

The Man Who Wouldn't Let Go— Jacob



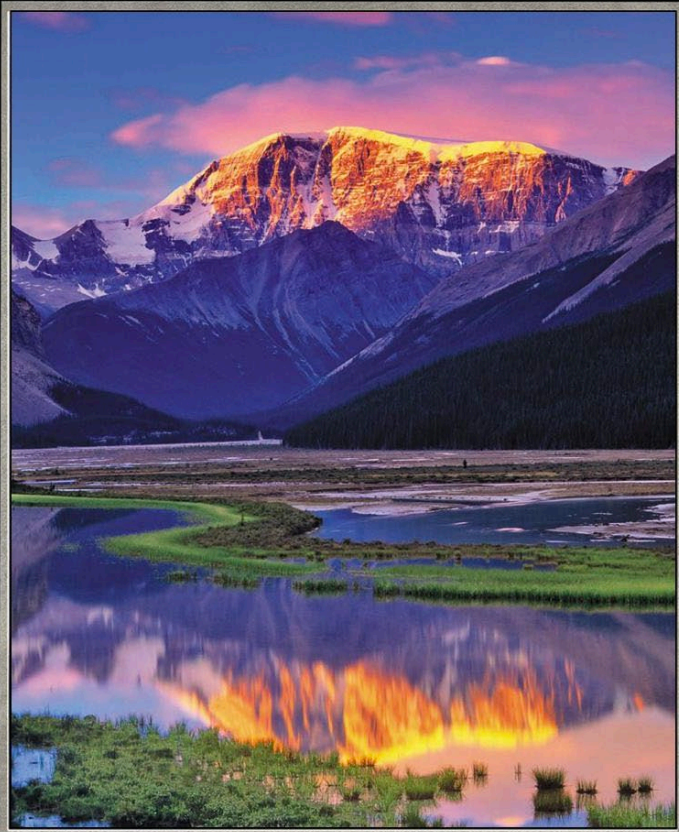
Genesis 32:22-32

²² The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. ²⁴ And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. ²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷ And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸ Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." ²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. ³⁰ So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." ³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. ³² Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.



Many of you have seen the Successories Stores that sell beautiful pictures with motivational slogans like:





EXCELLENCE

*Some excel because they are destined to,
most excel because they are determined to.*

There's also a company called Despair.com that sells parodies of the Successories pictures.



AMBITION

THE JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES SOMETIMES ENDS VERY, VERY BADLY.



DISCOURAGEMENT

BECAUSE THERE'S NOTHING STANDING BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR GOAL BUT
A TOTAL LACK OF TALENT AND COMPLETE FAILURE OF WILL.

© DESPAIR.COM



MISTAKES

IT COULD BE THAT THE PURPOSE OF YOUR LIFE IS
ONLY TO SERVE AS A WARNING TO OTHERS.



PESSIMISM

EVERY DARK CLOUD HAS A SILVER LINING,
BUT LIGHTNING KILLS HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE EACH YEAR WHO ARE TRYING TO FIND IT.

- Life is a struggle.
- Even for some of the great people we meet in the Bible.
- You have days when everything goes right and you feel like you are living out a slogan from the Successories collection.
- But for most of us, there are plenty of days when we could be one of those Despair.com posters.

God meets us in our struggles.
When he does, don't let go until he
blesses you.

1. Jacob came into this world struggling with people.

- He was *born struggling* with his twin brother *Esau* (Genesis 25).
- Their mother *Rebekah* could feel Jacob and Esau jostling with one another in her womb.
- Jacob was born *clutching Esau's heel*.
- So they named him Jacob, “*one who grabs the heel, or one who trips up.*”

- He later struggled with Esau over who would receive the family's blessing and inheritance due the firstborn (Genesis 27).
- Jacob deceived his father, cheated his brother out of his birthright, and had to flee from Esau's anger.



