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[00:00:05] You can stay standing today, we're in Genesis Chapter 32. And while you're turning to Genesis Chapter 32, I want to let you know we have a message today called "Wrestling with God." And you know what? The truth is that, a lot of times, we wrestle with God and we wrestle with stuff in our lives. And as we're going to discover today, that's part of the sanctifying process that God has us in. Not that we should ever wrestle against him or head in the other direction. But, you know, sometimes the transformational process that God has us in is not easy. And so if you are connected to our daily devotions, this week is a special series called Wrestling With, and we've identified, you know, some of the key things that we sometimes struggle with us as Christians. And I want to encourage you to just really pay close attention to that. If you aren't connected to our daily devotions, we would encourage you to do that. You can do that by going to our website's home page. On the app, you can go to the Go section. You can scan the QR code right there. And then of course, they're on video. They're also- you can podcast them, etc. So, you know, just want to encourage you to consider that. And I think like I've laid out 20 different areas that sometimes we wrestle with in our life as believers in Christ, and we'll see how that goes over the next couple of months. So today we're in Genesis Chapter 32. We're going to like parachute into this section of scripture, and I'll give you the context later. So let's just read it together. We're talking today about Jacob. Guys, remember who Jacob was.

[00:01:43] Hey, by the way, who normally goes to the nine o'clock service? I'm just curious. Raise your hand. Alright. You guys are smart. I just want to tell you, as opposed to like coming and falling asleep at the first service, you guys got a little extra sleep. So check this out verse 22: And he arose that night and took his two wives. All right, we already have a problem, right? We already have a big problem. And not just that, but they're sisters, so we've got some. This is a topic for another time, but there's some serious dysfunction happening here. And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his 11 sons and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. He took them, sent them over the brook and sent over what he had. And Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now, when he saw that he did not prevail against him- this is the this mysterious individual. We'll let you know who he is in a minute. Now, when he saw that he did not prevail against him, he touched the socket of his hip and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as he wrestled with him. So just like, you know, he ended the whole thing with a supernatural intervention. And he said, Let me go for the day breaks. But he said, that is Jacob, I will not let you go unless you bless me. So he said to him, What is your name? He said, Jacob. And he said, Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel. For you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed. Then Jacob asked, saying, Tell me your name, I pray. And he said, Why is it that you seek? Why is it that you ask about my name? And he blessed him there. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel for I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved. Just as he crossed over Penuel, the sun rose on him and he limped on his hip.

[00:03:31] Father, thank you God, for this story today that we read in Jacob's life. And God, we're so deeply thankful for your faithful work in his life, God, that does speak to us today about your faithful work in our lives. And God, as we just step into this section of scripture. God is, I know, I know there are areas in our lives, things that we are wrestling with and maybe wrestling with you over. And God, we need you. We need you, God, because you know our hearts. We don't want to just have some superficial, shallow relationship with you. God, we don't want just lip service. We don't want to be Christians in name only. God, we want that deep work of your spirit because Father, truly there is no one and nothing like you. And if there's anything, God, if there's anything that holds us back, would you reveal it to us today? So we can bring it out into the light and move forward into the promises and the blessings that you have for us. In Jesus name, amen.

[00:04:43] You can have a seat. So, listen, the last time- we are like air dropping into this story, so let me just give you a little bit of context because the context matters. By the way, context always matters. But the last time we were hanging out with Jacob, he was in Bethel and remember, he had just left his- he had just left his home. He left the house of his mom and his dad. He left his brother. Not a good situation there. We'll get to that in just a second. And he headed to Abraham's homeland. He headed to Haran. Because remember, it was required that the Patriarchs married within the family of Abraham. And so he heads to Haran and you guys can read these chapters for yourself. Chapter 29, 30 and 31. But he gets there and he discovers the love of his life right away, Rachel. He meets his uncle Laban. And Uncle Laban has a little insidious scheme because he wants Leah, his oldest daughter, to be married off first. And so if you guys know the story, he, Laban arranges the scene or the circumstance of the wedding where Jacob unknowingly ends up going and consummating a relationship with Leah first. So he's married to Leah, and then he has to work for Rachel, the love of his life. By the way, love is always worth working for. Right? Love is always worth working for. And so, so you know, things with Laban are not good. There's dysfunction and there's difficulty. And Jacob recognizes, he realizes that the Lord reveals to him: it's time for him to head home. So 20 years after he left his house and went to Haran, he is now coming back. He has two wives. He has 11 sons. He has an abundance of wealth. And so, you know, God has blessed him. But he really has manipulated circumstances so that he was an extremely wealthy individual. And as he's making his way back to his homeland, he comes up to the very edge of the inheritance, the edge of the Promised Land. And that's signified by the river Jabbok.

