

# Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower  
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

## Jacob Wrestled the Angel

Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.

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. Then he said, “Let me go, for the dawn is breaking.”

But he said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

So he said to him, “What is your name?”

And he said, “Jacob.”

He said, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed” (Genesis 32:24–28).

This brief passage clearly represents a watershed moment for Jacob and the soon-to-be nation of Israel. Still, the vague and somewhat puzzling details make interpretation difficult. It would’ve been helpful for the Hebrew writer to give his own inspired commentary on this episode!

But, I think if we spend a little time looking at the context, we will come away with at least three reasonable and important applications for our personal lives today.



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### **1.) Jacob needed to deal with God before going any further.**

Jacob's life up had been tumultuous. In Genesis 25, Jacob was born clinging to his older brother's heel, and he was given a name which means "grabber" or "supplanter" or even "schemer." Jacob was, in many respects, an immoral con artist. Jacob took the birthright from his brother Esau by demanding it for a bowl of stew. Jacob lied and disguised himself to steal Esau's blessing from the lips of Isaac. Esau plotted to kill Jacob, and Rebekah sent him to her brother Laban.

There, Jacob met his match in trickery. Laban pulled a fast one in the darkness of a tent, and tricked Jacob into laboring for 14 years for the hand of his daughter Rachael. For another six years Laban constantly changed Jacob's wages in the most slippery fashion (Gen. 31:41).

God used this soap opera to accomplish His will to bring about a great nation. While in Laban's home, Jacob accumulated two wives and their handmaidens, twelve sons and a daughter, and an enormous household of flocks, goods, and servants. Feeling increasing pressure from Laban, the time came to return home.

But this required Jacob to do something that he had been dreading for twenty years. He had to deal with Esau! Last he knew, Esau wanted to kill him. Fleeing alone from his brother's murderous rage was bad enough; now he had to face Esau with the burden of a vulnerable household, slowly and helplessly plodding through the wilderness.

As Jacob got close to home, he heard that Esau approached with 400 men! Jacob became very frightened. He made desperate moves, splitting his household into two parts, so that some might escape the massacre. He selected rich gifts from his flocks and treasures, and sent them in Esau's direction. But there was still no confidence in his heart. The best he could say was, "perhaps he will accept me" (32:20).

It is in this moment of utter desperation that Jacob wrestled the angel (that the "man" is an angel is confirmed by Hosea 12:3-4). Jacob could have put himself bravely in front of his family. But he was right where he needed to be. He sent everyone across the Jabbok River, and began to pray alone in the darkness. There, God's angel upon him suddenly and attacked him.

Jacob had been fighting with everyone else in his life—his parents, his brother, his wives, his in-laws. But he needed to struggle with God. The stakes were high, the outcome unknown, the night dark and lonely.

Thus, we discover that at certain stages of our lives, we have to deal with God before going any further. We may succeed in many areas of our lives, enjoying influence, power, money, and success. But we cannot avoid forever a confrontation with God. Until we have this fight with God, nothing else will fall into place. We may struggle against disease, but really we need to struggle with God. We may struggle against people, but really we need to struggle with God.

God may put you in that position for your good. Your Jabbok moment may come in a hospital waiting room, with your spouse in surgery, when God comes to strive with you until morning light. Maybe you will be driving through the night, to fix a problem you have created, when God accosts you. Maybe you will be out of your house for the first time, getting on a bus headed for college, and you are scared of what you will face when you get there. Maybe you will be tossing and turning with decisions in your future, when God won't let you sleep.

But if you cling to God, and do not let go until you have the answers to your questions, and understanding of what God's intentions are for your life, as revealed in His word, you will come away with a blessing. In this sense, struggling with God is not an act of rebellion, it is an act of faith. It is admitting that God is the possessor of blessing, and that we will be unsatisfied with everything else in the world until we have it.

As long as God is our adversary, we are doomed to fail with our fellow man. Until we put aside every worldly thing and say in the depth of our midnight prayers, "Lord, I want to be blessed by YOU, and I won't give up until I've got it, and I won't be satisfied until you provide it," we are doomed to be restless and uneasy in the world.

## **2.) Jacob needed to learn to rely on God.**

At this low moment, Jacob realized that God alone was the securer of his future. Does anyone really think Jacob was such a skillful wrestler

that he gave God a run for His money? Of course not. The angel could have dislocated Jacob's hip at any time. God allowed Jacob to struggle all night long to convince him that there's no defeating God, and yet, could learn the benefit of striving with God.

But let me ask this: if there's no beating God, did Jacob win? Did Jacob lose? Actually, he won because he lost! To lose would have been to walk away, to avoid God forever. Thus, Jacob does not defeat God; Jacob hangs in there as God defeats him, and learns the lesson that secures victory.

Thus, we must learn that we can rely on God. He is bigger than all our problems. Appealing to God is the only real victory in life.

### **3.) Jacob needed to change.**

God asked, "What is your name?" The last time someone asked Jacob this question (27:32), he lied.

When God asks a question (Gen. 3:9, 4:10, Exo. 4:2), it is not because He lacks information, but because we lack understanding. In a way, God was asking Jacob, "Who are you?" "What are you known for?" "How have you lived your life?" Jacob's answer was honest—he was Jacob, the schemer, the supplanter, the struggler against men. God forced Jacob to come face to face with himself.

Then, God granted him a new name, Israel, which comes from a verb meaning "to strive." But there is meaningful shift to "striven for" or perhaps even "May God strive for him." Jacob was by no means perfect from this moment on. But the name change demonstrates that God had secured an important victory in Jacob's heart, and he began to see his place in God's kingdom.

Thus, we need to change. And the more immediate and complete the change from serving ourselves to serving our heavenly Father, the more He is able to bless us going forward.

—John Guzzetta

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### **Quote of the Week:**

"Do what you can, with what you have, where you are."

—Teddy Roosevelt