

For those who were unable to join us for the evening communion service last Sunday, I urge you to revisit the message from that sacred night before our next service. Each communion is a unique opportunity for spiritual growth that you don't want to miss.

**From Jacob to Israel:
Wrestling with God and Men
To Achieve Your Divine Potential**

Genesis 32:28 (NKJV): 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.”

Unless you are willing to wrestle with God and **men**, you will never become all God created you to be, and you will never achieve your divine potential!

Introduction

We have learned much from Jacob from the past few messages I have given about him. 1) How to pray and not give up until God blesses you, 2) how to come to the altar for an encounter with God, and 3) how to view your trials and struggles of this life as opportunities for revelations from God.

We will expound on this message further in DADS Class this week.

The story of Jacob's transformation into Israel provides a revelation of God's way of perfecting his saints. Jacob's life is a story of struggle, perseverance, and, most importantly, surrender to God.

Everyone experiences trials and struggles in life. There is no escaping them! Due to the world's fallen nature, they are an unavoidable part of human existence. Even Christ tells us that in this world, we will have trouble.

But like Jacob, if we wrestle with God and with men, we can be transformed into the people God created us to be.

We must wrestle internally with ourselves, renewing our minds to God's will, and then externally with men, who will encourage us to resist God's will.

Men will usually encourage you to sin. After all, nobody wants to go to hell by themselves!

Through enduring life's struggles, God shapes our character and transforms us into His masterpiece!

James 1:2–4 (NKJV): My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Genesis 3:17-19 says the ground has been cursed for our sake to make life hard for us. But, all of our trials and struggles are foreknown and limited by God to no more than what we can handle. If we submit to Him, He will work all of them out for our good, molding us more into an image like him.

Therefore, we must learn to view the struggles and trials of this life as opportunities for growth, shaping us into the perfection God designed us to achieve. It is not about how we see ourselves or how others perceive us but about becoming who God intends for us to be.

We must be willing to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and wrestle with God and man until we ultimately submit to God by following him.

Our wrestling with God isn't about resisting Him; it is about engaging with Him, aligning our will with His, and learning to depend on His strength and guidance.

If you wrestle with God and win, you lose. When you wrestle with God and lose, you win!

Living in a fallen world means facing challenges in relationships, work, and society.
Eph 6:12 (NKJV) — 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

This reminds us that our ultimate battle is spiritual. To Satan, we are nothing but expendable collateral damage in his eternal war against God, and he uses human interactions and natural events to turn us against God.

Jacob's life was full of constant struggles, but each trial was part of God's divine plan. We all need to pray that we can see through our struggles and trials that God's hand of guidance and deliverance is always there for us to hold onto in our times of need.

Brief Summary of Struggles in Jacob's Life

- Jacob wrestled in his mother's womb with his brother and was born holding Esau's heel, earning the name "Jacob," meaning "heel-grabber" or "supplanter" (Genesis 25:26).
- He had to compete for his father's love. Isaac loved Esau, and Rebekah loved Jacob.
- He manipulates Esau into selling his birthright for a bowl of stew, taking advantage of Esau's hunger. (Genesis 25:29-34).
- He deceives his father, Isaac, with his mother's help, into giving him the blessing intended for Esau, further straining their relationship (Genesis 27:1-29).
- He has to leave his home to Haran, his uncle Laban's household, fearing Esau's revenge (Genesis 27:41-28:5).
- On the way, Jacob dreams of a ladder reaching to heaven, where God renews the covenant He made with Abraham, promising land, descendants, and protection (Genesis 28:10-22).

