

How Can We Wrestle With God in a Good Way?

- All right. We're in a great book of the Bible, Genesis 32, How many of you, your whole family's just been in an interesting season since we started Genesis, Amen? And if you're new, I apologize in advance for about what's gonna happen to your family, so the way we're dealing with Genesis, as we get into it, it's this multi-generational case study. And we keep looking at how the decisions of one generation, impact and effect positively or negatively, the next generation and the generation after that. So where we find ourselves in Genesis 32, it's actually the third generation. So there was this couple, Abraham and Sarah, they were believers, they had kids, and then their kids had kids, so we're into the grandkids now, we're into the third generation, and the principles we're gonna look at today in light of the sermon title is, how do we wrestle with God in a good way? And what we're gonna deal with is a case study of conflict between two brothers, Jacob and Esau. But the principles, relationally, they apply to all kinds of relationships, family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, church members, the principles are sort of timeless, but we're gonna apply them to this interpersonal relationship. And so what we've got here, we've got a family where the boys were born as twins, and there was some parenting problems, quite frankly. And that is, that dad really liked one of the boys, Esau, and mom really liked the other boy, Jacob. So they kind of played favorites, and this made things worse for the brothers. So if you've got a sibling, just look back on your history, and these boys started fighting in their mother's womb. They were twins, and you know, mom could see, elbows, knees, fists, and she's like, "Boy, there's a lot of Muay Thai going on in here." The boys were fighting in their mother's womb, they fought all the way through their life, and they never outgrew it. Sometimes kids will have conflict with a sibling, you're like, "Oh, they'll grow out of it." Sometimes they don't. These boys never grew out of it. They fought every day of their whole life. They just never got along. And the parents playing favorites only made it worse. So dad's always trying to side with one, mom's always trying to side with the other, and the one boy, Jacob, he's a little more tender, and he's a mama's boy, and Esau is a little tougher, and he's daddy's boy. And what happens is, Jacob's a little more, eh, conniving, controlling, and cunning. He eventually takes the birthright and the blessing away from Esau, his brother who was technically born first. And if you know the story, Esau is kind of an angry guy, he's good at hunting, and fishing, and killing stuff. And he tells his brother, "I'm gonna slit your throat. I'm gonna kill you." And he meant it. Right, every once in a while, we'll say something to family, you're like, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean that." No, he kept saying it 'cause he really meant it. So then mom looks at her boy and she says, "Well, this comes down to a fight, you're a dead man." Like, "You're good at macrame, you're not good at combat sports." Like, "This is not gonna go good for you, so you need to run for your life. Go to my brother's house, your uncle Laban, and he'll take care of you." Now at this point in the story, Jacob has been away from his family for 20 years. Insofar as we can tell, he hasn't seen or spoken to his family for 20 years. And he has been getting abused by his father-in-law, Laban. Worked him for 20 years, tricked him into marrying both daughters, just financially took complete advantage of him, ruined his reputation, threatened his life, I mean, just literally made his life 20 years of hell on Earth. And so what happens at this point, Jacob has left home, he's away for 20 years. And what God tells him is, "Now is the time to go back." Right? And there are times that God tells us to walk away from certain people, and then he tells us to walk toward other people. And what God is telling Jacob here is, it's time to walk away