[00:06:51] And so as he is there, he recognizes, Hey, last time I was hanging out with Esau, it was not- it was not pretty. Not a good thing. Because remember, he had manipulated away the blessing and he had stolen the birthright. And the reaction of Esau was, I'm going to wring that kid's neck, like literally off of his body. It's over. I'm going to kill him. He had murderous intentions. And so as Jacob is coming back, you know, he's looking in his rearview mirror and he's got an uncle that's really, you know, bad relationship with his uncle. His uncle is not happy with him. He's heading into the promised land. He's got a disaffected brother who wants to murder him. And so Jacob's in a tough spot. He sends some servants across the river to meet Esau to just say, Hey, listen, God's been good to me. I'm coming back. You know, it's kind of like a peace offering. He's brought- he gives them things to give to Esau. And when the servants come back to give a report, they're like, Hey, Esau, by the way, is coming to meet you, and he's got four hundred armed soldiers with him. So just picture this, right? I mean, Jacob literally is between a rock and a hard place. He can't go back because he's got a messed up relationship with his uncle. He can't really go forward because his brother, whom he assumes has murderous intentions, is coming to wipe him out. And so he separates his family into two groups, strategically thinking that, you know, if Esau's going to attack, maybe he'll just get- maybe he'll just get half my family. I'm not endorsing this strategy today. That's just the way that he was thinking.

[00:08:26] He separates his family into two groups, and then he goes to be by himself with the Lord. And I just want to say to you today that God had super-intended these circumstances, like there is no doubt. I'm not saying that God was responsible for the dysfunction behind him and the dysfunction in front of him, but God boxed him in. God boxed Jacob in. I'm saying to you today, Jacob had nowhere to turn, but to the Lord. You know, Jacob used to be- I mean, traditionally he was in a place where he could work his way out of any bad situation. You guys know people like this? Like they can argue their way- they can be totally in the wrong, but they can argue their way literally out of anything. Or they're just- they've just got these dynamic personalities or these amazing God-given capacities that they use to kind of manipulate the situation and circumstances into their own benefit. And this is the way that Jacob had lived his life. He had trusted in himself. Like he could always, at the end of the day, rely on himself to get the job done. And now he's in this spot where he can't rely on himself. God has boxed him in. And God boxed him in intentionally because there was something that God wanted to deal with in Jacob's heart and Jacob's life. In a way, God is saying, You know what? You can't go on any further like this. There's a promised land and an inheritance that I have set before you and before you enter into the promise, this thing that you have been sweeping under the carpet, this thing that you have buried needs to be unearthed so you can be the man that I've called you to be as you step into my promises and my blessings.

[00:10:06] Have you been there before in your life? Have you ever been in that situation where God has boxed you in? You know, maybe you're a really capable, able person and then you hit a circumstance where it's like, Man, you have nowhere to turn. You have nowhere to turn but up. And as you're in that spot, it's as if God's like, Hey, we're going to address this issue because this issue in your life matters more than what I do through you. God's work through us takes second seat to God's work that he's doing in us. And Jacob, what we see is that he wrestles with God and he emerges as Israel. So he is the same man, but he's not the same man. He is the same man, in a sense, right? But there's a transformation. There's a change. And you know, most commentators will acknowledge this was the turning point in Jacob's life. In fact, you know, if you're reading in the Hebrew, there's a play on words here, a play on Jacob's name, the name of the river and the word "wrestling." Because Jacob's name in Hebrew is "Yaakov", the name for river Jabbok is "Jabbok." And the word for wrestling is "vayeavek". And so the scripture's pointing out the significance of the man, the place and the match. There was unfinished business in Jacob's life because he was an unfinished man. He was capable. He was able, but he was incomplete. And, you know, I think some of us are like that here today. You know, maybe we're very capable. And maybe the truth is this: we've come a long way in our relationship with God.

[00:11:50] And yet still, there's that tendency to lean on our own abilities. Sometimes there might be that tendency to lean on what God has done in the past. And yet there's this thing that we've been carrying all along that God is saying to us, I want that. I want that, that unsanctified area, that unyielded area, that unsurrendered thing in your life that you've been holding on to, or maybe you've swept under the rug or you've turned a blind eye to. God's like, Hey, you've come a long way, but there's still work that needs to be done. Maybe today you're not a believer in Jesus Christ and you've been wrestling against God, right? There's a difference between wrestling with God and wrestling against him. You've been fighting against him. You've been resisting him. God has been knocking on the door of your heart. You're surrounded by Christians who've been talking to you about the love of Jesus Christ. And yet for whatever reason, and you can fill the blank in here, maybe it's just that you want to continue to live a life of sin. Maybe you don't want to yield yourself to God and live a life submitted to him. Maybe there are falses that you've been holding on to, that you're choosing over faith in Jesus Christ. Today, God is calling you to surrender to him, to stop fighting against him and to walk with him. Maybe today, as a Christian, you know you've walked with God for some time. And you know, this is kind of- this is the danger of walking with God for some time is we can get to a place where it's like we look at our past and how far we've come and we settle there.