- Jacob struggled with his *father-in-law*, *Laban* for his beloved *bride*, Rachael (Genesis 29).
- He struggled with *Laban* again over his *wages* for the years Jacob worked for him (Genesis 30).
- Jacob said that Laban changed his wages 10 times.
- As he prepared to return to his homeland after a 20-year exile, he *feared another struggle with Esau*.



2. At the key turning point of his life, Jacob found himself struggling with God.

- As Jacob was on his way back home he sent his family ahead and stopped alone for the night in the rugged high country overlooking the North Bank of the Jabbok River.



- In the darkness, Jacob is suddenly *grabbed by a stranger* who appears out of nowhere and they wrestle all night.
- Genesis 32 says that Jacob wrestled with an unidentified *man*.
- Hosea 12:4 says he wrestled with an *angel*.
- Some Christian expositors believe this is a *Christophany*—a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus.



- Jacob didn't know who the man is or where he came from, but at some point he realized he was **wrestling with God** in some form.
- Jacob called the place **Peniel** (Hebrew for “**the face of God**”).

פְּנִיֵּאל

Peniel

3. As Jacob struggled with God, he refused to let go until God blessed him.

- During the struggle, the angel *dislocated* Jacob's *hip*, so that he could not continue to struggle in his own strength.
- But Jacob *refuses to give up*.
- I wonder how long the average person could wrestle with an angel. Five minutes?
- But this wrestling match lasts until daybreak.
- And the angel did not defeat Jacob until he touched Jacob's hip and put it out of joint.

- Like Jacob had done with so many of his rivals, now Jacob's heavenly opponent had taken advantage of him.
- Crippled by a supernatural blow, Jacob encountered Someone he could not defeat.
- Jacob, the “Heel-catcher” had finally been caught.
- Jacob realized that he was in the hands of *the One against whom it is useless to struggle*.
- Now crippled in his natural strength he became bold in faith



Jacob tells the angel, *“I will not let you go unless you bless me.”*

Because Jacob, in the midst of his struggles, refused to let go of God, **God changed him forever.**

- He received a *new name* to reflect his new character. *Jacob*—the struggler, the cheat—became *Israel*, the prince of God, the one who prevails.
- This name *yīsrā'ēl* is a combination of the Hebrew words for *wrestle* (*sārêṭā*) and *God* (*'el*).
- Jacob's covenant name, Israel, name, embodied his wrestling, clinging firmly to God, and overcoming.

“Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but *Israel*, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.”

—Genesis 32:28

יִשְׂרָאֵל
Israel

- He became the *father* of the 12 tribes of Israel.
- The **nation** and the **land** of God's chosen people would be called by Jacob's covenant name: **Israel!**





At the burning bush, here's how God introduced himself to Moses,

Exodus 3:6

“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and *the God of Jacob.*”



King David would one day sing:

Psalm 46:7

The LORD of hosts is with us; *the God of Jacob* is our fortress.

Even when the Angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would give birth to the Lord Jesus, he described our Lord with these words:

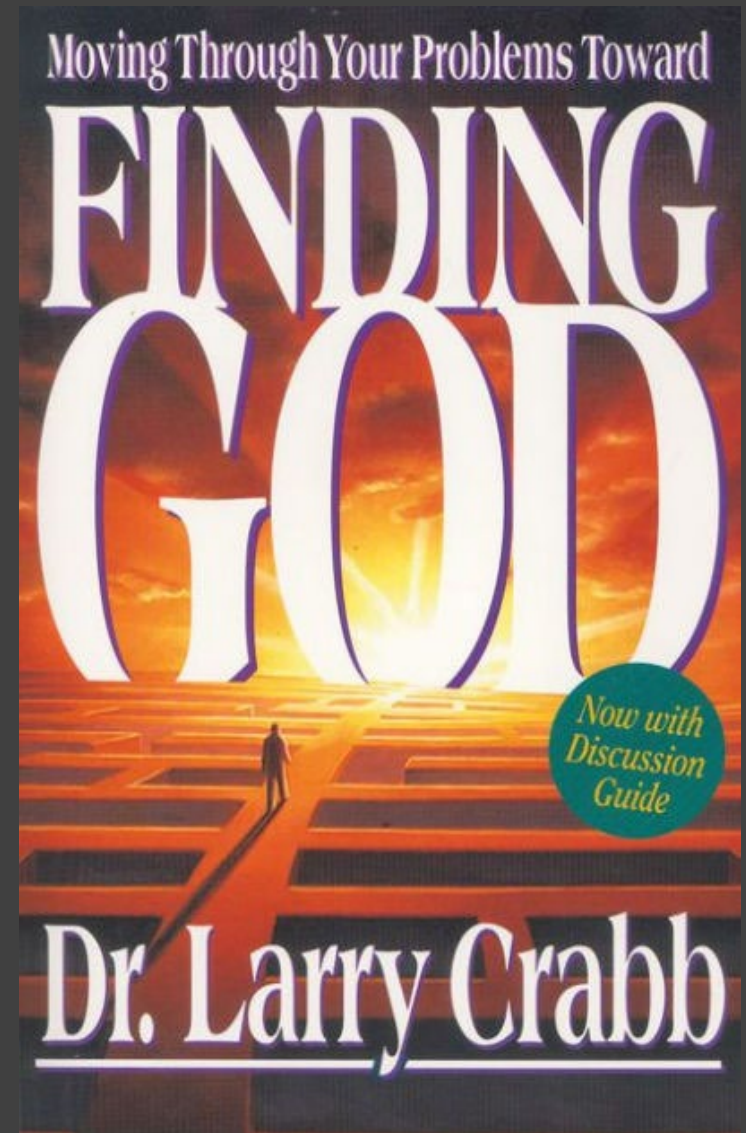
“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,³³ and he will reign over the *house of Jacob* forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

