

Wrestling with God

We've been slowly making our way through Genesis with the kiddos. You could preach on Genesis every week, but I won't. However, it's difficult, and you're at least hearing one today. *This is Jacob's story.* While on one hand it is drastically different than yours, it is principally the same as so many. His story is one of family drama, sibling rivalry, lying, fear, betrayal, hardship, and reconciliation. In particular, this is a story about wrestling with God. Before we do, let's back up a bit.

Background:

- **Genesis 25:19-34** Twins were born to Isaac and Rebekah. They struggled together in her womb. She was told, "two nations are in your womb," and "the older shall serve the younger." Jacob was technically younger than Esau. His name literally means "He takes by the heel" or "he cheats." They grew up: Esau favored by Isaac, and Jacob favored by Rebekah. One day, Jacob took advantage of Esau's foolishness when he sold his birthright to Jacob for food.
- **Genesis 26** Rebekah instructed Jacob to lie and deceive his blind father by pretending to be Esau and robbing him of his firstborn blessing. Upon learning of Jacob's betrayal, Esau had it in his heart to kill Jacob after the passing of his father. Knowing this, Rebekah counseled Jacob to flee to her brother until time passed and Esau's anger subsided.
- **Genesis 28** Jacob was sent by his father to Rebekah's brother. On his way, the Lord appeared to him in a dream. He saw a ladder reaching into the heavens, with angels ascending and descending on it. The Lord stood above it and reiterated His promises (beginning with Abraham) to Jacob. Jacob set up a pillar and called the place Bethel (meaning *the house of God*).
- **Genesis 29-31** Jacob lived under Laban's roof and married his two daughters, Leah & Rachel. Jacob favored Rachel. Over time, both women bore him children. They also gave him their servants to bear more children. The four women bore him 12 sons (and at least one daughter). After two decades of serving Laban, God instructed Jacob to return home.

Wrestling with God: **Genesis 32**

- Put yourselves in Jacob's sandals. He left his home and married Leah and Rachel when he was 40. He is now 60 years old and has to return home. Yet, in Jacob's mind, there's someone waiting for him. Who knows if time has healed all wounds like his mother said would happen? "I've sent word to Esau of my return, and now he's heading my way with 400 men! What's around the corner? Is Esau still angry with me? Is my life in danger? I don't know, but God has instructed me to go home. What should I do? I'll express my fear and anxiety to the Lord!"
- Vs.9-12: We try to put ourselves beside Jacob. How do you feel about him? Is he about to get what's coming to him? Do you feel sympathy for both boys? Are you pulling for him? Are you hoping God will save him? Here's what Jacob does: he prepares gifts to be delivered to Esau in literal droves. He tells his servants to make it known that Jacob, Esau's servant, is sending gifts to his lord. He hopes the gifts will appease Esau and reconcile the two.

- Vs. 22-32:
 - **Who is this man?** This is admittedly bizarre. First of all, Jacob is encountering angels throughout the narrative. Whether it's his dream in [ch.28](#), or the angels at the beginning of this chapter in the first verse. Who is this man? He's mentioned in [Hosea 12:2-6](#). There, he is called "the angel." You notice how, after harmonizing the text, to wrestle with the angel was to wrestle with God. You know where I'm going with this: I think it's Jesus in human form (called theophany).
 - **What's going on and why now?** Considering the full picture, Jacob's name, and his name change, here are my thoughts:
 - Jacob's name means "*he takes by the heel*", or "*he cheats*." In fact, Esau, in his anger, said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." [Genesis 27:36](#). Jacob, in his younger days, was attempting to take things into his own hands. While God worked through it all, he still made bad decisions, resulting in hard consequences. In fact, he's about to face more in a short while.
 - Jacob's name change to Israel means "*He strives with God*" or "*God strives*." It's apparently a play on words and very close to his original Hebrew name. And what happened when he strove with God? Well, of course, he got a name change, but it's more than that. He experienced the mercy and grace of God, oddly enough, in a wrestling match. Could the angel have taken him out easily? Of course. He's learning to lean on God instead of himself. Did this encounter encourage him? Absolutely. God visited him in a very personal way. It was worth the limp. In fact, his limp would always remind him of God's personal visit. He encountered the Creator and lived to tell about it. This whole encounter helped change him. No longer is he Jacob the cheat, but Israel the wrestler. See, he learned what it is to hang on to God. He couldn't defeat God - this was all grace. He begged to be blessed because he was learning his need for God.
 - **We all need to wrestle with God.** We need to set aside our spouses, children, and wealth for a night. I mean that we need to see Him in a "one-on-one" kind of way. God is a personal God. He came to us all and we know Him as Jesus. We need a moment alone with God, because it is before Him alone we will stand or fall one day. We need to experience fear, stress, vulnerability, and uncertainty. It's through this process that God can change us, rename us, and though we may limp away, we walk with new perspectives, stronger faith, deeper conviction, and peace. More than anything, brethren, we need to acknowledge how we can't do this alone. Trying to go this alone will backfire. If you think Jacob was blessed because he was stronger than God, you've fundamentally missed the lesson. God allowed Him to win due to His grace, but not to leave him thinking he was stronger. He was to finally get Jacob to rely on Him. So many times, we fight against God when He's trying to bless us. This would also be the story of Israel as a whole as seen in [Hosea 12:2-6](#). Always striving with God when He was trying to help. What about you? Who are you fighting against? What for? And what are we learning?