[00:13:17] It's like, Hey, you know I've- I've come a long way. Like this is, you know, and God points something out or somebody points something out, you know. Your wife or your husband, they're like, Hey, babe, you know, this thing. And it's like, Well, well, wait a minute. You should be at least thankful that I'm not who I used to be. And I just want to tell you that has nothing to do with it. Alright. Thank God that you're not who you used to be, but that doesn't mean there aren't changes that need to happen in your life today. And so in this process of walking with God, what happens is we have a desire. We should have a desire to be more and more surrendered to God, to be open to the spirit of God revealing those areas in our lives. I've talked a lot already today, OK? Do you know where I'm going with this? That need to be changed. So wrestling with God is part of the process of transforming us into the image of Jesus. And I want to say that today, because sometimes I think when we wrestle with God, we put it in a negative framework, but it's not in a negative framework. It's when we wrestle with God that we find ourselves- we should find ourselves- it should lead to something- what should it lead to? We should be learning to align our heart and soul to the purposes of God, and to the purpose- or to the person of God. So, Jacob, here he is in this place. He was alone. He's confronted with this individual, this mysterious man. Who is this mysterious person?

[00:14:39] Well, as you read, these verses you understand just from was contained here is that Jacob comes face to face with God. We know that's the case because once there is that supernatural intervention, he recognizes he's not just been wrestling a human being. He, in fact, has been wrestling with God. And there's a change. There's a turning point. His attitude changes. There's a work that happens in his heart. And the moment is so profound, he literally at the end calls the place- and this was typical for Jacob- he called the place Peniel, which means "I've met God face to face." But in addition to that, the Bible says in Hosea 12:3, we have a little commentary on this story from the Old Testament Prophet Hosea. And he said this: Jacob took his brother by the heel in the womb, and in his strength he struggled with God. And now we're talking about this moment in Genesis 32. Yes, he struggled with the angel and prevailed. Check this out. This gives us insight as to the condition of his heart. He wept and sought favor from him. He wept and sought favor from him. Jacob was wrestling with God in the spirit, but he was wrestling with God also in the physical realm. What does it mean to wrestle with God? Well, this is what it means. Two things today. I want to answer that question for you. First is this: it means that we have a tenacious struggle with God that leads to our humble surrender and subsequent transformation. You guys with me today? I know it's a tough day because there's a time change, but stick this out. God's got something for us. So it means that we have a tenacious struggle with God. Some of you are struggling today tenaciously with God, but it's got to go in the right direction, right? That leads to our humble surrender and subsequent transformation.

[00:16:29] By the way, those two things are always tied together. We want transformation, but transformation doesn't happen unless we are humbly surrendered to the Lord. Now, I think- this is just my view, but I think that Jacob probably did not realize immediately that he was wrestling with God. You know, he wrestled for a long time. The Bible says he wrestled all night long until the break of day. I don't know if you guys have ever wrestled before. I've shared this story a million times. Let me share it a million and one. But I remember in high school, I took wrestling as an elective. And I played football. I played basketball. I played soccer. You know, I played golf and baseball. I love sports. But wrestling- wrestling's a totally different thing. Three minutes of wrestling and people are barfing their guts out, right? I mean, it's just like, not only is it physically exerting and exhausting. It's also a little nasty because it's like hand-to-hand, sweating, you know? I mean, you can't get closer to somebody than when you're wrestling them- in an athletic sense. And, you know, I just have this- he was a tenacious guy. And so who knows how long it was until he recognized that this adversary was not in fact an adversary, but it was in fact God himself? And, you know, sometimes I think that when we fight, when we wrestle with God, we have the tendency not to even realize that the struggle is really with him and not just circumstances or other people. Because if we're honest today, sometimes when we're having a hard time, you know? We're spent, we're exhausted, we feel like we're a salmon swimming upstream, proverbially. You know, we seem to be like working so hard and it's like, Man, what is going on? And sometimes in that adversity, we have the tendency to blame our circumstances and other people.