—Luke 1:32-33

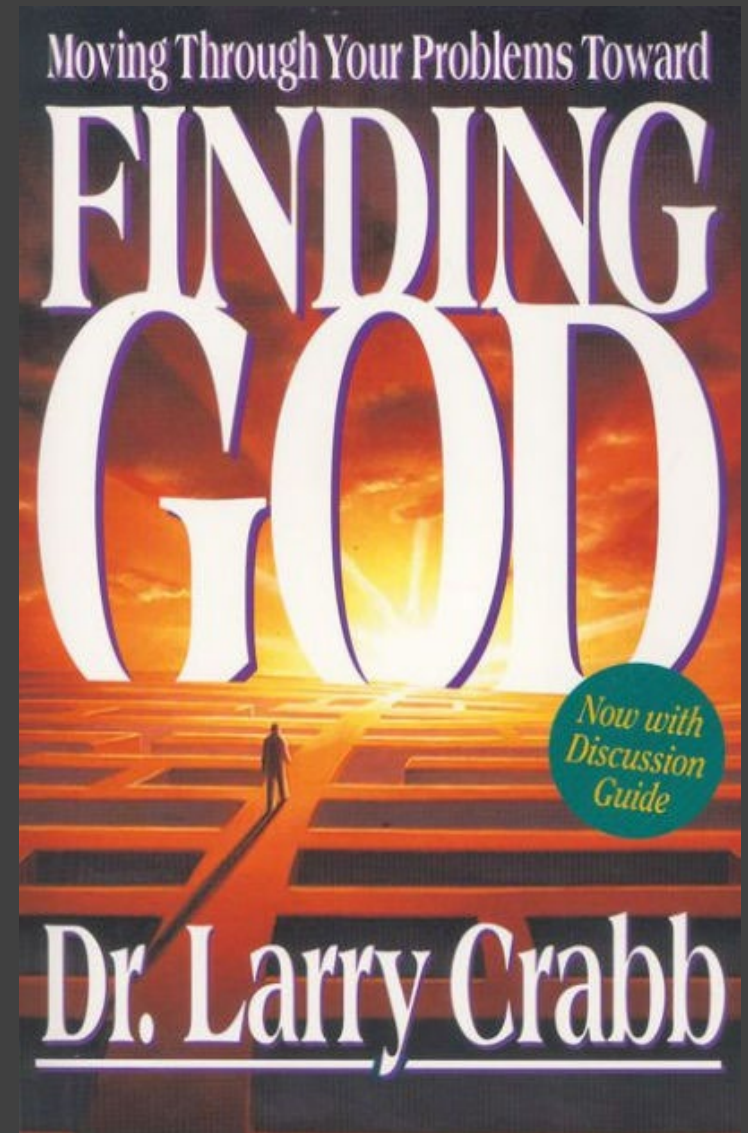


God calls us to know and trust him
in the struggles of life.

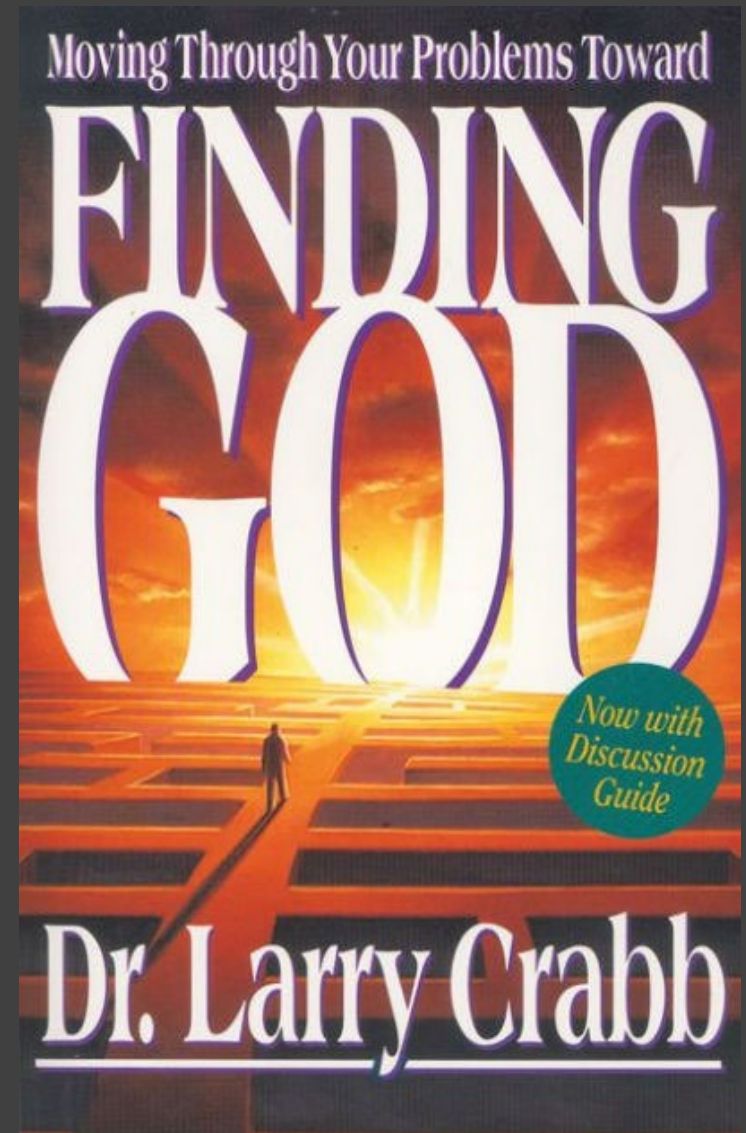
In his book *Finding God*, Larry Crabb writes about his struggle to really find God after losing his brother in a plane crash in 1991.



