

“You have wrestled with the Creator and won.” I was trapped. I had just narrowly escaped from being enslaved to my uncle and father-in-law Laban for 20 years. I had swindled him out of most of his flocks of animals on the way out of his land, but thankfully the Lord, even though I didn’t deserve it one bit, had intervened and stopped him from **killing** me. But now I couldn’t live in the lands of Laban anymore. I had to go south. But to the south, was my brother Esau. And Esau wanted me **dead** for stealing not only the double portion of the family inheritance from him, but also the family blessing.

I had no choice now, but to try and fix my relationship with my brother. So I sent messengers ahead to see if he might have changed his heart toward me. The messengers returned and said Esau was heading our way with 400 men at his back. I was **terrified**. So I **split** my possessions into two camps. I wanted to have one half survive in the event that Esau got violent. Then I also did something I had never really done before. I **prayed**. I reached out to the Creator, the Lord of my father Isaac and my grandfather Abraham. I begged the Creator to help me and stay faithful to the promise he had given to our family. Then I also chose 350 of my best animals that I would give to Esau as a **peace offering**. I placed these 350 animals at the very front of our group to let Esau know that they were a gift to him. I was covering all my bases, hoping **something** would work. That somehow I would survive. Twenty years I had been on the run from my angry brother and now I had to come face to face with him.

That night I took my four wives and eleven sons and moved them safely to the other side of a stream. Then I went off by myself to sleep. As I tried to sleep that night, I was restless. All night I was wrestling a man. I refused to lose or back down. The man tried to get away from me, but I refused to let him go until he blessed me. He asked me my name and I said, **“Jacob.”** He replied, **“Your name is no longer Jacob, your name is Israel for you wrestled with the Creator and won.”** Then I asked his name, but he refused to give it to me. But he did bless me. I walked away from that wrestling match, injured and hurt in my hip, and I would **limp** the rest of my life because of it. When I looked up that morning, I saw my brother Esau was coming with 400 men at his side. So I put my wives and children behind me and went out to meet him. I **bowed down** before Esau **seven** times as I approached him. But Esau ran up to me and **hugged** me and we both wept, filled with a mix of emotions. I insisted that Esau take the gifts I was offering him. He reluctantly accepted. But he wanted us to join up with his family and journey with them. But I insisted on us staying behind and we settled in the land of Shechem.

Shechem was the son of Hamor, the king of that land. And my daughter Dinah fell in **love** with Shechem. Shechem wanted to marry Dinah, but they had already been sharing a bed. My sons were furious when they learned of this. King Hamor came to us and asked us to merge families through the marriage of Shechem and Dinah. Shechem begged us, saying his family would do **anything** to make this marriage happen. Then my sons Simeon and Levi stepped forward and demanded that the only way we could merge families and allow this marriage would be if all the male Shechemites were to be **circumcised**. Shockingly, king Hamor and Shechem agreed. They went and had themselves and **all** the men of their city circumcised. On the third day, while they were still in great pain, Simeon and Levi snuck into the city and **killed** every male—including king Hamor and his son Shechem. They **plundered** the whole city, taking all the animals, possessions, and women for themselves. Simeon and Levi also kidnapped their sister Dinah and brought her back to me. I was furious. We were dead men now. As word spread, everyone in the region began to turn against us and hated us for this treachery and brutality that my sons had done.

The Creator thankfully appeared to me and did **not** abandon me, though we deserved it. He told us to run away from that land to settle in Bethel. So we left. I was determined to learn from this. My family was clearly a **disaster**. My sons were **terrible** men. I was a **terrible** father. I wanted to **repent** and make things right. So I gathered all the idols in our house and destroyed them. The Creator was walking with us, but we had definitely not been walking with him. We were not worshiping him. We were worshiping ourselves, our wealth, our possessions, the violence of our hands, and the agreements and treaties we were making with other peoples. We needed to repent. The Lord was very pleased at these attempts to repent and just as he had been doing all along, he continued to **protect** us and **watch over** us as we struggled to change.

“You have wrestled with the Creator and won.” I realized that my whole life I had been **“wrestling with the Creator”**—fighting against him. The Creator had always been trying to direct my life. But I was **refusing** to let him guide me. I defied him. I resisted him. I **had** to win, I **had** to have my own way in life. I insisted on following my **own heart, flesh, dreams, and plans**. I insisted on following **my family, my parents, my wives, and my children**. And it was a disaster. The Lord refused to overpower me against my will, he **wrestled** me, hoping I would come to my senses, but he always let me **win** when I dug in my heels against him. And it sucked. When the Lord let me win, he would **injure** me, to show me that getting my way was not what was best for me. He let me win the **inheritance and blessing** from my brother and it ruined my family. He let me return to my **parents’ family system** and it created a life full of slavery and drama for me. He let me **steal** Laban’s flocks and it almost killed me. He let me be **passive and undisciplined** in raising my sons and it made us hated by all our neighbors. At every turn, I was **winning** against the Creator, but I was badly **limping** through life, barely getting by because of it.

“You have wrestled with the Creator and won.” Where are you **“wrestling with the Creator”** in your life right now? Where are you resisting him? Where are you fighting the Lord’s will being done? The Creator has been present in every single one of our lives, trying to guide and direct us to himself. But like Jacob, we have **all “wrestled with the Creator.”** We have **fought** and **resisted** the Creator’s will. We have heard his Word and calling and **not** followed it. We have heard his teachings and **not** obeyed. We have known that we should **love our enemies** and yet we have **hated** them. We have known that we should generously **share all** we have with others and yet we have **stored** up possessions. When we fight him, the Creator lets us **win**—but he **injures** us in the process. He causes us to limp through life. He slows us down. He burdens us with guilt and drama. The Lord does this so we might learn that fighting him is terrible for us. Resisting the Lord gets us nowhere in the long run other than a life full of troublesome limping.

Jesus, on the other hand, **“wrestled with the Creator”** and **lost**. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus went toe-to-toe with the Creator, not wanting to face the cross. But Jesus surrendered to the Creator saying, **“Father, not my will, but your will be done.”** Jesus **lost** and because of that he **won** as the Creator raised him from the dead. So follow Jesus. Your flesh will want to resist the way of the cross that the Lord is calling you to. Your flesh will want to hate your enemies. Your flesh will want to store up possessions. But when you **“wrestle with the Creator,”** you need to back down and let him win. You need to **“wrestle with the Creator”** and lose. For only in **losing** to the Lord, will you **gain** your very life and soul in him. **Amen.**