[00:18:12] It's like, Well, you know what, God, these circumstances, if they were just better circumstances, the problem that I have is that You've allowed these things into my life. And if you would just change, if you would just change my circumstances, if I would just live in another state, if I could just have another job, if you could get me another life, if I could have another set of kids, if I could have new followers on my social media, like everything would change. You know how we are. And sometimes it's not just the circumstances. Like I said, it's the people. We have the tendency when we're having a difficult time to point the finger at everybody except ourselves. It's like, we're just like Adam in the book of Genesis Chapter two. God is the wife you gave me. And we find ourselves pinpointing other people and things as the problem. Where all along, God is saying, The problem is not out there. The problem is not with them. The problem is with you. What needs to change? Hey. Moving to another city is not going to solve your problem. Getting a brand new family or working in a different location is not going to solve the issue. Because I've allowed things to become difficult because there's something that I want to deal with in you. For Jacob, it was his self-reliance. It was his self-reliance, man. He was a very capable individual that had the tendency to trust in himself instead of God. And, you know, he lived.

[00:19:40] And I just want to say this carefully today. He lived oftentimes independently from God. I mean, it's not that he didn't believe in the God of his grandfather and of his father. Because he did. He did. We know God gave revelation. He had moments of prayer with God that were beautiful. But even in this relationship with God, he had the tendency to say, Hey, you know what? I'm good to go. I got this, I got this. I can handle this. I talked a couple of weeks ago about, you know, that proverbial saying in the Christian world that's so absolutely false, right? That God never gives us more than we can handle? Absolutely false. God does it all the time. And oftentimes he does it so that we're forced to be in a place where we stop relying on ourselves and start trusting in him. And that is a place sometimes that doesn't feel good. That place sometimes hurts. And this was Jacob's tendency, even though he "had God," he was a very capable individual. If you just consider his life starting in the womb, right? There was a wrestling in the womb. He was prevailing in the womb. He prevailed at birth. He grabbed the heel of his brother. And then the namesake that he had: "Heel Catcher", deceiver, supplanter was because of this tenacious quality that he had, that when it was unsurrendered to God, it was unpleasing to God. He prevailed in manipulating the blessing away from Esau. He stole the birthright from Esau. He prevailed with Laban for Rachel. He prevailed in his wealth. And yet, for all of his prevailing, he was still unsurrendered to God in certain areas of his life. And I just- I'm compelled today to ask this question, not just to you, but to all of us: how many of us are living with unsurrendered areas in our lives? Maybe our whole life is unsurrendered. And what God has been calling us to do is, once and for all, surrender to him through putting our trust and faith in Jesus Christ.

[00:21:42] But listen, on the other hand, maybe for some of us, there's a personality trait, there's a quality, there's a characteristic. And I'm not saying that these things are always bad. Sometimes they can be good, they can be God-given. But if they're not submitted to God, they just become us working in our own flesh. Maybe it's an area of sin and rebellion. You know, this idol that we've been carrying with us all along the way and what God is doing in our lives is he's boxing us in and we're mad, right? There's financial constraints, there's relationship constraints, there's circumstantial constraints. We can't go backwards and we can't go forwards. And the whole time God is saying, stop looking around and start looking up. Start looking to me. Are you guys with me today? God is not a good luck charm. God is not a good luck charm. He's not the proverbial Santa Claus sitting in your corner that you call on when you're in a pinch, right? Because that's what happens sometimes as Christians. It's like, Yeah, I have a relationship with God and I go through my life. I go through my day, but I never really look to him. I never really spend time in communion with him. Like, if something is difficult, yeah, I'll call God out. I'll call God out and ask for a little bit of help. But other than that, you know, I just kind of continue on my way. I think Jacob was somebody who lived like that until he encountered something and someone he could not defeat. He was able to overcome Esau's raw power. He was able to overcome Laban's sorry scheming. But he met more than his match in God.

[00:23:17] And this is the thing. Like, just picture this: Jacob is about to enter into his inheritance. The promise, right? That had gone to Abraham, to Isaac and now to him. And it is really God saying, You know what? You can't enter into this blessing the way you are. You can't enter. Something has got to change in your life. For you to take the next step- for you to receive the blessing that I have for you- what has to happen first is your inner transformation. And I just, you know, I wanted to just come back around to this again because, you know, in our Christian culture, we are all about the blessing of God. Thank God for his blessing. But sometimes, we value the external blessings that he gives us over the internal blessings that he wants to bring to us. It's like, Yeah, you know what, God? Give me the car, give me the house, give me the easier life, you know, give me these things. And then there's all this stuff on the inside that God's saying, Well, I want that and I want that. And it's like, No, no thanks. You know, you've got your place, God, I put you in your place. I've got a compartment for you. Is that too hard today? What had to happen here is supernatural intervention. So in all of this wrestling, what happens is the angel of the Lord just goes "boop." Just like this, right? I mean, he could have done this the whole time. He's just like, I think- I think it's over. I think all this wrestling has come to an end. I'm just going to- I'm just going to touch the hip here- this little muscle and the result of this supernatural intervention.

