

Wrestling with God?

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In **Genesis 32:22-32**, the account of Jacob's "wrestling" with God is provided. It's really a fascinating account, but one that, frankly, had me a bit baffled until recently. Here are verses **22-25** (NKJV).

22 And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. 23 He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. 24 Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. 25 Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him.

Let me be honest here. I've read that passage numerous times over the years and it always made me question something. How could a human being actually *wrestle* with God? I'm fully aware that Jesus appeared anthropomorphically many times in the Hebrew Scriptures in pre-incarnate form. I do not doubt that Jacob literally and physically wrestled with God in human form. That's not my question. My question is how does a mere human being prevail against God? The text states, "*Now when He (God) saw that He did not prevail against him (Jacob)...*" which tells us that though Jacob did not prevail against God, he obviously maintained his own against God, didn't he?

But the whole scenario is one of wonder. I can picture Jacob wrestling with God, but I can also see God in human form with a slight smile as Jacob literally pursued a blessing from God. Jacob was not willing to "let go" of God until God had blessed him (**Genesis 32:26-28**).

26 And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks."

But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

27 So He said to him, "What is your name?"

He said, "Jacob."

28 And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."

Yes, God told Jacob he had "prevailed" in his struggle with God, but obviously, there is no way that Jacob would have prevailed against God if God had not allowed it. Surely, Jacob's physical attributes were nothing against God Almighty, even in human form. I might be willing to admit that Samson *might* have a chance physically against God, but even that seriously stretches credulity, doesn't it? No mere mortal, however, well-built, however strong, would ever truly prevail against God.

So, given the situation, it is clear to me that God obviously played with Jacob as a father adoringly wrestles with his young son. Dad might allow his son to gain a slight advantage for a short period, but ultimately, Dad would let the son know that, while he admires his son's willingness to wrestle with Dad, Dad still rules.

I believe this was also the outcome of the wrestling between God and Jacob. I also believe this physically wrestling signifies a spiritual struggle that often occurs in our pursuit of God and I've come to realize that in just the last three to four months. I'm nearly 65 years-old, so I guess this realization is better late than never, right?

Let me explain as best I can. As I look over the past few months, I've noticed that just prior to God directing my steps, there is a certain amount of inner turmoil that has occurred within me. If I go back to the situation a few months ago when I was desperately trying to figure out what my next step was in life, the frustration, turmoil and tension was something that I literally felt and I didn't like it. It was like a growing fire within me that I couldn't control well. I seemed to be one step away from allowing it to overtake my personality so that I would've lashed out at people I love, all because of the tension that was within me that was causing me to do two things: first, I focused a bit on the experience of my "feelings" within me because of the crossroads I was then facing. It was a combination of not feeling good at all emotionally, while at the same time, pushing myself to believe God was in these small details of my life (which loomed large at the time).

Ultimately, I did a great deal of praying, reciting memorized Scripture and simply looking for resolution because I knew that I could not continue to live with this inner turmoil for long anymore than a wrestler could continue wrestling night and day without a win or defeat. Eventually, it would wear the wrestler out, wouldn't it, emotionally and physically?

I have to admit that I pushed myself to pursue God through that situation. I felt on one hand, a real and growing frustration at the situation and the unknown. On the other hand, I saw that my faith in God was increasing and I actually got to a point where I experienced the frustration *but* at the same time, I was beginning to see the hope that God was leading me. I hope that makes sense.

In essence, I suppose it could be said that I was "wrestling" with God, a bit like Jacob. However, my struggle was within, while Jacob's actual struggle was without, physically. But here's the thing. I fully believe that both Jacob and I were not so much wrestling with God, but with *ourselves* because of situations in our lives that came to the surface.

There were times during my own wrestling that I was very tempted to be angry with God. How stupid is that? God had done nothing wrong, yet in my flesh, I was told to focus on what God was *not* doing. I realized that this must mean God was actually busy doing *something* that would eventually and ultimately bring relief via a breakthrough and God's answer would be provided to me.

This is exactly what happened too. In a matter of just a few short days, my wife and I were discussing the situation. I was "tense" but I did everything to assure her that I was not taking out my frustration on her and that she had done absolutely nothing to warrant it. In essence, I was apologizing for the way in which I might have made her feel as though it was somehow her fault, but since it was not her fault in the least, I needed her to know that my frustration was solely based on believing that God needed to direct me and that He would do so in His way and in His time.

As we discussed the situation, she realized that my tension was not due to anything she had done. It was also during that discussion that she made an offhand suggestion about what I could do in pursuing an objective. Her suggestion turned out to be *the* very thing that God used to direct my path. I immediately took her suggestion to heart and within one day, I had a call back from a company that wanted to interview me for a part-time position. I went in the next day and was hired that same day.

Now of course, since I had seen God's path and went down that road, I saw how He worked things together and my frustration and tension melted, replaced with praise, adoration and awe for Him and His provision. That was several months ago.

Move several months ahead and to very recently and I realized I was going through a similar situation in the sense that the turmoil, tension and frustration was again building. As that grew, I also knew that I needed to be as persevering in my pursuit of God, through prayer, praise and recitation of memorized Scripture. It was very interesting to once again see the frustration right alongside the expectation that God was going to do something to solve my problem. Because of a situation I was experiencing through no fault of my own, I was beginning to dread my new part-time job. No need to go into details, because of course, now that I'm on the other side of it, I can see that what Satan meant for evil, God meant for good!

This most recent situation lasted for roughly two days. I saw myself going through the problem the same way. I experienced growing frustration and tension, which brought to mind that I needed to "wrestle" with God by pursuing Him in prayer and praise and reminding myself of His Word.

One morning, my boss asked me if I would want to do this other situation that had just become available? Would I be opened to it? I immediately saw that as God's hand and jumped at it. I began training yesterday morning and am now learning it hands-on. In this particular situation, what Satan meant for evil (through another person), God actually meant for my good!

My whole point here is that in both cases, though some might argue that I had been wrestling with God, in reality, I was wrestling with my flesh and with the devil (**Ephesians 6:12**). God is never the problem, is He? We might think we are wrestling against God, but in truth, we wrestle against the things that keep us from seeing God as He is and what He plans on doing in our lives.

In Jacob's case, I believe we see a perfect physical example of how much God loves us. During times of tension, I can tend to say or even think things that are not only inaccurate about God, but it's almost like I'm daring Him to prove me wrong. That's so immature and childish. He doesn't have to prove anything to me and of course, His Word itself (not to mention His actual incarnation and perfect life ending in unqualified painful death for your sins and mine), is proof that He loves and cares for me and you.

I've finally begun to understand that Jacob really didn't wrestle against God. Yes, he physically engaged with a pre-incarnate Jesus, but that really wasn't wrestling. God was patiently teaching Jacob that it can be a struggle at times to push ourselves through to what we will learn to be the truth of how we should act and think. For some people, this may be but a momentary pause to reflect, consider, then move in a specific direction. For others like me, it may involve greater frustration, tension and angst. It's all based on the inherent personality of each person. Because I am a type A personality, I actually end up making it more difficult for myself to "hear" God initially. Whereas someone else, who is easier going, might not have the same difficulty I do and can more easily push through the situations they face to get to a resolution.

Wrestling with God is really wrestling with ourselves in the process of letting go of the things that keep us bound to this world. God always hears, always sees and always wants to help us move on in Him. The time it takes for each person to do that will depend on their own personality and their responsiveness to God and His will.