- Jacob works for Laban for seven years to marry Rachel but is deceived into marrying Leah instead. He works another seven years for Rachel (Genesis 29:15-30).
- After tension with Laban, God commands Jacob to leave with his family, and they secretly depart for Canaan (Genesis 31:1-21).
- Returning to Canaan, Jacob fears Esau's wrath and sends gifts ahead to appease him (Genesis 32:3-21).
- Jacob divides his camp to prepare for potential conflict and prays for God's protection, acknowledging his unworthiness and dependence on God (Genesis 32:9-12).
- Left alone at night, Jacob wrestles with a divine being until daybreak (Genesis 32:24).
- Despite being injured in the hip, Jacob refuses to let go until he receives a blessing (Genesis 32:25-26).
- The divine being changes Jacob's name to **Israel** ("one who wrestles with God"), signifying his transformation and a new identity in his relationship with God (Genesis 32:28-30).

This marks a turning point in Jacob's life, as he moves from striving in his own strength to relying on God's promises and blessings.

Jacob wrestles with a divine being throughout the night. This wrestling represents Jacob's spiritual struggle with God, grappling for a blessing that became a new identity.

Hosea reflects on Jacob's life and this encounter:

"He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and in his strength, he struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; he wept and sought favor from Him." (Hosea 12:3-4)

Verse By Verse Exposition

24 Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.

Being "left alone" signifies Jacob's being left to himself to struggle with his internal and external fears, guilt, and unresolved tensions from his past, including his fear of Esau, his deceitful past, and his desire for God's blessing.

The "Man" (Hebrew: *ish*) is an angel, specifically the guardian angel of Esau, sent to challenge Jacob. Some interpretations suggest this "Man" is a divine being, representing God Himself.

Heb 12:6 (NKJV) — 6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.

25 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.

Jacob's victory wasn't in defeating God but in surrendering to Him. His new name, Israel, signified that he had prevailed not by strength but by dependence on God.

2 Corinthians 8:12 For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has.

A willingness to continually engage with God and surrender opens the door for God's power to best bless us by transforming us.

Because Jacob did not give up but held on, as we are told to stay continually in prayer, the angel left a mark on him, which symbolized his victory in not giving up. It signifies our limitations in spiritual struggles. While Jacob "prevailed," the injury reminds him—and us—of our dependency on God for ultimate strength and victory.

The injury teaches humility. Even in our victories, we bear marks of dependence on God.

26: "And He said, 'Let Me go, for the day breaks.' But he said, 'I will not let You go unless You bless me!'"

Jacob's persistence is our example of spiritual perseverance until our change comes. Jacob refuses to let go, demonstrating that blessings often come through persistence in struggle in prayer.

The breaking of day signifies a transition: Jacob moving from darkness (using his strength) to light (his transformation trusting in God's strength).

Our blessings often require persistence. As Jacob clung to the angel, we are called to cling to God in prayer and faith during our struggles.

Lk 18:1 (NKJV) — I Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,

27 So He said to him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Jacob.'

Asking Jacob's name is not for God's information; God already knew his name. This was for Jacob to think about himself, his faults and shortcomings. "Jacob" (meaning "heel-grabber" or "supplanter") reminds him of his past deceit, particularly in taking Esau's blessing.

The question invites Jacob to confront his identity. Before transformation can occur, he must acknowledge who he is.

True transformation begins with self-awareness and confession.

To grow spiritually, we must confront and own up to our past actions. We must wrestle with our internal ungodly desires. What did God tell Cain?

Genesis 4:7 (NKJV): If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

We all have internal thoughts that are against the will of God. Paul had them.

Romans 7:19 (NKJV): For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

If we wrestle with our imperfect internal thoughts and fail to conquer them, the Scriptures tell us this:

1 Jn 1:9 (NKJV) — 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Then, we start again with the grace He has given us.

1 John 3:7 (NKJV): Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.

28 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.'

The name "Israel" (*Yisra'el*) is derived from the root *sarah* (to strive or struggle) and *El* (God). It signifies Jacob's spiritual transformation into a new identity and a higher calling, from a deceiver to a man of faith who contends with God and men.

Other name changes that redefine God's people's identity to align with his purposes and promises.

- Abram to Abraham
- Sarai to Sarah
- Hoshea to Joshua
- Simon to Peter
- Saul to Paul

Jacob is no longer defined by deceit or selfish ambition but by a deeper relationship with God and a life of divine purpose.