[00:24:52] Some of us need a supernatural intervention today. We need a supernatural intervention, right? Just for God to go "boop." I'm going to put my finger on this. I'm going to put my finger on this. And the result was his hip- jacob's hip popped out of socket. I mean, yeah, ew is right. Can you imagine? Right? This one reason why he's weeping. But it's not just the physical pain, it's the realization. Oh man, I've been wrestling with God all along. I've come face to face with God, and he's allowed me. He's allowed me this time of wrestling. This was the key turning point in Jacob's life. And it's interesting to me that God allows him to wrestle all along this way, where God could have just- it could have just been brutal submission, right? I mean, just a pin down, tap out, story over. But God doesn't do it because he's a loving father and he works with us graciously and he's tender, right? And not just that, but God wants our heart to be transformed. He's not just, you know, some mean guy in the sky that compels his children to do what he wants them to do because of brute force. He lovingly shapes us and changes us and seeks to bring our hearts to a place where finally, we are able to say, You know what, God? What you want, I want. What you want, I want. What you want for my life- the way you want me to be is what I want as well. And that is a process that God is faithfully willing to bring us through.

[00:26:24] The greatest blow from God became the beginning of Jacob's greatest blessing. The thing that hurt him was sent by God to help him. The thing that hurt him was sent by God to help him. How many of us today have things in our lives that have been divinely appointed by God that we're fighting against, as if they're against us, when in fact they're for us? They're for our shaping? They're for our transformation? I just want to tell you guys, this is how I view everything in my life. Even the hard stuff, even the adversity, even the persecution, even sometimes difficulty relationally. Look, I've learned in my life the first question that I need to ask is, God, what do you have in this for me? Because you know what? I can be so off track. And I can be looking at my life through a lens that is not necessarily giving me God's perspective. And so I've got to be willing to be in a place where it's like, OK, you know what, God? These are the things I believe. This hurts, right? I mean, first of all, before I get to that, this hurts. I don't really like it. But what I do know is that you are able to take all things and work them together for good for me. You guys know that today. Right? I'll get to that verse in just a second.

[00:27:49] God- like with Paul, you remember, Paul was given this amazing revelation, Paul was so powerfully used by the Lord. And as he was given this revelation, with the revelation came a thorn in the flesh. And Paul's words were, Lest I be puffed up beyond measure, an adversary from Satan buffeted me in the flesh. And I prayed to God. This is Paul's autobiography on this moment. I prayed three times. Take this from me. Take this from me. Take this from me. Until God finally said, Stop praying that. This is my will for your life. And not only that, but my grace is sufficient for you. Paul, I've allowed this adversity in your life not to hurt you, but to help you because you have a tendency towards pride. The Bible says in Hosea 6:1, This is such a good portion of scripture: Come and let us return to the Lord for he has torn, but he will heal us. He has stricken, but he will bind us up. After two days, he will revive us. On the third day, he will raise us up that we may live in his sight. And so Hosea the prophet is saying to the people who are wayward, Listen, the adversity, the difficulty that we're receiving right now from the Assyrians or the Babylonians. This is God-intended. We're wayward, we're off track. And so what God is saying is like this flashing light: Come back to me. Come back to me. You know, and when you come back to me, as I've allowed this in your life, what's going to happen is I am going to give you life, when you are fully surrendered to me. A.W. Tozer said this: The Lord cannot fully bless a man until he has first conquered him. The Lord cannot fully bless a man until he has first conquered him. Let me just say it like this as well: the Lord cannot fully bless a woman until he has first conquered her, right? Just so we all get this today. And we should embrace being conquered by the Lord. There's no one better to be conquered by than the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes. Yeah.

[00:29:53] The second thing today- the second thing today that I would say, in answering the question, What does it mean to struggle with God? First, just as a reminder, it's a tenacious struggle that leads to our humble surrender and subsequent transformation. Second is this: it means absolute perseverance in God. Let me start all over again. It means- hey, I lost an hour of sleep too. No, I didn't really. It means absolute perseverance with God in humble prayer and faith until the answer to our prayer is received. It means absolute perseverance with God in humble prayer and faith until the answer to our prayer is received. Remember, he held on. He held on to the Angel of the Lord and this was what Jacob said. He said, Bless me! Like, Don't leave me like this. I'm between a rock and a hard place. And so Jacob just utters up this prayer and look, it's so fascinating. I have read, maybe not hundreds, but I have read a lot of commentaries on this particular phrase that Jacob says. He says, Bless me. Like what in the world is he talking about here? What does he want God to do? I mean, it's undefined. It's undefined. It's like, is he saying, Protect me? Is he saying, Deal with my brother Esau? Is he saying, you know, Bring me financial blessing? Like, it's not even really clearly identified. And I do believe he's in this place where it's almost as if, because he knows he's dealing with God and he's fully surrendered, it's almost as if he's saying, God, do what you know you need to do. Do what you know you need to do. I'm not going to boss you around in this prayer request. I'm just going to say, I totally am yours, and I just want you to do whatever you think is best.

