



JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD

GENESIS 32

GOAL

▶ To help children understand how relying on God changes everything in life.

CHARACTERS

▶ **Jacob:** He wrestled with God in the form of an angel. God changed his name to Israel, which means “he strives with God.”

God: In the form of an angel, He wrestled with Jacob.

MEMORY VERSE

▶ **Genesis 32:26:** I will not let you go unless you bless me.

OVERVIEW

▶ **Read Genesis 32:** Jacob left his father-in-law's land and journeyed back to his homeland. As he, his wives, sons, servants, and livestock got closer to their destination, Jacob was nearing a confrontation with his brother, Esau, whom he had tricked and betrayed out of his birthright. Jacob feared for his life. After he sent everyone and all of his possessions ahead to meet Esau, Jacob was left alone. That night a man wrestled with Jacob until dawn. When the man still had not beaten Jacob, he touched Jacob's hip and displaced the joint. Jacob refused to let go of the man until he blessed Jacob. The man told him that he would no longer be known as Jacob, but as Israel, because he had struggled with God and men and prevailed. Jacob then realized that he had been wrestling with God.



SUGGESTIONS

- ▶ Jacob relied on his own abilities and strengths to scratch his way to the top, all the while not recognizing that his success was a direct result of God's blessing and work in his life. Many of the struggles and difficulties he faced could have been avoided if he had relied on God to provide for him rather than figuring out a way to make it happen on his own. Jacob wrestling God was both literal and figurative.

It was literal in that Jacob actually wrestled a man who represented God. Scholars have suggested that this representative was an angel, while others argue that the representative was Jesus. Whoever it was, he possessed supernatural power. With a simple touch, this man was able to dislocate Jacob's hip. In terms of physical strength, Jacob was never going to win this wrestling match.

It was figurative in that Jacob was wrestling with his faith in God. Despite God's promises to Jacob, on many occasions, he chose to take matters into his own hands and ensure success on his own on his own terms. He did not rely on God to provide for the needs and blessings in his life. When threatened with what he thought was a battle with his brother and his 400 men, Jacob recognized a situation he couldn't talk or cheat his way out of—he was going to need divine assistance. This wrestling match was a turning point in Jacob's life. It was during this event that Jacob finally saw his need for God in his life.

PRE-LESSON ACTIVITY

- ▶ **Dependence Race**
Pair each student with another. Standing side-by-side, tie their legs together. Have the students race to the other side of the room.
To be able to move quickly, they must move together. Students cannot win the race on their own, just as, without God in our lives, we cannot live successfully and without sin.

MEMORY VERSE MEANING

- ▶ **Genesis 32:26:** God is happy to bless us. He does not withhold His blessings from us. He wants us to depend on Him.



**POST-LESSON
ACTIVITY**

▷ **Thumb Wars**

Pair students with each other and instruct them to play a thumb war. The winners play each other until one student is declared the class champion.

**TAKE
HOME**

- ▷ Jacob came to realize his dependence on God after a series of regrettable actions. How can we avoid making similar mistakes?

We should rely on God, not ourselves. God gives us talents and abilities that enable us to live happy, successful lives. It is easy to rely on those abilities and forget where they came from or who actually is in control of all aspects of our lives.

God's ways are not our ways. God has a plan for our lives. The blessings He has in store for us are achieved through far superior methods than anything we can think of on our own. No blessing God wants to give us will cause us to sin.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 1



Q1a: Why was Jacob afraid of his brother Esau?

A1: Jacob was afraid that Esau would carry out his threat to kill him for tricking Esau out of his birthright.

Q1b: Has anyone ever been angry with you?

TN: This is not a fun feeling. It can make us afraid. If we've done something wrong, the best thing to do is to own up to what we've done, apologize, and try to make amends.

SLIDE 2



Q2a: Why did Jacob divide the people traveling with him and his livestock?

A2: Jacob created two camps in an effort to reduce any potential losses if Esau did attack.

Q2b: Your parent promised to take you shopping for a new video game. Do you need to remind your parent of this promise?

TN: Sometimes people forget, so there is no harm in reminding them. There is no harm in reminding God of His promises to us, but there is no need for us to do so; God never forgets His promises, and He never fails to follow through. When Jacob reminded God of His promises, the reminder was more for him than God, as it reassured Jacob that God was with him through this scary situation.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 3



Q3a: At first, who did Jacob think he was wrestling?

A3: At first, Jacob thought he was wrestling Esau or one of his men.

Q3b: Have you ever surprised yourself by doing something you didn't think you could do?

TN: Jacob was left alone in his camp so he could prepare himself for something terrifying. When a man came to him in the middle of the night, he just went for it and started wrestling him. He didn't know who he was or whether he was outmatched—he just started wrestling. This man could have been the very brother he was terrified to meet, but in the dark, all alone, Jacob suddenly found courage and defended himself. His response was a bit surprising.