His struggle with God was his acknowledgment of his sins to God. We, too, must not be afraid to admit we have sinned to Him. God knows it! Confess it and pray for strength to overcome them!

Jacob's struggle with "men" refers to his conflicts with Esau, Laban, and his own natural tendencies.

His new name represents a new identity.

When we wrestle with God and ourselves internally and other men externally to align ourselves with God's will, we, too, will be transformed into a new identity.

We are given a new identity when we accept and receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

*2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV): Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

29 Then Jacob asked, saying, 'Tell me Your name, I pray.' And He said, 'Why is it that you ask about My name?' And He blessed him there.

The angel's identity is not as important as the blessing itself. Sometimes, we seek clarity or answers from God, but He gives us what we truly need: His blessing and presence.

Sometimes, we pray so hard for God to relieve us from our struggles. We wrestle day after day, trying to get relief and an understanding. Paul also experienced similar trials and prayed for an answer. God gave him one.

2 Co 12:9 (NKJV) — 9 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

30 So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: ‘For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.’”

Jacob recognized this as a direct encounter with God’s presence, even if He was veiled in human form. Encounters with God leave us changed, often marked by a deeper sense of purpose and gratitude.

31 Just as he *crossed over* Peniel *the sun rose on him*, and he *limped on his hip*.”

The Scripture says, “he *crossed over*,” meaning he persevered. He did not give up. He pressed on to what God had called him to!

The *rising sun* symbolizes Jacob’s renewal and transformation. He emerges from the struggle with a new identity and a divine blessing.

The *limp* reminds us of the struggle. It is the scar of spiritual growth, the mark of honor, not defeat. Sometimes, we experience pain or emotional hurt from a struggle, but this should be a reminder that God brought us through, and what was meant to break us down actually built us up!

Every struggle leaves a mark, but these marks remind us of God’s faithfulness and the transformation He brings.

Jacob's transformation into Israel teaches us that we can only become who God has called us to be through perseverance, humility, and surrender to God.

This passage invites us to engage with God in our struggles, trusting that every challenge is an opportunity for growth and a deeper relationship with Him.

Wrestling with God refines and defines us. It deepens our faith and transforms us into faithful servants of God.

As believers, we have the privilege of challenging God not to resist Him but to draw closer to Him and be strengthened through the struggle with Him.

Wrestling with God often happens in prayer, where we persist, question, and seek His will. Jacob never gave up, and we *must never give up*!

Jesus wrestled with God in Gethsemane and prayed, “Not My will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Three times of wrestling in prayer led to surrender and victory. He lost, but He won and is now seated at the Father's right hand.

Wrestling with doubt, pain, and unanswered prayers in our trials refines and builds our faith.

Like Job, we question but remain steadfast, trusting that God is just and sovereign. He will restore us!

We must learn to hold on like Jacob. We must cling to God, refusing to let go until He blesses us and changes our name.

Genesis 32:28 (NKJV): 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.”

Practical Examples of Wrestling With God and Man

Personal Relationships

Society normalizes casual dating, cohabitation, or other relationships that don't align with God's design for love and marriage.

God calls for purity and commitment in relationships.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality.

(1 Thessalonians 4:3, NKJV)

Waiting for marriage can cause us to struggle with God and men, which may lead to criticism or pressure from peers, but it also reflects faithfulness to God's Word.

At Work

Cutting corners, lying, or exaggerating achievements are often necessary for success.

God calls for honesty and integrity.

Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men. (Colossians 3:23, NKJV)

Standing firm in truth might cost a promotion or lead to tension with coworkers. Choosing God's will shows trust in His provision rather than relying on unethical shortcuts.

Prioritizing Worship Over Cultural Pressures

Weekends are often seen as a time for recreation, family, or personal projects, with little regard for worship or church involvement.

God commands His people to gather in worship and keep Him first.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some. (Hebrews 10:25, NKJV)

Prioritizing church attendance or personal devotion time may require sacrificing other activities or leisure, but it reflects obedience and love for God.