[00:31:38] Hey, Christians, that's not a cop out. That is not a cop out. There are some people who say, Well, you know what? You need to be absolutely defined in everything you ask God for. And if you just ask him to fulfill his will in your life, somehow, that that's not faith, and that's just not true. You know, it's that place of surrender where it's like, God, you know what? I've been spinning so much in my own self-centeredness and self-reliance. I don't even trust myself to ask you for the blessing. And so do what you think needs to be done. And and in that, what does God do? He changes them. He changes them. You know, if you- how many of you have experienced answered prayer before? Raise your hand. Oh, that's good. I was expecting that. OK? And if y'all didn't raise your hand, there would be an issue. But one prayer, you know, God will answer for sure is the prayer: change me. God, change me. Have you prayed that before? Have you just asked God, Lord, I don't- you just have said to him, Lord, I don't want to remain the same person I've been. I want you to change me and make me more like Jesus. So this is what the Angel of the Lord does. The Angel of the Lord says, Well, what's your name? And of course, you guys know God knew the name of Jacob. But what he was doing was he was calling him out because the last time that someone asked Jacob what his name was, he lied. The last time Jacob was asked this question, he was asked by his father, and he lied and said that he was Esau.

[00:33:12] What is God doing here? God is unearthing something that Jacob has buried over the last 20 years. In fact, Esau, you remember- when Jacob stole the blessing from Esau, Esau said, you are rightly called Jacob or manipulator or deceiver or supplant planter. He used the name as a pejorative. It wasn't a positive thing. This is in fact who you are. And so when he calls Jacob to say his name, it's almost as if Jacob is saying, You know what? I have to confess. This has been my nature. This has been the issue. I've been deceiving. I've been manipulating. I've been working circumstances by my own willpower. And now I have to unearth the reality of that and confess this to the one who really knows. God was unearthing, like I said, something that Jacob had been burying. And I wonder today if there's some of us who have things in our lives that we have been burying. We just don't want it to be touched. We don't even want God to touch it. We don't even want to look at it. We don't want to be reminded of it. And so we've swept it under the rug. We've buried it and we've planted a bed of flowers over it. And we think that we can just move on in our lives without addressing it. And I think this story here is like a timeless story that says, You can't move on the right way until you look back and deal with what needs to be handed over to the Lord. His greatest self-perceived strength was, in fact, his greatest spiritual weakness. And as he makes this confession to the Lord, the response is a transformation, a change of his name. He goes from being the manipulator or the supplanter to the one who is called Israel.

[00:35:03] Now in your Bible, you might have a note next to the word Israel. And maybe your Bible says "Prince with God." The truth is it's a very difficult name to define. But I want to give you some alternative definitions to the definition I just gave you. Some say that Israel means "a God-mastered man" or "a man or a woman who's been mastered by God." Some people say it means to be "governed by God." Many commentators and Hebrew scholars say it means "God fights" or "God fights for." And so I just want to synthesize those two things because I believe that's our context today. When he gives- when the Angel of the Lord gives Jacob a new name and calls him Israel, he is saying, You are now governed by God. You've yielded your life. You've surrendered to him. So you are governed by God. And because you are governed by God, God now fights for you. God now fights for you. In fact, this is the national name that God gave his people because they were to be a surrendered people that God ultimately would fight for. In a way God is saying, You've been fighting in your own strength and in your own ability. But now that you've surrendered to me, I am going to fight for you. Church, I want to remind you today that the battle belongs to the Lord. The battle belongs to the Lord.

[00:36:22] And you know, you know, if you want to fight for yourself, God is more than willing to let you defend yourself and fight for yourself. But I would say to you, the better option is to say, God, I've surrendered my life to you. I'm going to let you do the fighting. You can fight the adversary for me. You can fight when he comes knocking on the door with temptation, you can fight the adversity and the persecution that's coming against me. Because God, I believe that the battle belongs to you. When we wrestle with God, there's just a few things for takeaway for us today that I want to draw your attention to. When we wrestle with God, it should leave us surrendered to him. It should leave us surrendered to him. I say it should because often times, our wrestling with God is perpetual and we never get to that point of surrender. God gave Jacob a physical emblem of how he was to be surrendered. And I think this is true that oftentimes the blessings of God come with a limp. Sometimes they come with adversity. Sometimes the blessings of God come through the struggle. And maybe even those times where it is God himself who is allowing us to be wounded. But Jacob, I think, was in a place where he was able to thank God- even for his personal suffering. I wonder how many times Jacob, when he was walking and having the tendency to look back to his own ability and strength as he was limping was just reminded, OK, I've given myself to God. I've surrendered to God. I'm not going back to that old life. I'm not going to be the manipulator or the deceiver. I'm not defined by the name of my past. God has done a new work in my life and I'm going to walk in the fullness of what God has given to me. And so, father, I want to thank you for that dislocated hip. I want to thank you that I have a perpetual reminder that I will never forget: that you are the one who caused me to yield, to tap out, to plead for mercy. And you answered my prayer.