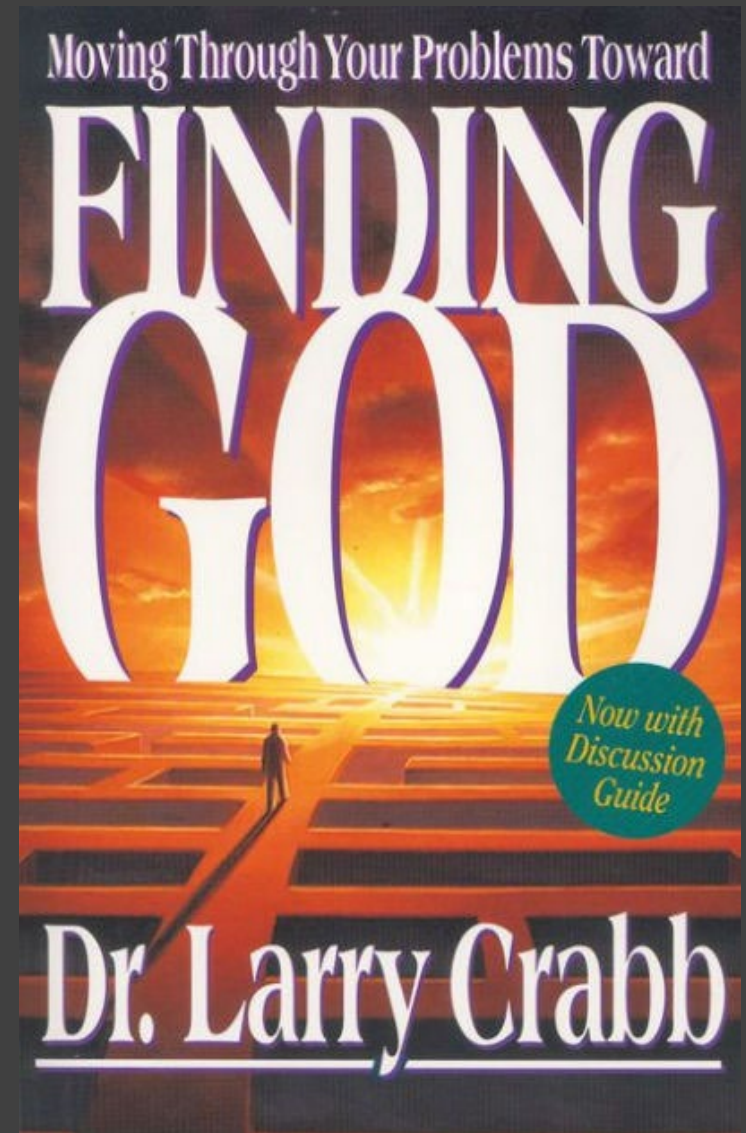
I cried many times during those first two weeks after the plane crash But two weeks after the accident, I sensed tears that had not been shed, tears pressing for release from an even deeper source than the profound loss I felt over Bill's death. . . . During the day on Sunday, March 17, I felt restless, uneasy. That night, I couldn't sleep. At midnight, I slipped out of bed, reached for my Bible, and headed for the privacy of my study.



For reasons still unclear, within seconds of my sitting down the dam burst. Tears gushed from my eyes and poured down my face. I sobbed, I wailed, I heaved for perhaps twenty minutes, without one recognizable word coming from my mouth, just the groaning of a soul in wrenching pain. I felt an unspeakable sorrow beyond any I had ever known. With terrible clarity, I realized that I, along with everyone else, was out of the Garden of Eden and had no way back in.



And then the words began to come, out loud, subdued at first, then with the intensity of a scream. I cried to the Lord, “I cannot endure what I know to be true. Life is painful. I am selfish. Everything is intolerable. Nothing satisfies. Nothing brings relief. Nothing good is certain. There is no rest. Sorrow outweighs joy. *I cannot go on without knowing you better. . . . I know you’re all I have. But I don’t know you well enough for you to be all I need. Please let me find you.*”



- In this life there is no escape from pain and problems.
- And all of us, sooner or later, reach a point where **we need to know God better or we just won't make it.**
- Those who don't know God must either **pretend that things are better than they are** or live in pursuit of **things that numb the pain.**
- Often, the only other way out is madness or suicide.

Hebrews 11:6

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

- Whatever your struggle, **lay hold of God**.
- Earnestly **seek him**.
- And, like Jacob, **don't let go** until he blesses you.