

# Genesis Ch32v22-23 - Wrestling With God

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[ 0 : 00 ] . So, Genesis 32 is where we're at.

We've been looking at the life of Jacob and his relationship with God and how God is slowly but surely changing him.

And we come to a significant part in Jacob's life where God transforms him. So, we're going to read, then we're going to pray, and then look at this word together.

So, let's read Genesis 32, starting at verse 22. That night, Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants, his eleven sons, and crossed the ford of the Jebuk.

After he'd sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So, Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.

[ 1 : 50 ] When the man saw that he could not overpower Jacob, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

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

The man asked him, What is your name? Jacob, he answered. Then the man said, Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.

Jacob said, Please tell me your name. But he replied, Why do you ask my name? Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called that place Peniel, saying, It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.

[ 2 : 57 ] The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore, to this day, the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

Well, let's pray and ask for God's help. Father, we thank you for these records, these true accounts of the life of these ancient people, the living God, the same God that we worship today, working in the lives of people just like us.

And so we pray that as we look at this story together, that we would learn something about the greatness of God, how we should respond to him, and how we should trust him for grace every day. Father, be gracious to us now, and help us with your Holy Spirit's power. In a sense, we ask that you would touch us afresh, so that we know that we are meeting with you.

And this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, Jacob is in a terrible mess.

[ 4 : 51 ] That's often how we found him, isn't it? Having stolen his brother Esau's blessing, he had to run for his life. Now it's some 20 years later, and Jacob is on the verge of meeting his brother Esau.

Not knowing how his brother is going to respond to him, Jacob sent some messengers ahead. Have a look back at verse 6, chapter 32, verse 6.

So he's getting ready to meet his brother, and he sends messengers ahead. Verse 6. When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, we went to your brother Esau, and now he's coming to meet you.

And 400 men are with him. This is no welcoming party. This is an army. Verse 7.

In great fear and distress, Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. He thought, well, if Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape.

[ 6 : 08 ] What's Esau going to do to me? Well, Jacob does what most people do in a crisis, even atheists. They cry out to God.

Look at verse 10. I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you've shown your servant. Verse 11. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me.

Now, full marks to Jacob for crying out to God for salvation and help, because that's a good thing, right? But you know what? It can also be a painful thing.

You see, when God intervenes in our life, it's not always comfortable. Sometimes it feels like a wrestle.

And so after Jacob prayed, he sends on all his family and all his people and all his servants ahead of him. verse 24. So Jacob was left alone.

[ 7 : 22 ] Now, can you picture him there? In the darkness of night, filled with fear about his brother, all alone. And God spoke softly to Jacob.

Don't be afraid, my son. I'm with you. No harm will come to you. Be at peace. Except that's not what happened, is it?

Let's consider Jacob's wrestle. First, we are perplexed by God's ways.

We're perplexed by God's ways. Verse 24. Jacob was left alone. And out of nowhere, his body slammed to the ground.

A man, verse 24, wrestled with him till daybreak. Rather than resting in peace, he finds himself wrestling all night. And what's perplexing for us is the identity of this wrestler.

[ 8 : 35 ] Look at verse 28. The man said, your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with who?

With God. In fact, Jacob goes on to confirm it in verse 30. Jacob called that place Peniel, saying, it is because I saw God face to face.

Now, yes, later on in other scriptures, it is referred to the angel of the Lord, a person representing God, but what we're to get here is that this is no dream or vision.

This is a full-on, in-person, wrestle with God. And it seems Jacob is not going to give up too easily. Verse 25. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, when he saw that Jacob wasn't giving up, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

[ 9 : 46 ] Now, you might be into MMA, but you know that if you're going to cause a strain to your opponent, you have to land a big heavy blow. Well, as God wrestles with Jacob, he just touches Jacob's hip and he's left with a hobble and a limp.

What awesome power! With just a touch, God strikes him, God injures him, God causes him pain. Well, you say, God can't do that. Isn't God tender and gracious? Isn't God the one who's gentle and kind?