SLIDE 4



Q4a: How did the stranger end the fight?

A4: The stranger touched Jacob's hip, shifting it out of joint.

Q4b: Did God fight dirty against Jacob?

TN: No! God didn't need to hurt Jacob to win the fight. God put Jacob's hip joint out of place to help Jacob realize his need for God. Jacob knew God had a plan for his life. He knew that God had promised to bless him. That didn't stop Jacob from going out and getting everything he wanted on his own terms. Now, as his brother and 400 men were heading his way, Jacob faced a situation he couldn't talk or cheat his way out of; he needed God. Yet, Jacob was still trying to make a deal with God by reminding Him that he promised to bless him and with Esau by sending him gifts. Jacob continued to do things on his own. He didn't trust or rely on God. This injured hip served two purposes: 1) it made it so Jacob wouldn't physically be able to defend himself against Esau, and 2) it would serve as a reminder of his reliance on God.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 5



Q5a: What happened when Jacob met Esau?

A5: Esau met him with a huge hug and a warm welcome.

Q5b: Do you know what your name means?

TN: Many, if not most, names in the Bible have a meaning. Some of them derive their meaning from Hebrew words they sound like. The name Jacob means "he deceives" or "he cheats," and the Jacob in this story lives up to his name's meaning. In his past, Jacob cheated his brother out of his birthright and deceived his father to get the blessing meant for his brother. When God gave him a new name, He gave Jacob a new identity and a fresh start. What a wonderful, unexpected blessing!

As a side note, the name Jacob is very popular, and it should be made known that anyone named Jacob is not necessarily a bad person. The name is now more associated with the character in the Bible who was a man of God and one of the fathers of the faith.



**MEMORY
VERSE**

▷ **Genesis 32:26:** I will not let you go unless you bless me.

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BIG IDEA

▷ When we find ourselves wrestling with what is right and wrong, we should turn to God for answers.

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**CLOSING
PRAYER**

▷ Dear God, we thank You for the plan You have for our lives and for blessing us so richly. You give us more than we realize. Help us to be thankful for everything You provide and to rely on You. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 1



After Jacob stole his brother's inheritance, he was scared. Jacob's mother and father decided to send him to live with his Uncle Laban in Haran. Laban tricked Jacob into marrying his daughter Leah. Eventually, he gave him his other daughter, Rachel, who Jacob wanted to marry all along. Jacob got richer, and his family got larger. One day, the Lord spoke to Jacob and told him to leave Haran and return to his father's land. When he left, he took his entire family and all of his belongings. Jacob's travels took him close to the land of his brother, Esau. Though it had been years since he had seen Esau, he was still very afraid that Esau would carry out his threat to kill him for stealing the birthright and blessing. Jacob sent his servants ahead to let his brother know he was coming in peace. Esau sent no response to Jacob's message, but started heading his way with 400 men. Jacob was terrified.

SLIDE 2



To reduce any potential losses if Esau attacked them, Jacob divided the people traveling with him and his livestock into two camps. After Jacob prayed and reminded God of His promises to him, he prepared some gifts to send ahead to his brother. He also asked his wives and children to go ahead of him, leaving Jacob alone in the camp to prepare to meet his brother.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 3



That night, as he was alone, Jacob saw a figure emerge from the dark. His fears gripped him. Could this be Esau or one of his men coming to murder him in this lonely wilderness in the dark of night? Jacob was not going to let himself be harmed, so he decided to go on the attack. He rushed toward the man, knocking him to the ground. He would wrestle this man as if his life depended upon it.



SLIDE 4



As the fight began, it was an even match, and they wrestled for hours. As the fight wore on, Jacob realized that he was not fighting with Esau. In fact, he wasn't sure who this stranger was, but he knew that he wasn't an ordinary man. Finally, to end the fight, the stranger simply touched Jacob's hip socket. Immediately, Jacob felt his leg weaken as his hip shifted out of joint. Even though he tried to wrestle, he knew that he couldn't win. "Now, let me go," the man said to Jacob. "It's morning." But Jacob knew that this was no ordinary man. This was a messenger of God. In spite of his pain, Jacob had a hold of him. "I won't let you go unless you bless me!" Jacob said. The man asked Jacob's name, and Jacob told him. "Your name is now Israel because you have fought with God and men and were victorious," the man said, and then he blessed Jacob.





LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 5



Something very special had just happened to Jacob. The sun rose gently in the sky as Jacob returned to see his family and face Esau. Jacob was a changed man. He walked with a limp, but he had a new name and a new identity. God had given Jacob a promise, and He would keep it. When Jacob met Esau that day, their meeting was a happy one! Esau met him with a huge hug and a warm welcome. From that day forward, Jacob would lead a life of blessing. He still had his troubles, but he knew that God would keep His promises.