

GENESIS 32:22-29 GOD STRIVES

²² That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴ So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶ Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

²⁷ The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

²⁸ Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."

²⁹ Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

This event in Jacob's life should serve to help us understand why the Hebrews in the wilderness were referred to as a stubborn and stiff-necked people. After all, they were the descendants of Jacob. The patriarch has not overcome his opponent physically, as witnessed by the ease with which his hip was displaced (32:25); not to mention that Jacob was over 90 years old by this time. The manner in which he overcomes men and God is spiritual – he refuses to give in. Finally, after wrestling all night Jacob yields and simply hangs on to God in order to receive a blessing. By abdicating he wins. Then God renames Jacob, the "grasper," with the name Israel, "God strives." The change of name in Scripture signifies a change in character. To name someone is to have power over that person. The "man" renames Jacob, but does not reveal his own name/identity to him.

Self-sufficiency is perhaps the greatest impediment to a faithful relationship with God. God continues to reveal our dependence upon him through the trials of this life. But as long as we insist on the sufficiency of our own talent, resources and power, we will deny ourselves access to the saving power of God. The pantheon of witnesses to God's grace is filled with those who have been brought to God through an experience that brought them to their knees. For John Newton it was a storm at sea in which he was sure he would drown. He gave into God's amazing grace and was delivered from the slave trade and into the Gospel ministry. The key was that when he despaired of his survival, John Newton let go of the control over his life and hung on to God. Are you stubbornly trying to be good enough on your own; or overcome an addiction by your own strength; or break into the kingdom through your own strength; or slavishly live in theological purity; or rationalize your weakness? If so, know that God strives and he will prevail. Our only salvation comes by simply hanging on to him.

Father, weaken my arrogance and self-sufficiency while you strengthen my grip so that I might cling to you. May I yield to you long before I experience the full measure of your strength. Thank you for your loving kindness that is so great that you would strive with me in order to save me. Amen.