from Laban, and that part of the family, and it's time to walk literally back home, but who's waiting for him there? His brother. What's he gonna face? He doesn't know. The point is, if you're going to reengage with someone that has a murderous spirit, and this was the problem with Esau we looked at last week. They didn't just have a toxic relationship, Esau had a murderous spirit, and that is literally like, "I want to destroy you. My goal is to kill you." If somebody says, "Look, my goal is to kill you." What I would say is, "No more group photos for social media with that person," right? Just, if somebody looks at you and they're like, "Here's my goal. My goal is to take your husband, your wife, your kids, and your house." Like, well then, thank you very much, you know? No more tandem bike rides with matching sweatshirts, this is where we go our separate ways. So the problem here is, last time he saw Esau, he was a murderous spirit, that's why he had to run for his life. But God tells him, "Try again. go back to your family, try again." That's where we find ourselves in the story. And so the first principle is this. Obeying God can be difficult and dangerous. Some of you have been told, "Well, just do what God says and He'll bless you." Nah, it very rarely works like that. Usually, you gotta go through a real difficult season to walk into blessing. And just because you're obeying God, doesn't mean it's easy, and sometimes people be like, "I don't know why life is so hard, I'm obeying God." That may be why it's hard. The devil tends not to oppose and trip people who are wicked. Okay? "I Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him." He's right on the precipice of what is called The Promised Land, what we would call Israel. The angels show up, so he gets a welcoming committee from God, and when Jacob saw them, he said, "This is God's camp." So he called that place Mahanaim. And that means "Two camps." He's like, "Well, I'm camping here tonight, but so is God." heaven and earth had come together here, the scene and the unseen, the natural and the supernatural, He calls it Mahanaim, this is where God is gonna camp with us tonight. "And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau, his brother in the land of Seir, in the country of Edom." So, if last time you saw your brother, he is like, "I'm gonna kill you." The goal is give him a little heads up. Don't surprise him, maybe he'll calm down. "Instructing them, 'Thus, you shall say to my lord Esau,'" You could tell here, he's trying not to get in trouble. Anytime your brother calls you "Lord," he's a little scared of you. "Thus says your servant, Jacob. I have sojourned with Laban," He's like, your brother's coming home, but it's been 20 years. "And stayed until now." but God's really blessed him, "I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, female servants." He's really succeeded. "I have sent to tell my Lord in order that I might find favor in your sight." He's saying, "Your brother's come home, he's all grown up, he's doing very well. And he wants peace, not war." "And the messengers return to Jacob." Can you kind of sense the tension here? "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, with 400 men." Let me say that's either a good day or a bad day, but either way, it's gonna be an exciting day. "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed." "Last time I saw this guy, he said he was gonna kill me, and now he's got 400 other guys." "So he divided the people who were with him," women and children largely, "and the flock and herds," all of his business, "And camels into two camps, thinking, 'if Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape.'" So here's what's happening. Here's the big idea. There are certain times you need to walk away from some people, and you need to walk toward others. Laban was a bad guy, so God tells him, "Walk away." But who's he walking toward? Esau, as far as he knows, that's a bad guy too, but God called him to do it. This is the big idea.

You don't know people's hearts, but God does. You don't know where they're at, but God does. Jacob may have fears, but Esau may have changed. It's been 20 years. And the point is this, sometimes you need to live by the Spirit, not just by your rules, because rules only work when we have all the information. Sometimes there's family, friend, someone that we used to be close to, that now we're distant from, and we've had to separate for a season because they were murderous. Like, they're gonna hurt us, this is just not a healthy situation. But it doesn't mean that they've not changed. It doesn't mean that they have, it means that they may have. The question is, are you asking God, are you praying for them, so that you're guarding your heart against bitterness? And then also just asking God, like, "Hey, if you want me to contact them or to reengage them, or to check in with them, just let me know." And God lets him know it's time to go home. Now what's happening here is when Jacob left, he was one kind of guy, and when he's coming back, he's really changed. So in any literature, there are certain characters that are static, meaning they never change. They're just the same from beginning to end. One of the static characters in the story is Laban. For 20 years, no progress. He doesn't get saved, he doesn't say he's sorry, he's not generous, he's not loving, he's just a bad guy from beginning to end. He starts bad, he ends bad. 20 years, static character, no change. Jacob is what we would call a dynamic character, he changes. He started as a non-believer, he's coming back as a growing believer. He left as a guy who was single, he's coming back married. I mean, he didn't nail it, four times, but he's coming back with his four wives, You know, he left, he didn't have any kids, Now he's got 11 sons and one daughter, he left absolutely broke and poor, had nothing, ran for his life. And now he's coming back, he's very wealthy, affluent, and rich, God has really blessed him. He left as a guy who was a total coward, and now he's coming back, and he has courage. And what he's saying is, "What I ran from 20 years ago, I'm going to stand up to today." He's made progress. He's not perfect, but he's made progress. And what's happened is, those 20 years under Laban, they've toughened him up. When we start Real Men, men need to be tough and tender. Okay? You need to be tough for your family, tender with your family. The problem with Jacob, he was only tender, Esau was only tough. Esau's gotta learn how to also be tender, and Jacob's gotta learn how to be tough. Jacob wasn't gonna learn how to be tough at his house, 'cause it was controlled by his mother. And his mother was an overbearing, high-controlling mother. So she made sure that his whole life was all taken care of, and nothing bad was gonna happen to her baby boy. Well then she raises a man who really is too tender. He's weak, he's a coward, he doesn't like conflict, he manipulates, he controls. He's not a guy who is ready to be a grown man and lead a family or a business. But what happens under 20 years of Laban's leadership? He gets toughened up because he gets beat up. He basically gets beat up for 20 years, but God uses that to toughen him up, so he could be a husband, father, business leader, return home, here, he's right on the precipice of the land that was promised to his grandfather, Abraham, it's the Promised Land, we call it the nation of Israel. It's a great piece of real estate. It's a little complicated to own, but it's a great piece of real estate. And so he's going back to inherit that land which God had promised and pledged to him. So he's changing, he's growing, he's maturing. Now the question is, what about Esau? We don't know. Paul's got this line in the New Testament. He says, "Insofar as it depends on you, seek to live at peace with others." What he's saying is this. It takes one person to forgive, one person to apologize, and two people to reconcile. And what Paul is saying is, whether you're the one that needs to