No, my God doesn't do this kind of thing, but he does. It's perplexing. It's troubling. You see, it seems we can cope with a God that we invite into our presence to bring his peace, but we don't do so well with a God who invades our life and causes a fight.

We like a God that we can control and a God who does what we say, but a God who comes unannounced and weakens us.

[ 11 : 19 ] Well, isn't that perplexing? Why would God wrestle with Jacob like this? Why would God touch him and cause him harm?

Why take him out? God can't do that sort of thing. Well, sometimes God doesn't fit into our manageable box.

Sometimes God does confront us. Sometimes God goes on the offensive. It seems God can bring discomfort and he will allow trouble so that we might face God and perhaps deal with God.

Sometimes he needs to get our attention and sometimes it's in the times of wrestling that he gets it. Make no mistake, God is no more loving in times of peace and he is no less loving in times of turmoil.

It's just that God works in all kinds of different ways. So first, God's ways are perplexing.

[ 12 : 39 ] second, we are transformed by God's touch. We may find God's ways perplexing but they lead to a transformed life.

Look at verse 26. In the midst of the wrestle, the man said, let go for it is day break.

Surrender, Jacob. Submit. But it seems Jacob isn't for letting go. He's stubborn. He's refusing to give up.

Now this is a high risk strategy on Jacob's side, isn't it? Because the last time he refused to let go, he gets touched and he's severely weakened.

Who knows what will happen if God touches him again? He could die. What's going on? Well this is more than just plain stubbornness and stupidity.

[13:47] This is an act of faith. You see, Jacob's life has been filled with struggles and fights. he's always trying to get ahead, cheating and lying to get what he wants, looking and searching for the blessed life.

Now it seems God is going to struggle with Jacob. And Jacob must learn that it's not what he wants in life, but who he needs in life.

Not what he wants, but who he needs. So God brings him to a place where his life is changed and transformed.

There's three steps or three moves in this wrestle that show us how we can have a transformed life as we meet with God.

First, submission. Again, let's read verse 26. The man said to Jacob, let me go for it is daybreak.

[14:53] But Jacob replied, I will not let you go unless you bless me. Jacob's not letting go, not because he thinks he's more powerful than God, but because he finally realizes that God is stronger and greater than him.

All his life he's been scheming and deceiving, trying to plot and plan his own way in life. Now he finds himself in a place of weakness and helplessness.

he's literally been brought to his knees. Here is a man who stopped fighting with God and has surrendered to God.

So first, there's a submission. And then second, there's a confession. Verse 27. The man asked him, what's your name?

Well, it seems quite a pointless question because of course God knows who he is and knows what his name is. So why ask him what his name is? Well, it seems it's to draw out of Jacob to face up to his own reality of who he is.

[16:08] Yes, my name is Jacob. And we know what Jacob means. He's the deceiver. The schemer. Yes, I'm a cheater and a stealer.

I'm a liar and a fraud. This is who I am. I'm a sinner. Can you see that in the midst of all this wrestle, all the hiding is gone?

Jacob freely admits to who he is. And then third, there is desperation.

temptation. You see, through the wrestle, Jacob is confronted and challenged by God and at last, Jacob finally sees it's no longer about what he wants for himself but who he needs.

Read verse 26 again, then the man said, let me go for this daybreak. But Jacob replied, I will not let go unless you bless me.

[17:14] I need you, God. I need your help. I need your blessing. I'm desperate for you.

In fact, Jacob knows that by hanging on and not letting go, he could die. God could touch him again, but that's just how desperate he is. I need your blessing so much, I will die for it.

He's desperate for God and he will do anything to experience God's blessing in his life. God's blessing in life.

You see, submission and confession and a heart of desperation leads to a life of transformation.

Verse 28, the man said, you will no longer be called Jacob, the deceiver, but you will now be called Israel because, well, Israel means you've struggled with God and with humans and you have overcome, you have won.

[18:29] Jacob is given a new name. Israel will now be your new name. This is a mark of victory. Well, that's strange, isn't it?