Handling Finances

Culture emphasizes accumulating wealth, material possessions, and living beyond one's means.

God calls for stewardship, generosity, and trusting Him to provide. *“Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase.”* (Proverbs 3:9, NKJV)

Honoring God through tithing or giving to others may feel risky when finances are tight, but it demonstrates trust in God’s faithfulness rather than worldly security.

Raising Children in Faith

Modern culture often promotes moral relativism and secular values and prioritizes children’s success over their spiritual development.

God calls parents to train their children in righteousness.

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”
(Proverbs 22:6, NKJV)

Prioritizing spiritual growth through prayer, Bible teaching, and church involvement might mean limiting extracurricular activities or resisting cultural influences.

Forgiving Others

Society often promotes holding grudges, seeking revenge, or “cutting off” difficult people.

God calls us to forgive as He has forgiven us.

“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32, NKJV)

Forgiving someone who has deeply hurt you can feel counterintuitive and culturally “weak,” but it reflects God’s grace and transforms relationships.

Sharing the Gospel

Culture often views religion as private and discourages open discussion about faith, especially the exclusivity of the gospel.

God commands believers to share the gospel boldly.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” (Matthew 28:19, NKJV)

Talking about Jesus may lead to rejection or uncomfortable conversations, but it fulfills God’s mission and offers others the hope of salvation.

Internally with Ourselves

To fulfill our divine potential, we must wrestle with our desires, weaknesses, and pride and submit to God’s will. As Paul writes:

“For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.”
(Romans 7:19)

Overcoming Self-Gratification:

Choosing spiritual disciplines like prayer, fasting, or generosity over comfort and convenience.

Submitting to God's Will:

- Letting go of personal ambitions to follow God's calling, even when it means sacrifice, as Moses did when he chose to lead Israel despite his insecurities (Exodus 3).

Living Righteously:

- Wrestle daily with the temptation to conform to the world. Choose holiness, as Jesus taught:
- *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me"* (Matthew 16:24).

Conclusion

Whether wrestling with God in prayer, facing opposition in relationships, or battling our own desires, remember that God uses these struggles to shape us. *"For those who honor Me I will honor"* (1 Samuel 2:30). Like Jacob, cling to God until He blesses you and transforms you into the person He created you to be.

Extra Notes

Jacob's Struggles with Men

Struggles with others marked Jacob's life:

Esau: Jacob deceived his brother to gain his birthright and blessing (Genesis 25:29-34; Genesis 27). This rivalry defined much of Jacob's early life.

- **Laban:** Jacob endured years of exploitation and manipulation, wrestling for his wives and flocks (Genesis 29-31).
- **Family Conflict:** Later, Jacob faced betrayal and division within his own family (Genesis 37).

Wrestling with men often reveals our character and forces us to confront our weaknesses. Jacob's struggles with Esau and Laban prepared him for his ultimate wrestling match with God. Jacob learned humility, perseverance, and reliance on God through these struggles.

Wrestling Externally with Men

- **In Relationships:**
 - We wrestle with unforgiveness when someone has wronged us. We tend to hold grudges. We must choose love and reconciliation over resentment, as Jacob eventually did with Esau.
- **In Ethical Decisions:**
 - Standing for truth and integrity in workplaces that prioritize profit over principles.
 - Resisting societal pressures to compromise on biblical values in relationships or business.
 - For example, prioritize worship over leisure or integrity over success.

Wrestling with God

- **By Persisting in Prayer:**

- Like Jacob, cling to God until you receive clarity, peace, or transformation.
 - Example: Wrestling with God over a life decision or unanswered prayer.
- **By Trusting Him in Trials:**
 - When facing pain or doubt, trust that God uses struggles to refine and bless you.

Like Jacob, we are all called to wrestle—with God, man, and ourselves. These struggles are not signs of failure but invitations to deeper faith, transformation, and blessing. Jacob's new name, Israel, reminds us that we can fulfill our divine potential through perseverance and surrender.