forgive or apologize, all you can do is your part, and put your hand out, but for there to really be a reconciled, restored relationship, they're gonna have to do their part, 'cause it takes two people to have a relationship. What Jacob is doing here, he's going to do what he can, but he doesn't know what Esau is gonna do. And oftentimes, when we have conflicts with people, we have unresolved conflict in particular, or if it's a family member that's really hurt us, we could say, "Well, I'm not gonna do anything, you go first. As soon as they do what they need to do, well, they need to forgive me. I'm not gonna talk to them 'cause they're super bitter." Or, "I'm not gonna talk to them because they didn't say they're sorry." Like, you gotta go first, and the answer is, somebody's gotta go first. And either one can go first, and here, Jacob is the believer, Esau is still an unbeliever, and so Jacob is going to do what he can to reach his hand out, but he doesn't know what he's gonna get in response from his brother. And this is where, when you do the right thing, it doesn't mean that they're gonna do the right thing. I mean, Esau could forgive him or murder him. This could go either way. And here's what happens for Jacob. Can you sense the anxiety? Everyone and everything he cares about is now in the path of Esau, and Esau comes with, 400 men. This is one of two things, a welcome or a war. And you don't know, till it's too late to do anything about it. He's got women and children, and they're now in harm's way. These are his children in harm's way. And so what he does, he divides the family into two groups, and he tells us why. "If Esau decides to slaughter my family, this part of the family will die, but this part of the family can flee." I mean this is one of the most stressful, anxious, difficult moments of your whole life. Why is he doing this? God told him to. This is where you've gotta make sure you hear from God, 'cause if God didn't tell him to do this, this is the most reckless, foolish, destructive decision of his whole life. Some people read it so like, "Well, you know, sometimes it's good just to put your family in harm's way." No, I would not, no. You better make sure that you get, swallowed by a fish, puked up on a beach, and you know it's confirmed through a prophet and a burning bush or something, like you need to really hear from God if you're gonna put your family in harm's way. So here's what he does, he's feeling the stress, so he meets with God. And he's gonna pray. And here's a big idea. If prayer doesn't change your situation, it still changes your soul. Let me just pivot here for a minute. So you're dealing with something, we're all dealing with something, right? We all look into the future, there's someone or something that causes us anxiety and fear. We all have it, You're like, "The future looks bad, this person is dangerous, I don't know how this like, anxiety comes." And the question is, well, why pray? Well, 'cause one of two things will happen when you pray. God will change the circumstances, and/or, he'll change you to get through the circumstances. Okay? Sometimes God will answer the prayer, and it goes away. You're like, "Oh thank you Lord." Other times it doesn't go away, but God changes you, and he can get you through it. Okay? So that's why we pray. A lot of times people are new Christians, well, "So I prayed and it didn't work. God didn't do what I said." Well, because He's God, He tends not to get bossed around. That's just one of the perks of being God, God's not up in heaven going, "Well, they said so, and I heard an amen. So rock, paper, scissors, amen, I gotta do what they said." It's not like that. Prayer might change the circumstances, but prayer will change you to deal with the circumstances. So here's the longest prayer recorded in Genesis. "And Jacob said, 'Oh God of my father,'" That's his grandfather, Abraham, "And God of my father, Isaac." You see where he's grown in faith. He didn't pray before, he didn't worship before, he is now. And Jesus Christ comes as the God of Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob, that's who he's talking to. "Oh Lord, who said to me, 'Return to your country and your kindred.'" He's like, "Okay, God, I'm here, but I'm here 'cause you told me to be here. Like, I don't necessarily wanna be here, but I'm supposed to be here, that I may do good." And now this is a maturing believer. "I am not worthy." What is he saying? "I'm not a good guy, I've not lived a perfect life. I don't deserve anything, but you're a God who's gracious and patient and merciful. And I trust that you're you're gonna be that way to me as you were to my dad and my grandpa. I'm not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant." What he's saying is, "God, you've been super patient with me, and super gracious to me. And I can't tell you that you owe me anything. So what I'm asking for here is grace." He says, "For with only my staff, I crossed the Jordan," he's like, "When I ran for my life 20 years ago, here's what I had. One stick." One stick. Okay? "And now I have two camps." And now he's like, "I have such a gigantic family and business, it's unbelievable." So here's what he says. "Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I," what? "I fear him." He's being honest. Okay? Prayer is where you can be honest with God. He's like, "You know what? 20 years ago, I ran for my life. And now that I'm coming home, I'm still scared of this guy. That he may come and attack me," And here's the big line. "The mothers with the children." Let me say this, if you're a grown man, watching women and children get slaughtered, oh my gosh. "But you said," he's saying, "God, you make promises. 'I will surely do you good and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for a multitude.'" He's like, "God, you told me," okay, "God, you told me, go home, and that we'd have a nation of people." He's like, "Here comes Esau. God, just reminding you, just in case, you know, you forgot to write it down, like, you said to go and that we would live and flourish. Now, you've only always been good to me." And here's what happens. Sometimes when you're facing some of your greatest fears, it's good to look back and see the faithfulness of God. Like, "Okay, has this God ever shown up? Has this God ever come through?" What he's saying is, this God has shown up and come through, not only for me, but for my dad and my grandpa. So I got three generations of proof that this God that we worship, that He's a good God, and He's a dependable God. Sometimes before you go into your fear, you've gotta look back and remember His faithfulness. And that helps to encourage you, encourage, literally means it pours courage into you. Okay? And some of you, this is where our testimony is really significant and important. Sometimes when we tell other people what God has done in our life, it pours courage into them for their life. Like, "Okay, God did that? Okay. Well that's where I'm at. Well, He could do that again." Yes, there's where hope comes in. So what we see here with Jacob, he's saved, he's growing, and he's leading his family, and he's feeling the burden of leadership. And we see him growing by hearing from God and speaking to God. God spoke to him and he's obeying, and now he's speaking to God. And you just need to know for those of you who are maybe new Christians or non-Christians, any relationship really rises or falls with communication. Okay? And communication isn't just speaking, it's also listening. And so when we listen to God, that's hearing from him, this is why we have the word of God. If you want to get a word from God, open the word of God, God will speak to you and you need to listen and obey, and then prayer and also worship, and we're gonna sing again in a bit, worship is a way that we all pray together. That we all pray the same words from the same Holy Spirit. And so when we speak to God and we hear from God, that's how we cultivate and build our relationship with God. And so what I

