

Daily Devotional Guide

Monday – Read Genesis 32:22-24. Jacob is anticipating his meeting with Esau. His lies are catching up with him and the truth is coming to the surface. He has been hiding from the truth about himself for a long time. However, he knew that his brother Esau knew exactly who he was – the one who stole his birthright. Jacob sends his family on ahead so he can be alone with his thoughts. This is at night. When was the last time you spent time alone in prayer looking honestly at yourself and what needs to change in your life?

Tuesday – Read Genesis 32:24. Notice the verse says “a man wrestled with him.” It does not say “Jacob wrestled with him.” This means that this “man” initiated the struggle. Who was this man? God. God pursued Jacob in order for him to see the truth about himself. God had probably been pursuing Jacob for a long time, but Jacob was good at denial. Finally, all the thoughts and pain were too much. God wrestled with Jacob. Jacob was resisting the truth, otherwise it would not be wrestling. What truth are you resisting in your life?

Wednesday – Read Genesis 32:25. This is a peculiar verse. Why would God “wrench” Jacob’s hip to slow him down when God easily had the power to stop him? God was trying to wear him down, not destroy him. The text tells us that they wrestled all night. Often times we are not willing to yield to God until the fight in us is gone. We have to run out of strength and excuses. When God wrenched Jacob’s hip, he knew he could not afford to be arrogant anymore. There was a power holding him greater than himself.

Thursday – Read Genesis 32:26. There was a lot of fight in Jacob. He kept resisting God. God commanded him to let go but Jacob could not. Notice Jacob’s statement to God: “I will not let you go unless you bless me!” In other words, “I will yield if you will help me out of this jam with Esau.” Jacob wanted help from God without having to change. How often it is the case that many people want the benefits of faith without having to be transformed by God. This is impossible. If you desire something significant from God, be prepared for God to do some serious work on you.

Friday – When do you wrestle with God? Why do you wrestle with God? This text is about who is in charge of your life. Who will you trust – yourself or God? Where will you turn for help? Will you continue to fight God or will you allow your heart to be changed?



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Wrestling with God - Confrontation

Sunday, November 6, 2011

Sermon by: Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Scripture Lesson: Genesis 32: 22-25

Today I begin a new sermon series called “Wrestling with God.” For the next three weeks we are going to take a closer look at the story of Jacob wrestling with God. This is a powerful story of transformation. Through Jacob’s struggle we can learn how God can transform our own lives and give us a heart for Him.

So often we hear about people's hearts being changed by God. But how does that happen exactly? We all know people who have experienced dramatic changes in their lives. They have overcome addictions. They have overcome bad attitudes. They are not the same people they used to be. When they're asked how it happened, they often speak of their hearts being changed by God. Well the story of Jacob wrestling with God gives us the clues as to how this transformation can happen.

I'll make a promise to you today. If you are willing to journey with me through this challenging passage of scripture for the next three weeks God can change your heart too. And you will walk in newness of life.

So if you have a hunger to be the person God wants you to be – if you desire to be changed from the inside out – if you're tired of lying to yourself about who you are and who you have become – if you feel that there has always been something holding you back from real life – this series is for you.

Today as I begin a new sermon series wrestling with God I want to ask this question: **Who's in charge of your life?** This is the overarching question of this series. Until you can answer this question honestly you'll never develop a heart for God.

Before we go ringside and witness Jacob’s wrestling match with God we need to understand a little bit about Jacob and how he got into this mess. Some of you may remember from your Sunday school lessons that Jacob grabbed his twin brother Esau’s heel when he was born. Jacob’s name literally means “Grabs the heel.” Figuratively, the name means, “He deceives.”

From the very beginning it seemed that Jacob was always trying to get an angle on everything. He was a trickster. Today we might call him a con man. The defining moment of his life was when he stole his brother, Esau's birth right. His father Isaac was getting up in years and had bad vision, so he had a difficult time telling his two sons apart. So when the time came for Isaac to give Esau his birthright Jacob wiggled his way ahead, called himself Esau and snatched Esau’s inheritance away. In one act he deceived his father Isaac and his brother Jacob. He fled from home to live with his Uncle Laban.

From that moment on Jacob believed that whatever he wanted in life he could take. He could lie, cheat, and steal his way to success. He was confident and conceited and would have believed with Gordon Gecko in the movie Wall Street that “greed is good.”

Despite Jacob's deplorable actions God still had his hand on him. Before Jacob was born God had chosen him to be God’s vessel for His people. God had big plans for him. So God was very patient with Jacob.

Fast forward 20 years later. Jacob has a family of his own but is still living a deceitful life. In fact, in our text Jacob is fleeing again because he had duped his Uncle Laban. God

tells Jacob to go back home. Jacob is listening to God with one ear and decides to do it.

Out text finds Jacob anticipating his meeting with Esau. He hasn't seen his brother in 20 years! He knows that Esau is the one person he can't lie to. He knows the truth about Jacob. He is still angry at his brother Jacob and wants to kill him for taking his birthright. He is seething. He has been holding this anger for 20 years. In fact, when Esau finds out that Jacob is coming home he gathers an army of 400 men to find Jacob and kill him.

When Jacob discovers there is a price on his head he sends expensive gifts to Esau and his army to appease them. But Esau's anger cannot be quenched with gifts. Jacob's deceitful ways and his lies are finally catching up with him. The truth is coming to the surface. He needs some time alone to think things through. He sends his family ahead so he can think. It is night and he is alone. Verse 24 says, "Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak."

