

# GENESIS 32:22-32

## WEEK 8



### Context & Historical Background

In Genesis 27, Jacob betrays his older brother Esau by tricking his father, Isaac, into giving him his brother's blessing. As you can imagine, this makes Esau angry. So Jacob flees his home and goes to work for his uncle, Laban. On the way, the Lord comes to him in a dream and blesses him, continuing the covenant he made with his grandfather, Abraham, to bless the earth through his descendants. Jacob then takes Laban's daughters Leah and Rachel as his wives (long story, doesn't make it okay). The Lord eventually tells him to return to the land of his father, and again promises to be with him. With sights set on his homeland, Jacob has a problem: He must come face to face again with his brother. Of course, Jacob is terrified. He hasn't seen his brother since he stole Esau's birthright. Now he makes preparations to send gifts ahead to Esau to try and appease him, and night begins to fall on a petrified Jacob.



### Related Passages

Hosea 12:3-4 - Reference to Jacob wrestling

Psalm 27 - David pleads to see God

Matthew 26:36-46 - Jesus pleads with God in the garden



### Key Terms

**Jacob:** "deceiver"

**Israel:** "struggles with God"

**Peniel:** "face of God"

**Jabbok River:** *yabboq*, *yeabeq* means "wrestled", *yaaqab* means "Jacob"



### Key Themes

**Wrestling:** The most striking part of this story is the literal implications of it: Jacob physically wrestled with God? How do we deal with this? The church has tried to understand it a few different ways. Some take it at face value: somehow Jacob literally wrestled with God. Some say Jacob wrestled with the Son. Some say, taking Hosea 12 as their guide, Jacob wrestled with an angel. Others emphasize the spiritual dimension of this struggle—struggling in prayer, struggling with doubt, struggling with fear, suffering. But when we put ourselves in Jacob's position,

what does it mean for us to wrestle with God? That's the takeaway here.

Like Jacob, we face trials. We sin and suffer and doubt and worry. And just as Jacob wrestles, we should wrestle, too. Christ wrestled in the garden because of his suffering. Scripture invites us to wrestle with our doubts (Mark 9:24). We are called to a life of persistent prayer and petition, the kind we see in Matthew 15:21-28 with a Canaanite woman determined to have the Lord heal her daughter. *That's* how we wrestle with God. There are times when things don't go our way. Or times when we cry out to God for direction and the answers don't come. There are times when sin dominates our life. We can either draw back and continue living a life reading and learning about God, or we can meet him. Like with Jacob, wrestling with God won't mean we come away uninjured or unchanged. Wrestling with God may hurt—killing sin always does, being told no does—but it will heal us. A life with God sometimes means *wrestling with him* through the tough circumstances and questions in life.

**New Name:** Jacob was given a new name, Israel. Based on the meanings of both of these names, we can see beyond a name change to a change in character. Jacob, “deceiver,” is changed through the process of “struggling with God” and seeing him face to face. The change in name signals a new acknowledgement of his weakness and reliance on God. And it's this name which is passed on as the name of God's people—Israelites, not Jacobites. Not differing from Jacob, they will also struggle in their relationship with God in an effort to rely on their own knowledge and strength. And from that Israel comes true Israel, God's church, the Israel of faith (Romans 9:4-8).

A new name also has signified a new standing or position historically. When monarchs come to the throne, they take a new name. The same was true of Augustus (previously Octavius). This is the case all over Scripture (Abraham, Peter, Paul, etc.). This may also explain the strange reason in Philippians 2:9 God grants Christ a new name. Historically Christians have adopted the practice by giving a new “Christian name” at baptism or ordination.

**Clinging to God:** When Jacob goes from fighting with God to clinging to him, he receives his blessing. The first time Jacob got his blessing, he did it his own way, through deception (Genesis 27:36). But now he pleaded with God for it. When we choose to embrace the truth in God's word and cling to it, sometimes in spite of our present circumstances, something happens. Proverbs 3:18 says the wisdom of God “is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.” When Jacob holds fast, he leaves having seen God's face and his life is marked as one who has been with the Lord.

## 📖 Quotes & Illustrations

*“Have you heard God's blessing in your inmost being? Are the words, ‘You are my beloved child, in whom I delight’ an endless source of joy and strength? Have you sensed, through the Holy Spirit, God speaking to you? That blessing—the blessing through the Spirit that is ours through Christ—is what Jacob received, and it is the only remedy against idolatry. Only that blessing makes idols un-*

necessary. As with Jacob, we usually discover this only after a life of 'looking for blessings in all the wrong places.' It often takes an experience of crippling weakness for us to finally discover it. That is why so many of the most God-blessed people limp as they dance for joy."