would say to you is this, when you're in a difficult, dark, and dire day, you need to hear more and you need to speak more. Right? I always like to say, as things get darker, God's people gotta go deeper. You're like, you know what? Okay, this is a difficult season that I'm in. You know what? I need to hear from God more, I may need to spend more time in silence and solitude, more time in journaling, more time in Bible study, And I need to talk to God more, like, my prayer time is not gonna just be, "Hey Lord, thanks for the taters, amen." Like, I'm gonna get on my knees. I'm gonna shed some tears, and we're gonna talk about some stuff. And/or you may need to put worship music on in the car, or hit the house, or stay for a few services at church, and like, "I just gotta kind of sing and pray this out of my soul." Okay? That's what he's doing here. And what happens is he's transferring the burden to God. Burdens are gonna come on you in life, and right now he's looking at a massive burden. He's like, "My whole family business, everyone and everything I love could get slaughtered in front of me." That's a burden that is quite frankly, too big for a human being to carry. There are things that you can't carry because they will crush you. Now, when those burdens come, what we tend to do, is some things that don't make it any better. We can freak out. We could drink, we could drink and freak out. We could drink and freak out, and then go on the internet, you know? Find all the other people who are drinking and freaking out, and then ask them what they think we should do, then they give us drink recipes, and it doesn't help anything, that's the internet. I just explained the whole internet. So when a burden comes, what do you do with it? You gotta ask, "Okay, God, is this for me to carry? Is this for us to carry? Or is this for you to carry?" In this one? He's saying, "God, you gotta carry this one, like, I'm doing what you told me to do, but I'm afraid that it's going to destroy everyone and everything that I love." So let me say this. When you're carrying a burden that will crush you, prayer is how you transfer that burden to the Lord. It doesn't mean that the issue's gone, but it means that you're realizing, unless God shows up and gets involved, Like, "This is beyond me." Okay? And that's where faith kicks in. And so, let me say this as well. Has Jacob changed over the course of 20 years since he was last home?

- Yes.

- Yes, okay. So let me give you hope for family members. Okay? 'Cause sometimes people love their family so much, that they're like, "Are they gonna change? Are they gonna get saved?" Some do some don't. Okay? Laban, who he just left, doesn't get saved, doesn't change, isn't getting any better. Jacob got saved, is growing, is changing, is maturing. And sometimes when you're dealing with family, or friends, or former colleagues, or business people, you're like, they have a murderous spirit, they're in a very bad place, I need distance. But here's the good news as God has been working on you, God also could be working on them, you don't know. So Jacob is changed, and he's gotten saved, and he's growing. This doesn't guarantee us that people we love, especially extended family members, or even immediate family members. It doesn't guarantee that they're all gonna get saved and it's gonna be great, and we're all gonna have, some big reconciliation party, but it leaves hope. So at this point he's gonna march forward and here's the big idea. Repentance and restitution might lead to reconciliation. "So he stayed there that night. And from what he had, he took a present for his brother Esau." So he's gonna send a series of gifts to his brother. Why do you think he would send a series of gifts to

