

STRENGTH IN THE STRUGGLE

Whether we like it or not, this life has many struggles in store for us. We need to know how to find the strength that we need in the midst of those struggles.

Key Passage:

Genesis 32:28 (NLT)

28 “Your name will no longer be Jacob,” the man told him. “From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won.

CONTEXT:

- Jacob is the grandson of Abraham, son of Isaac and twin brother to Esau.

In Genesis, Jacob’s life has 3 punctuations:

Extortionist:

Genesis 25:29-33 (NLT)

29 One day when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau arrived home from the wilderness exhausted and hungry. 30 Esau said to Jacob, “I’m starved! Give me some of that red stew!” (This is how Esau got his other name, Edom, which means “red.”) 31 “All right,” Jacob replied, “but trade me your rights as the

firstborn son.” **32** “Look, I’m dying of starvation!” said Esau. “What good is my birthright to me now?” **33** But Jacob said, “First you must swear that your birthright is mine.” So Esau swore an oath, thereby selling all his rights as the firstborn to his brother, Jacob.

Deceiver and thief:

Genesis 27:30-33 (NLT)

30 As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and almost before Jacob had left his father, Esau returned from his hunt.

31 Esau prepared a delicious meal and brought it to his father. Then he said, “Sit up, my father, and eat my wild game so you can give me your blessing.” **32** But Isaac asked him, “Who are you?” Esau replied, “It’s your son, your firstborn son, Esau.”

33 Isaac began to tremble uncontrollably and said, “Then who just served me wild game? I have already eaten it, and I blessed him just before you came. And yes, that blessing must stand!”

Striving to gain an increase his family and wealth:

Genesis 31:40 (NLT)

40 “I worked for you through the scorching heat of the day and through cold and sleepless nights. **41** Yes, for twenty years I slaved in your house! I worked for fourteen years earning your two daughters, and then six more years for your flock. And you changed my wages ten times! **42** In fact, if the God of my father had not been on my side—the God of Abraham and the fearsome God of Isaac[c]]—you would have sent me away

empty-handed. But God has seen your abuse and my hard work. That is why he appeared to you last night and rebuked you!”

THE WRESTLING MATCH

Genesis 32:23-24 (NLT)

23 After taking them to the other side, he sent over all his possessions. 24 This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break.

- It is not clear whether Jacob knew who this man was, but I think it is safe to assume that Jacob may have thought it was either Laban or Esau.
- Past his strength and through his weakness, Jacob wrestled with this man.

PERSISTANT PERSISTENCE

Genesis 32:25 (NLT)

25 When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob’s hip and wrenched it out of its socket.

- Jacob had a persistence that made his opponent realise that Jacob will not stop until he got what he wanted.

Why engage in a wrestling match with Jacob if victory could have easily been achieved? Answer, God is using the struggle to transform who Jacob is by testing his persistence and challenging his identity.

This was the quality of Jacob's persistence.

Genesis 32:26 (NLT)

*26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!"
But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."*

Jacob was desperate for God's favour. Through weakness, discomfort and pain, he held onto God like his life depended on it. Jacob knew that his blessing would come, so long as he held onto God with all his might.

HUMILITY - OWNING UP TO WHO WE ARE.

Genesis 32:27 (NLT)

27 "What is your name?" the man asked. He replied, "Jacob."

Up until this point Jacob's name was defined by:

- *Extortion*
- *Lies*
- *Deceit*
- *Human effort*

Genesis 32:28 (NLT)

28 "Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him.

“From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won.”

This wrestling match was a turning point in Jacob’s life and identity.

In the same way, we have strived for the right to have a place in our family and in community, we strive for good things to happen in our lives and we strive to have relationships and possessions.

Jacob’s wrestling match taught him that in the midst of all of his striving and struggling in life, true strength is only found when he **surrenders to God and persistently depends on him.**

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NLT)

9 Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.

10 That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

When we do life our way, we struggle in vain. But when we realise that the only struggle worth our time and effort is to seek and know God, our struggling will be rewarded by Him who has the best gifts to give.

Matthew 5:3 (NLT)

3 “God blesses those who are poor in spirit and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

When we realise that our need is spiritual and not physical, emotional or mental, we should come to God in humility and cling to Jesus and what he accomplished on the cross for us.

What does it mean to have strength in the struggle?

When we are on the ground, weary, exhausted and in pain from a life of striving and struggle, we need to cling to Jesus with all that we have.

“I will not let go until you bless me.”