

Wrestling with God

Genesis 32:22-28

The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. 24 And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. 25 When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." 27 And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28 Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."

Jacob and his whole family and all their possessions were on their way back to Canaan. He had left with many ill feelings between himself and Esau. He was now coming into Esau's territory and he was not sure what to expect.

After leading family and flocks south across the Jabbok under the cover of darkness, Jacob himself went back across the stream, apparently to spend some time alone with the Lord in prayer.

As he began once again to pour out his heart to God, he suddenly became aware that out in the darkness some-one had grabbed hold of him and was wrestling him to the ground. The mysterious struggle continued – for hours – until the first streaks of dawn appeared in the eastern sky.

Jacob was struggling with God in earnest prayer. This struggle involved spiritual striving with God for His blessing, but it involved a physical struggle as well. Jacob's opponent, referred to as "the man," later identified himself as God. God came to him in such a form that Jacob could wrestle with him successfully, yet he showed Jacob that he could disable him at will.

Jacob's response is *I will not let you go unless you bless me*. God didn't want Jacob (and He doesn't want us) to be timid with Him. He delights to let us win victories over Him on the basis of humble believing prayer. Jacob clung in faith to God and to God's promise, and he received the blessing he desired.

The Lord asked him what his name was, not because He had forgotten, but to remind Jacob that he had been a "heel-grabber," one who took unfair advantage of a rival. That old name no longer fit this man and so God gave him a new one.

Now that Jacob had acknowledged God as the source of blessing and was about to reenter the Promised Land, the Lord acknowledged Jacob as his servant by changing his name to Israel. It means "he struggles with God."

Bible names often serve as more than convenient labels for people. Here Jacob's new name describes the new nature and character the Spirit of God had patiently and painstakingly created in him. Jacob had learned to lean on God.

Alone and faced with danger, Jacob finds God to be his adversary. Yet faithful Jacob wrestles and receives a new name and God's blessing. It does not always seem that God is on our side. Sometimes He causes Christians to bear trials, temptations, and suffering—i.e., the cross. Yet, this is not to destroy us, but to strengthen us and finally bless us. Christian faith clings to God's Word of mercy in Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

Prayer: Lord, in Baptism, You have promised to be my God. Grant to me what You see that I need. Amen. (TLSB)