That Jacob is overcome, that he is victorious, does that mean Jacob was somehow more powerful than God? No, Jacob didn't win because God surrendered to him.

Jacob won because he surrendered to God. The purpose of the wrestle, the purpose of the touch, was to bring Jacob to a point of desperation, to bring him to his knees so that he cries out to God for mercy, bless me.

Jacob won by admitting defeat. Jacob is victorious because he knew he couldn't beat God.

Hosea, the prophet, later on comments on this very event. And as he speaks about Jacob, this is what he says.

[ 19 : 40 ] he's speaking of Jacob, he says, as a man, he struggled with God. He struggled with the angel and overcame him.

He wept and begged for his favour, or begged for God's grace. God's love.

Isn't that astonishing? Jacob overcame. Jacob won. How did he win the wrestle? By weeping and begging for grace.

Jacob was victorious in his wrestle with God because Jacob was desperate for God. And so Jacob's life was transformed.

Verse 29, Jacob said, please tell me your name. But he replied, why do you ask my name? He was given no answer, but he was blessed.

[ 20 : 47 ] God blessed him. Now can we begin to see that while we may be perplexed with God's touch, it can lead to a transformed life.

You see, we mightn't choose the wrestle for ourselves, but sometimes God brings discomfort to his children. Sometimes he allows troubles and trials not to destroy us, but so that we would fall on our knees and cry out to God for mercy and say, bless me.

God's love for you. Maybe you're in that struggle right now. There's a battle inside your heart.

Maybe there's a bit of Jacob going on, living your own life and doing your own thing, out for self and always keeping God at arm's length, protecting yourself.

self. But then God confronts you. He challenges you. He doesn't wait for your invitation to say, Lord, come to me, but he goes on the offensive and goes to you.

[ 22 : 06 ] You might have asked for it or want it, but God in his mercy longs for your heart. And it's a wrestle. We fight and we battle.

well, the way to win that fight is to lose. The way to win is to lose.

It means that we submit our life to God. We confess our sin to God. And we cry out in desperation for his mercy.

It means we come weeping and begging for his grace. it means that we would be willing to even die for the blessing rather than forsake the blessing.

Are you in a fight with God? Are you keeping him at arm's length? The way to win is to lose so that you will be blessed, changed, and transformed.

[ 23 : 19 ] So we are perplexed by God's ways, but we are transformed by God's touch. And then we are afflicted by God's grace.

grace. Now doesn't that sound a contradiction? Afflicted by grace? Well, look at verse 31.

The sun rose above Jacob, and he passed Peniel, the place where he wrestled with God. it's a new day, a new beginning.

The wrestle is over, and with renewed strength, he's now ready to face his fears and step out and meet his brother. But, look at the rest of verse 31.

He was limping because of his hip. Jacob's not healed. It's not removed.

[ 24 : 30 ] The injury is left. God's touch upon his life remains. It's a daily reminder to Jacob that he needs God's grace, not just for one day, but every day.

Every time he gets up in the morning and hobbles to the bathroom, every time he gets up on his two feet and limps along, Jacob is reminded of his desperate need of God.

But isn't that just what Jacob needed as he prepared to face his brother? He was in great fear and distress. He was overwhelmed.

Now he's ready to go and meet him. Every step he takes will be a reminder that God is there. God is his strength.

You see, once we have God, once we've met with God, once we've done business with God, once we've received his blessing, there is nothing to fear.

[ 25 : 32 ] Not the future, not our life today, not even death itself, no matter what life can throw at us, there is nothing to fear. Sometimes we go through times of struggle and suffering.

It could be a difficult relationship. It could be a temptation that just keeps reoccurring or a weakness. Maybe it's a particular illness or a recurring pain.

And in the trouble we pray and we ask for God to take it away. We long for things to change to be different. Well, perhaps God will bring about change, but what if he doesn't?

What if we walk the rest of our days with a limp? I don't pretend to know all of God's ways and his working.