[00:38:26] This for sure was the case, like I said with the Apostle Paul. Paul was in that place where he had a thorn in the flesh. It was a constant reminder that all that God had done in his life was fundamentally God and not himself. And I think when Paul penned those words in Romans 8:28- coming back to those verses- I think this is what he conveys: We know all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. What is his purpose? For whom he foreknew he predestined to be conformed into the image of his son. Right? Do you know that's God's will for your life today? That's God's purpose. What is God doing? I get this a lot: Pastor, you know what? This has happened and that's happened, and these people, I just don't know what God is doing. I say, I know what God's doing. They're like, Woah, you got a word from the Lord? Yeah, it's Romans Chapter eight. I mean, I'm careful with this because, you know, sometimes that scripture is just like, I mean, it's just thrown around and sometimes not with heart. And so I'm careful with this, but it's like, Hey, listen, this is what God's doing. God is molding and shaping you. He foreknew you. He knew you before you were in the womb. And not only did he foreknow you. We're not just talking about his omniscience, we're talking about his plan. He predetermined. He predestined. There was something that he had said, Today you're thinking, Man, Pastor, I can't believe it. You believe in predestination? Yeah because the Bible says so. Alright? I mean, it is that simple. We'll talk about that another time.

[00:39:56] But God has had an eternal plan. He is- we are his poema. We're his workmanship. We are his symphony. We are his work of art. He is like a sculptor. He has created this, this amazing musical score. But he's done so with the end in mind. God knows what he's doing in your life. You say, Well, I wish he would tell me. Well, let me tell you. He's shaping you into the image of his son. One day you're going to stand before God and you will bear the image of Jesus. And I just want to say to you: everything in your life, everything, everything in your life is being used right now to bring that to pass. Every circumstance is like a brush stroke from the hand of the master, right? Every challenging situation is like a compilation of notes in your life that are part of a bigger score. Because God is doing something beautiful in you. And it doesn't just come through the easy things. Often times- most often it comes through the difficult things. He is the master potter, you are the clay, and he is molding you and shaping you today. And so, so let me just say to you, because you might be thinking, Man, well, how can we ever get to a place where we embrace that work of God in our life? And I think fundamentally, it comes back to this. He who was wounded, excuse me, he who wounds us was wounded for us. He who wounds us was wounded for us. The Bible says in Isaiah 53:5, But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon him and by his stripes, we are healed.

[00:41:41] In other words, when we look at the Cross of Christ, this is what we conclude: You did what it took to rescue me and to save me. And so, God, I want to do whatever it takes so that I can be shaped more and more into the image of your son. Wrestling with God should lead us to a surrendered life. It should lead to Christ-like character. When he crossed over the river- I'm talking about Israel now- when he crossed over the river into the Promised Land, he was a different man. And when you put your trust and faith in Jesus Christ, you became a different person. In fact, all of this journey of Jacob is emblematic of the Christian life. He comes up to the Promised Land. There's a work. There's a turning point. There's a transformation. There's a change. He's given a brand new name. He crosses the river Jabbok, which in a sense is kind of representative of water baptism. And then he steps into his inheritance. You say, Well, wait a minute, pastor. The Promised Land always refers to heaven in the Old Testament. No, it doesn't. The Promised Land, metaphorically or allegorically or as a foreshadow or as a type, refers to the spirit filled Christian life. That's what it refers to. And so this is what's happened to us, the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. You put your trust and faith in Jesus Christ. You're born again. There's a transforming work of God's Holy Spirit. You go through the baptismal waters and you step into the Spirit-filled life that God has for you. And you put the old man- I'm not talking about your husband. You put the old man in his place, right? You put the old nature in its place like, that's where it belongs. Let me just tell you what I'm saying to you today. That old way of living your life belongs on the other side of the river. It belongs on the other side of the river. It's like, Well, you know what? I can still kind of get away with this or that. That is not the type of thinking that God wants for you. Breathe.

