

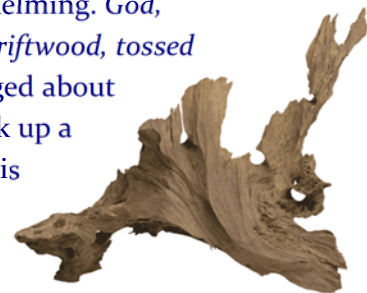
We can't ever forget that in the depth of our hurt, pain, suffering, distress, trauma and unrest—as deep as it can be, as overwhelming as it is—the message is, *I cry to you night and day.* The depth of God's compassion ultimately will always win, whether in this life, in this age, or in the next. It always wins!

Jacob's life was in the balance that night. It was either live or die. There was no in-between. Either live or die, lose his family, lose everything precious to him, or he would be delivered somehow. He held on because he needed answers! *I don't know what to do, but I'm not letting go.*

The psalmist is expressing to God how bad things are. This shows us the importance of holding on the way Jacob did:

Psalm 88:4–7: (ASV) *4 I am reckoned with them that go down into the pit; I am as a man that hath no help, 5 cast off among the dead, Like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more, and they are cut off from thy hand. 6 Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in dark places, in the deeps. 7 Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah.*

You have laid me in this pit. We can see how this despair is so overwhelming. *God, I feel like I am as good as dead before you. I am like a lifeless piece of driftwood, tossed about with all thy waves of your ocean.* A piece of driftwood gets banged about and eventually gets pulled apart and becomes nothing. When we pick up a piece of driftwood, it is light in weight because most of its substance is gone. And he's saying, *I'm like that. I'm being beaten about by your waves.*



When we feel those experiences, we must have the courage to be honest enough to express what we feel. This is the beginning of the ability to understand and cope.



Resting in our Wrestling: Even though I am in an impossible darkness, and I am beyond my ability to comprehend why, I still cry out to you.

The key is to still cry out—I don't have an answer, I don't know an answer, I don't even expect an answer anymore, but I still cry out. That is the despair of this Psalm. We can see how Jacob's despair caused him to hold on in great pain and anguish. *God, I'm not letting go—I need You now.* He still doesn't know what is going to happen because it is still dark, but he hangs on.

Jacob's tenacious holding on through the night and the fight brought him a blessing.

The night brought the morning:

Psalm 88:8–12: (ASV) *8 Thou hast put mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them (even my friends are gone): I am shut up, and I cannot come forth. 9 Mine eye wasteth away by reason of affliction: I have called daily upon thee, O Jehovah; I have spread forth my hands unto thee. 10 Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall they that are deceased arise and praise thee? Selah. 11 Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? Or thy faithfulness in destruction? 12 Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? And thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?*

I feel entirely alone, as though all who once knew me are disgraced by me. I can no longer see where you are, even though I have called out to you daily.

Sometimes depression, experiences, the grief of loss or trauma can bring us to asking how we will get through. The message of this Psalm is, however real it is in our personal experience, God's reality and providence is higher and stronger than our experience.

The psalmist keeps crying to God. Jacob continued to hang on to the angel, even though he was exhausted.



Resting in our Wrestling: In my overwhelming despair and loneliness, I can still ask for you to find me. Asking opens the door to being answered.

- *God, Can You give blessing where there is death? Yes, He can.*
- *Can You show faithfulness in destruction? Yes, He can.*

Sometimes, our experiences do not work out in this life, and we ask God, "Why?" It may be there is an essential lesson for us for eternity.

God's plan is bigger than our moments. God's plan gives blessing, taking the trial, trauma and difficulty in our lives to say, *I let you have that as a memory so you can truly appreciate goodness, love, mercy and kindness.*

Let's go back to Jacob.

Though wounded, Jacob was blessed on the morning of a new day AFTER a night of wrestling:

Psalm 88:13-17: (ASV) *13 But unto Thee, O Jehovah, have I cried; and in the morning shall my prayer come before Thee. 14 Jehovah, why castest Thou off my soul? Why hidest Thou Thy face from me? 15 I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer Thy terrors I am distracted. 16 Thy fierce wrath is gone over me; Thy terrors have cut me off. 17 They came round about me like water all the day long; they compassed me about together.*

In the morning shall my prayer come before Thee. Jehovah, why castest Thou off my soul? Why hidest Thou Thy face from me? The prayer is a question, and with that question is an answer.