But what if that struggle, what if that suffering is God's means of keeping us dependent and desperate for him?

[ 26 : 48 ] what if that limp is a means of knowing God's grace and blessing every day? What if that weakness is a means of finding strength in every fear we face?

You see, grace comes to us from God in all kinds of packages. Sometimes it comes in healing. sometimes it comes in affliction.

The Apostle Paul knew this, didn't he? Why don't we go to 2 Corinthians chapter 12. 2 Corinthians chapter 12.

2 Corinthians 12.

Here Paul has been speaking about an amazing experience he's had with God as he goes. He describes us going into the third heaven and he's just out of this world with his encounter with God.

[ 28 : 13 ] Then he switches gears and then he reminds us of an experience of affliction. Verse 7. The middle of verse 7.

He says, therefore, in order to keep me from being conceited, he said, instead of becoming proud and becoming self-dependent, instead of being God dependent, I was given a thorn in my flesh. Now, we don't know what that thorn was. It wasn't the kind of thorn from a rosebush, but perhaps a physical disability in his life, maybe an illness, maybe a temptation, a weakness in his life, an anxiety, a thorn that was painful and difficult.

Verse 8. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me, asking for the Lord that this would end, that it would stop.

And God answered, verse 9, he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

[ 29 : 37 ] Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, my struggles, my sufferings, my limp, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

that is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weakness. This is a deep inner joy, a sense of peace that in the insults, in the hardships, in the persecutions, in the difficulties, when I am weak, then I am strong.

grace comes in all kinds of packages. Sometimes it comes in affliction.

Not to crush you and destroy you, but so that you might know that Christ is sufficient, that he is enough for you in your life.

Now you might struggle with what we're saying this morning. How can a loving God send thorns and wounds?

[ 30 : 54 ] How can God touch my life and allow these trials to happen to me? I'm not sure if I like this kind of God.

but let me reassure you that God does love you. He loves you deeply. Let me show you.

You see, there was one who came to wrestle with God for us. And you know his name, Jesus Christ, God's own son.

And Jesus came, he wrestled with God's will for his life for God had sent him to come to suffer a great suffering. He sent him to die.

God's will for his life was thorns and wounds. And yet Jesus submitted and surrendered himself to God. Jesus prayed in the garden, not my will, but your will be done.

[ 32 : 03 ] And he went to the cross bearing my sin and your sin on himself, all of our deceit, all of our lies, all of our pride. And on the cross God touched him.

God afflicted him not with a limp, but with the very judgment of God. Jesus was afflicted for our sin. Jesus suffered the thorns of judgment so that you and I would never have to. He faced death. He overcame death. Jesus won by losing.

And so now as we trust in him, we can come to God our Father through Jesus and receive from him grace for all of our troubles.

We can come to God in all our fears and worries. we can freely enter into his presence without any concern whatsoever and receive from him his generous kind and good gifts, all that we need for life.

[ 33 : 18 ] You see, God is not out to crush you or destroy you. He loves you. And if ever you doubt it, look to the cross. and you will find his words.

My grace is sufficient for you. And we will be able to say with confidence, when I am weak, then I am strong.

Let's pray. our Father God, we confess that sometimes we make you very, very small.

we box you in. But sometimes you confront us with your greatness, your glory.  
And we admit that we do not always understand we find you perplexing, even troubling. but yet in the midst of our wrestle and the midst of our struggle, we find your goodness and your kindness.  
[ 34 : 53 ] We find that you are working for our good and for our best. And slowly you are changing us and transforming us. And you are enabling us to see that from you comes blessing after blessing.

And so we humbly come before you and we dare to hang on to you, to hold on to you and cry out, Lord, bless us.

Give to us your grace and mercy in our struggle and in our trial. help us to know and to experience that your grace is sufficient.

Help us to be able to say that when I am weak, then I am strong because you are enough. Father, for anyone here today who is finding that battle hard, will you pour out your grace into their life? will you remind them of their love, your love for them, your care for them? Thank you, God.

[ 36 : 20 ] Amen.