his brother? Maybe to try and fix the murder? Okay. Like, let me just tell you this. If you are home, and flowers get delivered next door to a wife, at 8:00 AM, 9:00 AM, 10:00 AM, 11:00 AM, 12:00 AM, 12:00 PM, 1:00 PM. And then the husband comes home, he did something really bad, okay? Yeah, he really, he did bad. Alright? And he's trying to send as many gifts before he shows up, so that she doesn't take the Thanksgiving turkey knife and use it on him. Okay? That's what's going on here. "200 female goats, 20 male goats, 200 ewes, 20 Rams, 30 milking camels and their calves, 40 cows, 10 bulls, 20 female donkeys, 10 male donkeys." It's a lot of gifts, right? "These, he handed over to his servants, every drove by itself," He's like, "One at a time, let's just load him up with gift, after gift, after gift." "He instructed the first, 'When Esau, my brother meets you and asked, 'To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you?' Then you shall say they belong to your servant, your humble, faithful, unarmed, pacifistic, servant Jacob. They are a present sent to my Lord Esau, and moreover, he is behind us, Jacob is coming.' He likewise instructed the second and third, and all who followed the droves. 'You shall say the same thing to Esau when you find him and you shall say, moreover, you're servant Jacob is behind us' for he thought, 'I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me.' So the present passed on ahead of him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp." So let me say this. When you have had a really harsh conflict with someone, disagreement, doesn't go well, you've sort of created a boundary, or maybe there's been a break, for here, it's been 20 years. What Jacob does here, he is initiating the relationship in conversation. And he does something that is really important, and that is to get the conversation, and the relationship started in a peaceable way. There's a researcher named Gottman, he's one of the leading researchers of our generation, I don't think he's a Christian, on relationships, and he says, one of the four things that'll destroy a relationship is what he calls a harsh startup. where you start a conversation, is gonna make it better or worse. If you walk in, you're like, "Hey, look, I'm really ticked off, and I'm frustrated, and I need you to shut up 'cause I got some things to say." I'm just telling you, it's not gonna end well. It's just not gonna. If you're like, "Hey, when's a good time to meet, let's schedule a time, let's be fasting and praying, let's jot down what we wanna say, let's bring in some people that are peacemakers." Okay, that's probably gonna go well. Okay? How many of you, don't raise your hand, but you're married, and you have potentially seen a harsh startup in a conversation? It never ends well, right? Usually where you start determines where you end. So what he starts with is, "Here's a gift, tell him I bring peace, and I'm coming. Here's another gift, tell him I bring peace and I'm coming." This is not a harsh startup. This is giving him plenty of time, Esau, to process, to prepare, even if at first he's angry or he's anxious, and he is like, "okay, okay, presents keep coming, the endorphin dump has happened, I'm a little calmed down, I'm in my right mind." He's setting this up for success. 'Cause sometimes what happens is, there's so much emotion intention in the relationship that we rush in, but that doesn't make it better. We need to give them time to prepare because here's the big idea. How long has Jacob been preparing for this conversation? Probably a long time. Esau is just hearing about it for the first time. So Jacob's like, "I'm ready to talk." Esau's like, "Whoa! All I've thought about for 20 years is killing you, so if I need now to think about talking to you." And so just because we're ready, doesn't mean they're ready. So he's giving Esau time to be ready. Okay? And I was thinking about this, so when I first studied Genesis and I taught this some years ago, I thought

here that Jacob was being a coward. Here's why. Here's Jacob, there's Esau, and he sends all the servants, women, and children first. Okay. If you're a man, you're like, there's harm, You're like, "Hey babe, get the kids, please create a human shield." Okay? Okay? And if you're single, now you know why, guys. Okay, you're that guy. 'Cause if you're a man and there's potential danger or harm, what do you do? You get between the danger, and the women and children. That's what you should do. That's what you should do, and some of you're offended 'cause I said men and women. Okay, you're the danger. Okay, so anyways, there's danger, and if there's danger, then the man gets between the danger in the women and the children. True?

- Yes.