TIM KELLER

"Jesus wants us to struggle with him in our afflictions and troubles, not abandon him. He wants us to cling to him as Jacob clung to his divine opponent after his hip was touched and he developed a limp."

TREMPER LONGMAN

"For we do not fight against him, except by his own power, and with his own weapons. For he, having challenged us to this contest, at the same time furnishes us with means of resistance, so that he both fights against us and for us... We may truly and properly say, that he fights against us with his left hand, and for us with his right hand."

JOHN CALVIN

## ! Three Main Points

1. We were created to hold fast to God. God blesses those who cling to him as their source.
2. When we face sin, doubt, sufferings, we wrestle with God and he has compassion on us.
3. Jesus wants us to seek his face (Psalm 27) and this deepens our faith and even marks our lives as one lived *with* him.

## ? Discussion Questions

- Why do you think God inspired this story to be included in Scripture? What do we see most clearly in this chapter that we might miss elsewhere?
- What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? What do we learn about people in this passage?
- Who are some other people in Scripture who had their names changed? What is significant about name changes?
- How does Jacob come away from wrestling with God with only a limp? Surely it isn't that God couldn't win the wrestling match? What does this say about God? (He has compassion on us as we wrestle with him. So where have you seen that compassion with God as you've wrestled with doubt or suffering?)
- What does it actually look like to cling to God? Avoid "general" answers here. Think of the actual moment you're living in and what clinging to God in that looks like.
- Have you experienced a season of doubt or questioning and through the striving, seen/know him more deeply?
- How can we live in to our new name as sons and daughters of the Father?
- In what ways do we "wrestle with God?" (in doubt, in prayer, etc.) What are we actually

wrestling with, and to what end?

- In what areas are you wrestling, that the Lord wants to meet with you there? Trusting God with school/future plans? Wanting answers and not hearing anything on His end? Dealing with the loss of a loved one? That relationship not turning out like we expected? Etc.
- Or what have you wrestled with in the past? Did you wrestle *with* him or pull away and how did that affect the outcome of your faith?
- Are you insisting on pursuing life your own way, or are you clinging to God? How can we identify which of these approaches we're taking?
- What does it look like to wrestle with God and overcome? What does this do to our character, our faith?
- How do you practically wrestle *with* God through the tough seasons?
- Do you have trouble believing God wants to meet with you, especially in the difficult seasons? Why or why not?

## Application & Practice

**Wrestle with Doubt:** We all either have, will, or are currently wrestling with some situation beyond our control. God doesn't want us to shy away from tough questions or difficult situations. Write out what you're frustrated with, suffering through, or doubting. Spend time telling these things to God, and listen for his voice. Find a Psalm which aligns with your situation and pray it.

**Wrestle in Prayer:** Pray through Psalm 27 every week night this week. Pay close attention to verse 8.

**Journal** your heart's response to the Lord drawing close to you, calling to you: "Seek my face."

**Clinging:** Many times, practicing gratitude even when we don't necessarily feel it can draw us closer to God's heart and into fellowship with him. Find time this week to list all the blessings you see around you, no matter how small. Make a list and pray through it 2-3 times this week.

Katie Majors, a missionary in Africa, after having to return one of her adopted daughters to her birth mother, was struggling in the aftermath to cling to Jesus through it. She began writing down every little blessing she saw around her on sticky notes and posted them all along her walls: "Gratitude brought me into communion with God. Here God completely redefined His beauty for me. This beauty came in His presence with me even before the happy ending was there, even if my vision of the happy ending never came true."

## Going Deeper

Kyle Idleman: "The Gift of Desperation: Fighting for God's Blessing"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMwHo8BQU7E>

Tim Keller: "The Theology of the Cross and Walking with a Limp"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZKhMR2gfi0>

Katie Davis Majors: Daring to Hope  
[https://www.amazon.com/Daring-Katie-Davis-Majors-author/dp/1780784600/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1534378340&sr=8-2&keywords=daring+to+hope+katie+davis+majors+paperback](https://www.amazon.com/Daring-Katie-Davis-Majors-author/dp/1780784600/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1534378340&sr=8-2&keywords=daring+to+hope+katie+davis+majors+paperback)

Ravi Zacharias: "Special Message - Raised to Run" (27:15-34:20)  
<https://youtu.be/jCTYgCt9dUw>