

It seemed promising, especially for a team that hadn't really been close to a championship in over 100 years. Everything seemed possible, maybe even destined. Sadly it was not. They were overmatched from the start. In their four game series, the Chicago Cubs never led. They scored eight runs, in four games. Their opponent scored twenty one. No one would have predicted it before the series, but it seemed the Cubs never really had a chance.

As Jacob arrives at the ford of the Jabbok things don't seem possible for him. He's got this family which represents the success he's had in life so far. But his past is catching up with him, threatening to take it all away. It seems he's overmatched. The first lesson relates more than just Jacob as he prepares for whatever kind of showdown with his brother Esau. In fact that isn't even the most important confrontation he gets into. We listen from the sidelines as Jacob gets into a wrestling match. It's important for us. Like it changed Jacob's perspective in life, so it changes ours. Jacob is...

**Wrestling with God**  
**God wants to "lose"**  
**Hold on to him for blessings**

Life came down to winning and losing. At least it did for Jacob. He was born in the line of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and then Jacob. Original fathers of the Jews, an entire nation's heritage in his family. Jacob had a twin brother named Esau. They were opposites. Esau was firstborn, but God intended the promise of the Savior to go through Jacob. Knowing this and wanting to win, Jacob made his own grab at setting that up. He cheated his brother in the process. Jacob had to run for his life. Over the next twenty years he married two women, had twelve children by four women, all while working for his uncle who cheated him daily. Jacob tried to get the upper hand and win in all his relationships his own way.

Alone after sending his entire family and all his possessions across the river, Jacob may have been thinking. Perhaps trying to figure what way he could come out on top and win in this situation. **"So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak."** Suddenly Jacob was engaged in a struggle. Not life or death, more like hand to hand combat between contestants in a fight. A fight that lasted all night. Though Jacob was exhausted and drained, he held his own. More accurately the man Jacob fought allowed Jacob to hold his own. This was no ordinary man. Jacob was wrestling God, and God wanted to "lose".

How often have you engaged in this kind of hand to hand combat with God? Not physical wrestling, but exhausting and draining just the same. Wrestling with God in prayer. Not once, but many times over many days over many issues. It may have left you physically drained wrestling with God in prayer over a class you were taking in school. As the semester continued the prayers continued. They were urgent prayers because grades determine future. It may have been an extremely dangerous situation you lived in once. Pained cries just asking God to get you safely through each day. Maybe it was desperate wailing because you got married and wanted a child. But as months turned into years the realization it wouldn't happen became painful. The prayers changed from "please bless us with a child" to "please take away my desire to have a child". Prayers like these can have us feeling every bit as exhausted as a real life wrestling match.

Just like a wrestling match you want to win in prayer. You wanted the passing grade. You wanted the escape from the dangerous living arrangement. You wanted a child. That was winning and you would do whatever it took to achieve it. But it's a wrestling match, so as time passed did your prayers get more intense or less? More frequent or less? Were the prayers laced with desperation of self or peppered with confidence of self-achievement? We want to win in life. Appreciated is anyone's help who gets on our side, including God. But if we're losing often times prayer life dwindles. God's not listening. God's trying to defeat me. God wants to win and so do I, and he's stronger.

**"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."** Jacob wasn't strong. His hip was wrenched just like that, with no effort but a touch. The man was letting Jacob win. God wanted to lose. In losing God and by his wonderful promises, God gave to Jacob, and Jacob believed. He believed because he could see the promises in his family and possessions. He knew the promise of a Savior to come would be from his family. God was good. Now God trained Jacob. In losing, God gave Jacob the opportunity to continue praying. Jacob wrestled all night. God didn't want Jacob giving up. By God's grace Jacob didn't give up.

As you wrestle with God in prayer, remember he wants to "lose". God invites you to pray. He wants those prayers to make him work. How gracious and awesome the work of God in your life has already been. He did hard work. God suffers right along with us. He suffered for us too. Patiently God waited till just the right time and sent his son. Jesus was sent to know what life is like. He appeared not to wrestle us, but to fight against Satan. Jesus went into battle against death. He suffered and prevailed. He defeated all our enemies. When he invites you to pray to him he can "lose" because he knows he's already won for you. You have victory in Christ.

God's grace can appear weak. It's so that you know he wants to hear your prayers. Pray the intense prayers, ask for big things, challenge God to keep his promises. You will win because God won. Everything you ask in his name he'll listen to. You'll receive answers, always what God knows is best for you. He even lets you prevail when it seems you could never prevail. When God seems far away and answers aren't coming and time keeps passing, even in those moments God is testing you. Testing just like he tested Jacob. God may appear weak, God wants to "lose," but he doesn't want you to give up praying. Hold on to him for blessings.

God seemed to want to get away. **"Let me go, for it is daybreak. But Jacob replied, I will not let you go unless you bless me."** No sinful human being can see God and live. God was escaping for Jacob's sake. But it really was further testing. Tired from sparring all night, Jacob could only throw his tired body at the man and hold on. "Bless me" Jacob cried, "Because I have nothing else." After all his years of doing things his own way, after trying to win at life on his own, Jacob now admitted it was God who provided all his blessings in life. If he received good things going forward God would provide them. God was pleased. Jacob's bold persistent prayer was exactly what God was leading him toward. Jacob laid hold of God's promise firmly and wouldn't let go.

God changed Jacob. He would go forward with confidence and renewed trust in God to fight for him and provide. Jacob clung to God's promises and won God's blessings. He was leaning on God. So God changed his name. Jacob means "heel grabber" because Jacob was born grabbing the heel of his brother trying to get ahead. But that wasn't Jacob anymore. **"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."** Jacob had overcome because of God's mercy and grace. Jacob relied on who God was and God's promises. Jacob was someone who trusted in himself, but Israel trusted in the Lord.

Could God be moving you from trusting in yourself to trusting in him? How does God do that? Through suffering, pain, and trouble. He puts you through the wringer. He presses down hard in your life to squeeze out every last bit of self-reliance. He gives you situations you can't control, dangers you can't escape, and a life that feels lost. You thought you were wrestling other humans to win, but it's God you wrestle with. In love he lets you cling to him by going back repeatedly to his Word. He's there to grab as you participate in the sacraments. Don't let him go as you grow in your trust of the one inclined to give you blessings based on promises. Look into the face of God in Christ Jesus and hold on to him for blessings.

If your opponent in a wrestling match was God naturally you'd think, "Oh man, I'll never win. Look at his power. That's it, I've lost." Truth is sinners don't stand a chance against God. But God isn't in it to win a victory against you. He's in it to give a victory to you. He's done that in Christ. And when he invites you to pray he wants to keep "losing". He wants you to hold on to him for blessings. As you wrestle with God in prayer, you'll never lose because in Christ you've won. And you'll gain blessings by holding on to the one who holds on to you.