- Amen? Alright. At least in our church, they do. The other, rainbow church disoriented, certain people that don't understand this, I don't understand. But anyways, what happens is, why is he sending the women and children in? Now, I thought about it today, and I think I've come to a different conclusion. I don't think he's being a coward, I think he's actually being very courageous. Because Esau doesn't hate the women and children, never even met 'em, and when the women and children walk into town, who are they gonna meet? All the family they never met. "Who are you?" "Oh, we're your aunt, we're your uncle, these are your cousins." "Oh wait, we heard about you, We'd never met you. Hey, well welcome." There's probably not going to be a violent response to the women and children. It's probably gonna be a welcoming response for the women and children. And what Jacob is gonna do, he's gonna hang back, he doesn't quite yet enter the Promised Land for a whole night. Now in ancient Eastern culture, it was an obligation to practice hospitality. It's not like Scottsdale where it's like, "Well, what hotel you wanna stay at? What spa you wanna go to?" They didn't have hospitality, people practiced hospitality. So you're like, "I need a place to stay." Well, we'll open our house. You could stay with us, or you're hungry? You could sit at our table. So if family shows up that you've never met, who's gonna welcome 'em? Extended family. "Oh well, come on over." And then very quickly, all the extended family's gonna realize, "They're not here to destroy us, like, they're unarmed, it's women and children, they keep bringing gifts, the kids are playing together, we had a nice dinner. Okay yeah, you could stay the night here, sleep here." And so they're gonna spend a whole night together, you know what happens when you get a little time with someone? Maybe you play a few games with someone, you sit by the fire, you have a meal together, you wake up the next morning and have breakfast. Guess what? You're friends. And so I believe what Jacob is doing here is actually quite strategic. There's only one person who's exposed. It's him. If somebody's gonna get killed, nobody else is gonna be caught on the crossfire. He's saying, "You all go into town, I'll wait right here. Make sure you all get settled in, welcomed, fed, loved, everybody can confirm that you're safe. And if Esau is going to murder someone, it's just going to be me. No one else is going to be hurt. And women and children won't see my murder." I think this is courageous. Do you see a different man?

- [Congregation] Yeah.

- First time? He's like, He's forced guilt, man, he's just, he's gone. He gone. And now here he's

like, "You know what? I'm willing to die to obey God. I'm willing to die to obey God. But I'm not willing for women and children, and people that I know and love to die for me to obey God." And so what I believe he's doing here as well, I believe he practices repentance and restitution. These things are very important. To repent is literally to turn around, it's a change of mind, change of heart, change of life. Previously, he stole from his brother. He stole. So what does he do? Runs. And now he repents, he turns around, he's coming back. That's what repentance is. You were going the wrong way, you turn around, you start going the right way. And by sending the gifts, I believe it was restitution. Because what he had done, is stolen. And so there's two things here at play. When you've stolen, you repent, you say, "You know what? That was wrong." But you also need to practice restitution, otherwise, "That was wrong, I stole your car." Yeah, and I'd like it back. 'Cause I'm walking now. You drive by and say, "Sorry," and I forgive you, but I would like my car back. And so what happens is, restitution is where you don't just say you're wrong, but you try and make it right. Try. Okay? If you stole money, give it back. Now what the other person can do, they can decide, if they want to, to forgive you. They can say "No, no, no, I forgive you. No need to pay it back." But the truth is they may need it. Right? Like let's say, the car analogy. Say, you've got a relative and like, "Okay, I'll sell you my car." Okay, great. "Here's the keys, it's gonna be 10 grand or whatever." Okay, great. And then you never pay 'em for the car. A couple years later you're like, "Yeah, sorry, I never paid you for the car." Yeah. "You want the money back?" Well yeah, 'cause now my kid's going to college, and I sold the car, and I was gonna give the money to my kid to go to college, and you didn't just steal the car, you stole my kid's college fund, and I do forgive you for stealing my car, but I still need the money back 'cause that actually belongs to the kid for college. And this is what happens all the time in our world. People wanna repent, but they don't wanna practice restitution. "Sorry!" You're like, "Me too!" Now let me say that I don't wanna weaponize restitution to where you get legalistic and put the screws to people. But I do want those of us who have taken to consider, if we need to give back what we have taken. What he's not doing here is giving a bunch of gifts to Esau, he's giving back what he stole. Now, he tricked him out of the birthright, but what did he steal? The blessing. His whole life has been blessed 'cause he stole the blessing. So he says, "I'm sorry I stole the blessing, and let me give back to you what God gave to me through the blessing." There's been a significant heart change in this guy. What we've seen previously, every time he's manipulative, he's conniving, he's deceptive, and he's always going to win and take, and now he's changed. He's moved from winning to worshipping, and he's trying to do the right thing. Let me say one more thing, before we get into the last section. When I first read this and studied it over the course of some years, Genesis 32:20, there's this little line, and it says that Jacob wanted to appease Esau. And I thought, well maybe he's tricking and deceiving. Now we're gonna go out, swim in the deep end of the pool for a minute on this concept. Let me just say by way of preface, I don't claim to be a scholar of Hebrew language, I went to public school, I think that's spelled with a K, and I, and I teach the Bible, and I tend not to get deep into the languages, I use the tools, but I tend not to speak in this way 'cause I don't want you to feel stupid, and I don't want you to think you can't trust your English Bible. But every once in a while, there's a word that was in the original text that when they heard it, it would've opened this complete understanding, and so it makes sense to pause and consider it. So when it says that, so here's what we know about Esau. He had wrath toward Jacob. Wrath like murderous

vengeance, justice, wrath. Jacob says "I'm going to appease him." The word there in the original Hebrew of the Old Testament is "Kippur." It later would be the word used for the most important day of the year in the nation of Israel, Yom Kippur. The Day of Atonement. The word literally means atonement. Atonement, it means, "at one meant." And what it means is, something wrong has been done and something needs to be done to make it right, so that you can be one again.