It reminds us of Cornelius, the Roman centurion who was outside of Judaism but faithful to God. When it came time for him to be converted to Christianity, he had a vision. In that vision, the angel said, *Your prayers and your alms have gone up as a memorial before God. You have not been answered up to this time, but now you will be.*

That was the experience with Jacob. Now he would be answered. After the night of wrestling, the difficulty and the struggle, he would be answered. This Psalm shows us our perceived reality, but as with Jacob, our reality should be founded in the goodness of God's providence. His providences are bigger than our experiences. We might not be able to see it in the moment, just as Jacob didn't when he was wrestling with the angel.



Resting in our Wrestling: I am hopeless, and yet the darkness of my night can—even beyond my blind despair—be brought to you in the morning.

When morning came and the angel blessed him, Jacob was able to go forth and meet his brother, seeing God's blessing unfold.

We imagine that as he was walking towards Esau, bowing down and getting up, he was limping and in great pain, but that did not stop him.

Jacob's wrestling led to him being able to fulfill what was required of him—the wrestling, the holding on for dear life and the uncertainty can lead us to the growth and strength needed to do and deal with what God puts before us.

God speaks to Jacob once again:

Genesis 35:9–12: *9 Then God appeared to Jacob again...and He blessed him. 10 God said to him, Your name is Jacob; you shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name. Thus He called him Israel. 11 God also said to him, I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come forth from you. 12 The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you.*

God's word is unbreakable. His promises were given to Jacob 20 years before. *There were testings where you couldn't see Me at all. There was a night of wrestling where you had no idea what was going to happen, and here is the result. I am blessing you because you are Mine.*

**PERSONAL
RESTLESSNESS
and
WRESTLING
WITH GOD:**

Wrestling with God opens our minds and our hearts to go beyond where we are right now. Wrestling with God can therefore be an integral part of our growth as Jesus' disciples. Growth means not staying the same. Jacob grew into humble submission to God after a lifetime sprinkled with trouble and deception.

Let us hold on to God's leadings with a Jacob-like tenacity, so we too can walk away blessed.

Sometimes we go through the hardship of the dark night, of not knowing what is going to happen, not knowing how things will unfold. This is frightening.

Yet, God was there for Jacob, and God can be there for us if we put Him first through Christ. Let's follow the scriptural principles that always put God first. Let's wrestle with God to hold on so we too receive a blessing.

**So, what happens when we wrestle with God?
For Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions...
...Think about it!**

All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.



Next episode

Episode 1368: Was Philip Miraculously Transported by the Spirit?



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Study QUESTIONS

Ep.1367: What Happens When We Wrestle With God?

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1367-wrestle-with-god/>

See:  CQ.Rewind
SHOW NOTES

1. What is Jacob's "back story"? How did Esau lose his birthright? How did Jacob supplant Esau to receive the blessing from Isaac? Why didn't Esau value his birthright? Describe the consequence to Rebekah and Jacob from this deception. What were the consequences to Jacob and Laban from their mutual deceptions? (Genesis 25:23-34, 27:27-45, Deuteronomy 21:17, Hebrews 12:16)
2. Have you ever used deception to push a result that was for a good purpose? Did you gain a blessing? Did you reap a consequence? How do you feel now about what you did and the result?
3. What angelic event happened as Jacob left his parents', Isaac and Rebekah's, home? What was the promise given at the end of the event? Why was this promise significant?
4. How did Jacob prepare for meeting Esau as he returned to Canaan after 20 years? Why was he so cautious? What angelic event happened as he returned? What did Jacob's persistence earn him? (Genesis 28:10-15, 32:1-12, 24-28)
5. What other kinds of "wrestling" did Jacob experience in his lifetime?
6. Why did God change Jacob's name to "Israel"? Why did Jacob finally let go of the angel? How did his persistence help him deal with Esau? How did he approach his brother? Explain whether the reunion went as expected. (Genesis 32:24-31, 33:1-4)
7. Have you had experiences or times in your life when you "wrestled" with God? Does Jacob's tenacity in clinging to the angel even though he did not have a glimmer of hope he could win the battle or even see a way through the difficulty, speak to you? In what way?
8. Do you ever get to the point of despair as Jacob did, with no clear path to follow? What did Jacob gain by holding onto the angel? What can we gain through continuing to ask for God to find us? (Psalm 88:1-17)
9. Ultimately, Jacob's wrestling with circumstances throughout his life caused him to grow into someone God could work with. What is the promise reiterated in Genesis 35:9-12?
10. Can you recognize your own wrestling with God over your insecurities and the darker circumstances in your life where it is hard to find God? What growth in Christ have you seen in yourself through these experiences? What do you need to do in order to "rest in your wrestling," holding onto the Father until the "morning" breaks, when you can see His answer and the blessing He has arranged for you?

Rest in God, tenaciously hold onto His promises. His compassion is much larger, much deeper than we can comprehend. The morning will reveal a far greater purpose for us than we could ever imagine!