[00:43:48] Wrestling with God- just two more things- wrestling with God leads to healing. It leads to healing. And so his approach to Esau was radically changed. It wasn't fear. It wasn't fight. It was humility in love. It wasn't fear. It wasn't fight. It was humility in love. And I want to tell you why: because Jacob was the one all along who needed to be changed. Jacob, all along was the one who needed to be changed. Sometimes when there's family conflict and dysfunction, it's like we think everybody else needs to change. And God's like, It's not everybody else, Son. It's not everybody else. It's not everybody else that has the problem. I'm not saying that other people don't have a problem, but God is saying the one that you need to focus on is yourself. You know, the healing in relationships starts with us. And this is why he says, Man, you got a brother who's against you? Leave your gift at the altar before you offer it and go. Go, be reconciled. Right? That's a heart issue. It's a heart issue. And God doesn't say, Hey, you know what? You continue worshiping until your brother reconciles with you.

[00:44:49] That's not what he says. He says you take the initiative. Because the work begins with you. Some of us in our family situations, we are pointing the finger all the time. We view ourselves as the one who always do- I'm going to get this all grammatically messed up- who- we always- a final point today. No, I'm just kidding. We think that we are the ones who are always doing it right and we all- we can put ourselves in a position where no one, no one can counsel us. No one can challenge us. No one can open up the scripture and say, Hey, well, wait a minute, right? Because we've already framed ourselves as always in the right. And that to us is saying that we're- we know we're not in the right. Because the humble heart says, You know what? I don't see that, but I'm going to take it to God in prayer and let him search my heart. That's where healing begins.

[00:45:40] Finally, today there's intimacy here with God. When you wrestle with God, it means intimacy. It means intimacy. Not separation, but intimacy. There's nothing. There's nothing you can do that's closer to another person in athletics than wrestling. And when you are wrestling with God, he is so close to you. Oftentimes it's in those hardest moments that God is the closest. And I think about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the midst of that fiery furnace. And there was one who was present with them, and there is one who is present with you today. I want to- look, I just- I want to bring this to a point. OK? And the point is this: is there something for you to yield to God, to surrender to him? You know, and if the answer to you is no, then you're not listening to God, because I'll tell you right now: there's something in all of our lives that needs to be yielded. God is always revealing things to me. He's like, That needs to change and that needs to change and that. You know? Like, Okay, I got it. Let's just take one at a time, you know? But we should all be in a place. Maybe there is a blessing that God has for you, and this current condition of your heart is keeping you from the fullness of what God desires. Maybe today you need to put your trust and faith in Jesus Christ. Today is the moment. Today is the place. Today is your Jabbok, right? This is the place that God wants you once and for all just to tap out, to yield, to surrender, to give it to him so he can do the new work in your life.

[00:47:08] And Father, thank you. God, thank you that you are present with us today and that you just- you don't quit. You are the one who's tenacious. God, you are the one who is faithful. You are consistent. And God, you love us. You bring us along. You bring us along faithfully, Lord. And today, I pray that there would be a total yielding and surrendering and submitting to you. God, there would not be an area in our life where we would close the door and bolt it shut and say no. There would not be a thing that we would be unwilling for you to unearth and bring out into the light so that it can- so that we can receive your healing. There would not be one element or aspect of our personality or our character that we would be unwilling to let you touch. God, you are faithful even to bring the supernatural intervention. And if that's what it takes, God, we pray that you would do that.

[00:48:26] Let's all stand together today. This morning, what we're going to do is this: if God is speaking to your heart and you know, there are things, or maybe it's your life that needs to be yielded and surrendered to God, surrendered to God, you need to, today, just confess to him and let him take this thing that has been holding you back. Let him get his hands on this thing that he has been drawing your attention to. Today, there can be a moment where the spirit of God just brings a new work, a cleansing work, a healing work, a transformational work. What you've not been able to do in the power of your own might, God can do in a minute. And so this morning, what we're going to do is our worship team is going to lead us in a time of worship. And if God is speaking to you and calling you to surrender your life to him or to surrender something to him, just make your way forward. I want to lead you in prayer today, OK? Make your way forward. Maybe you're coming alone today. Maybe you need to bring your spouse or your family. Come forward today and let God do what he's desired to do in your heart so that he can bring what he's desired to bring through your life. You make your way forward today. I just want to lead you in a simple prayer today. It is just so similar to what Jacob prayed. And God knows. God knows what you're asking today. And God's going to faithfully supply to you and- and so just understand that today. We may come for all sorts of different reasons. But God's going to hear today because God is here today.

[00:50:14] Just like Jacob prayed, there's going to be just a confession to God and an acknowledgment that you're surrendered to him and to Jesus, his son. And an invitation to God to do a new thing in your life. To bring to you the grace and the mercy and the power that you need. And so follow me in this prayer today, you can pray this out loud if you want to. Father, thank you for speaking to me. I hear your voice. And I confess that I've sinned. I see it for what it is. I'm leaving it behind. And I'm asking that through Jesus, your son, You would transform me and change me. Bring the healing I need and fill me with your spirit. I want your new beginning. In Jesus name, all God's people said? Amen.