- Amen.

- Okay? That's what it means. This language of atonement is one of the most significant themes in the entire Bible. And that is, that when sin happens, something has to be done so that the sin is atoned for, and that the wrath is appeased. If memory serves me correct, I think it's like 79 times, this word appears, and it usually refers to the Day of Atonement. Now this is mind-melting. Okay? So what happened, Jacob had his 11 sons, He was under Laban, Laban was demonic. Part of the reason that Jacob had to leave Laban? He was gonna be the father of the nation of Israel, and Laban would've been the King of Israel. This is like Satan running heaven, this is like Judas over the disciples. Satan is always trying to get evil people to rule and reign in political and spiritual spheres of authority. That's exactly what he's doing with Laban. So God says, "You gotta go, 'cause we can't have the nation of Israel under the leadership of demonic Laban." He's on the precipice, he's literally on the precipice of entering into the Promised Land. He's got 11 sons, one more is coming, those are 12, they become the 12 tribes of Israel. The land that they're about to inherit was promised to his grandfather, Abraham. This will become the nation of Israel. This will become the Jewish people. What is going to happen is these 12 sons will become the nation of Israel, and the 12 tribes of Israel. And then eventually, a temple is going to be built in the place of worship for the presence of God, for the people of God, and the nation of Israel. And in that place, people would meet with God for the purpose of atonement. And in that place, they would go every year for the holiest day of the year, the most important day of the year, they actually called it, "The Day." Yom Kippur. Day of Atonement. Jacob's word. And what would happen is, God's people would take the day off and they would travel as Jacob is traveling. They would then stop at the base of the mountain, 'cause you go up to worship God, and they would ceremonially wash themselves, they would put on white, showing that God forgives sin and make sinners clean. They would then sing the Psalms of Ascent. If you read the book of Psalms, it's their worship hymnal book, there are certain songs that'll say, "the Psalm of Ascent," You're like, what is that? That's what you sing when you're going up to the Temple to meet with God in His presence. So they would sing the Psalms of Ascent, and on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest would come into the temple, into the presence of God, he would bring two goats to deal with sin on the Day of Atonement. Here's what's crazy. The high priest or the priesthood was descendants of Levi, one of the 11 sons that dad just sent into the Promised Land. The entire priesthood is gonna come through Levi. The high priest would then enter into the holy place in the presence of God, and he was a mediator between God and the people. He was a placeholder for the coming of Jesus, there's one mediator between man and God, the man Christ Jesus. He would go in and there would be two goats, and he would name the sins of the people over the one goat. And then he would slit

its throat, and its blood would be shed, and the sin would be imputed to the animal, and it would substitute itself and die to make atonement for the sinners. And then the other goat was called the scapegoat. The priest then would name the sins of the people, and then send it away very much alive. We still use the language of the scapegoat today. Sadly in our culture, the language of the scapegoat is usually negative, but in the Bible, is very positive. And it shows that only God can atone for sin, and only God can take our sins away.

- [Congregation Member] Amen.

- So God atones for our sin and he takes it away. The whole point of the Temple, was to set up a sacrificial system. This is the entire Old Testament. Until here, Jacob's on the brink of the Promised Land, the nation of Israel doesn't exist. The priesthood doesn't exist, the temple doesn't exist, the Day of Atonement doesn't exist, but here's what he knows. I'm a sinner and I need Jesus.

- [Congregation Member] Amen.

- I need atonement for my sin. So he is prophesying the rest of the Old Testament, and the coming and the dying and the rising of Jesus Christ with one word. It's like a hyperlink into a different parallel reality. And so what happens is, Jesus ultimately comes, and it is said of him, "Behold, the lamb of God who, takes away the sin of the world." He is Jacob's atonement. And what Jacob is saying is, "I am a sinner. And when there is sin, wrath comes. And the only way to remove the wrath from the sinner is for atonement, Kippur, to be made.

- [Congregation Member] Amen.

- Okay? Now, he's almost ready to enter in, but he's got one more fight. Here's where we find, wrestling with God in the dark, Genesis, 32:22-27. "The same night," he's all alone in the desert, in the dark. "He rose, took his two wives, his two female servants, his 11 children, crossed the ford of the Jabbok, he took them and sent them across the stream and everything that he had." And Jacob was left what? All alone. All the women and children are out of harm's way. He is alone in the dark, on the precipice of the Promised Land. "And a man," can you imagine how scary this was? It's dark in the middle of the night. Some dude shows up to fight you. Who do you think it is? Your bet is probably, Esau found me. Amen? I mean, it's dark. You can't tell if he's a ginger or not, but you just assume he is. So a man wrestled with him, what? Until the breaking of day. how many of you have ever been in a fight, wrestling match, combat sport, boxing, How exhausting is it?