Can you imagine what was going through Jacob's mind that night? "What if the gifts don't work? What else can I do to get out of this jam? I'm Jacob and can do anything. There must be some scheme for this predicament. There must be some way out of this!"

But the truth was heavy and it was getting harder and harder for Jacob to resist. Enter God. The text says that it was at this moment that a man wrestled Jacob. Notice it does not say Jacob wrestled with the man. It says "a man wrestled with Jacob." This can mean only one thing – God initiated the struggle. God had been pursuing Jacob for a long time. God wanted to change Jacob's heart for a long time. Jacob kept resisting and resisting and resisting, but God kept hounding him. Finally it all came to a head that night in this wrestling match. Jacob was resisting God's truth for his life and God was not giving up on Jacob.

This wrestling match reveals something compelling about the nature of God. God pursues us and will not give up on us. God will keep tracking us down until we recognize the truth of our lives and desire to be changed by Him. The poet Francis Thompson experienced this characteristic of God which is why he called God

"The Hound of Heaven!" Wesley defined this aspect of God through his understanding of "prevenient grace." This is a fancy phrase for describing how God relentlessly knocks on the door of our hearts until we relent.

When God comes knocking he will always come with the truth, for God is truth. Only the truth will set us free. We like to say that God is love and that is true. However, we cannot divorce love from truth. So here is the truth: **We cannot change until we are willing to face the truth about ourselves.**

People resist this hard. This is why most wrestling matches with God occur – people are unwilling to face the truth about themselves and what needs to change in their lives. Human beings are very creative at avoiding the truth. We are quick to blame others and avoid responsibility. We are good at playing the victim. We are experts in denial. Some even abuse drugs and alcohol seeking to escape the truth.

Psychologists will tell us that most mental anguish in the world comes from our unwillingness to face the truth of our lives. The irony is that many of us will suffer more by not facing the truth rather than going through the necessary suffering of facing truth and finding healing. We have the tendency to flee from the truth.

This is what Jacob had done his whole life. He deceived and fled. But there was one person he could not flee from – God. He could not get escape God. He had to confront the truth.

What is the truth you are resisting in your life right now? Is there a sin you are struggling with? Is there a relationship issue? Is there a lie you have told yourself for a long time? Hear this: God will keep pursuing you until you confront the truth and deal with it. You will not be free until you do. You will not find joy until you do. God cannot change your heart until you do.

Jacob was stubborn and the truth was just too hard to bear. He knew his life was a house of cards. He knew he had gotten by with smoke and mirrors. He knew his life was built on lies, deceit, and selfishness. But this was the only way he knew how to live.

Verse 25 says, "When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him."

Now why would God do this? God could have destroyed Jacob with his pinky! Well, God was not trying to destroy Jacob; He wanted Jacob to wear himself out. The text says that they wrestled all night.

When we fail to embrace the truth, God desires to wear us down. Most of us are not willing to yield to God until the fight in us is gone. Does God intentionally inflict pain on us to teach us a lesson? No. But God does allow us to be foolish if we want to and feel the pain of our own choices. The injury occurred because of Jacob's own resistance. The text says that Jacob was injured "as he wrestled" with God. Jacob injured himself.

How often have we heard people in 12 step programs say, "My life has become unmanageable! I need help. I need to change. I need a power greater than myself to heal me."

Jacob arrived at this moment when his hip was wrenched. He knew he could not afford to be arrogant anymore. There was a power greater than himself holding him. He recognized he was not invincible. He was vulnerable and humbled. He was broken.

We cannot change until we are broken – broken of our selfish will – broken of our lies – broken of our deceit – broken of our sin. Once we are broken God can do something with us.

Jacob was a fighter and he kept fighting God. Verse 26 says, "Then he said, 'Let me go for the day is breaking.'" In other words, God was telling Jacob to stop resisting. Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." In other words, "I will stop fighting you if you will just get me out of this jam I am in."

Jacob wanted help from God without having to change. How often it is the case that people want the benefits of faith without having to be transformed. We call it "Bargaining with God." "Okay God, if you will just get me out of this mess, I will do better. I will give more money to the church. I will call my mom more often..." Ever heard that? Ever said that?

If you desire something significant

from God, be prepared for God to do something significant with your heart. This is how God operates. He does not do anything half way. God says, "You want that pain to go away? Well, then we are going to have to find why that pain is there and make a change. You want a meaningful relationship in your life? Well, then we are going to have to go to that place inside you that is causing you to push people away and make a change. For until you allow me to mold and shape you – until you allow me to truly love you – you will never be free."

Let me ask the question I asked at the beginning of this message: Who is in charge of your life? Who will you trust? Yourself or God?

Jesus had his own wrestling match with God in the garden of Gethsemane. Christ was fully God and fully man. As he faced the cross, he wanted to escape. He prayed, "Lord, let this cup pass from me." In other words, "Lord, I do not want to go through with this." But then he prayed, "Not my will, but yours be done." Because Jesus was willing to be broken of his own will the world was redeemed. There was life! "Eye has not seen nor ear heard what God has prepared for those who love him."

Hear this profound prayer by Thomas Merton: "My Lord God I have no idea where I am going, I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen."

Will you continue to fight God or will you allow your heart to be changed? Real life is on the other side of trusting God. Amen.