- [Congregation Member] Very.

- Go eight or 10, not rounds, hours. This is exhausting. They wrestled all night. "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." He cripples him. "Then he said, 'let me go, for the day is

broken.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'" Here's the big idea. You can't go into the next season of life until God blesses you. "And he said to him, 'what is your name?' He said, 'Jacob.' Then he said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, which means deceiver, but Israel, which means wrestles with God. For you have striven with God and with men,'" there's a big line there, "'You have striven with God and men and have prevailed.' Then Jacob asked, 'Please tell me your name.' But he said, 'Why is it you asked my name?' And there, he blessed him, so Jacob called the name of that Peniel, which means the face of God." He's met God face to face. Here's what I believe. Jesus came down and wrestled with Jacob. Now, Jacob is a very old man, as a general rule, you shouldn't fight old men, but here, here, Jesus decides it's a good idea, so we're gonna go with it. "'I've seen God face to face, yet my life has been delivered.' The sun rose up as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day, the people of Israel, and to this very day, the Orthodox Jews 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." Every time they prepare an animal, they're told, you do not consume that, that is a reminder that God touched the hip of our great ancestor and father Jacob. So here's what happens. Couple of things, number one, strength is built through hardship and resistance. This is what's true physically. Physical training builds strength through resistance. We actually call it resistance training. What is true physically is true emotionally, and mentally, and spiritually. What Jacob here is doing, he's finding his pain threshold because, let me say this. The level of your leadership is the exact same as the level of your pain tolerance. If you wanna lead more, you need to endure more.

- Amen.

- Okay? And so for him to walk into the nation of Israel, to have the 12th son born, to launch the 12 tribes, to bring the rest of the Old Testament, to raise up the Levitical priesthood, to have his people build the Temple so that Jesus could come as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it's gonna hurt. 'Cause evil doers, and demonic, evil beings, they are gonna do everything they can to stop and to thwart the plan of God. And now this is part of the problem is that we have a very weak, a very weak culture. Where we are trying to make life as easy as possible for as many as possible. But what you lack is strength, and fortitude, and courage and character. And even the last few years, it's like, oh there's problems, everybody who's young, just go home and sit on the couch. Don't get married, don't start a business, don't go to school, don't take a risk. We'll just send money to your account. You don't even know to walk out to the mailbox, to get a check and go to the bank. We'll just deposit it. No resistance equals no strength. No resistance equals no character. No resistance equals no leadership. Okay? And this is now a cultural crisis. A bunch of very weak, soft people who wonder why they can't lead anything. It's 'cause they don't have the pain tolerance to do anything, or to endure anything. In addition, some people ask, so why could Jesus not take Jacob? Jacob here is a senior citizen, you know, I'm sure he's wrestling, His AARP card comes flying out of his pocket, it's been a long night, and everybody's like, why could Jesus not take Jacob? Could he take Jacob?

- Yeah.

- Absolutely. How many of you are a dad, and you've got a son? Okay, okay. How many of your sons wrestle with you? All of them? Okay, okay, okay. And how many of you, you meet their strength equally. You don't overbear, dominate, unless you're a horrible dad. a horrible dad. Kid's like, "Let's wrestle," you're like, "Boom! Yeah!" You get nothing for Father's Day, you're a complete and utter failure. When you're boys are growing up, they need rough play, and what they're trying to figure out, 'cause for them, the strongest person they know is dad, so they're trying to measure like, how strong am I? And their hope one day is stronger than dad.

- [Congregation Member] That's right.

- Okay? And dad's goal is that they never comes. Okay, that's the conflict. So what a good dad does, he just meets the strength of the kid to give them resistance without destroying them, but it strengthens them.

- [Congregation Member] Amen.

- God's a father. We're His kids. Sometimes, you're like, "Man, I'm really having to push through this," and God's like, "I know, you're getting stronger." "Well God, why don't you just come and take care of it?" He's like, "'Cause I need you to get stronger, because what's coming next is gonna require more strength than you have previously had, and I'm not punishing you, I'm preparing you." Okay? And so ultimately, Jesus, I think it's kind of funny. At the end, he just touches him and cripples him, Jacob was like, "Oh, okay. I guess, yeah, you could have won." Because, so I was thinking about it, do you remember "Kung Fu Panda?"

- [Congregation] Yeah.

- Okay, okay. and somebody's like, "It's pantheistic!" It is. Okay, anyways. He would fight, and then at the end, he would grab him and he would put out the pinky, what would he say?

- "Skadoosh!"

- "Skadoosh!" This is skadoosh. This is Jesus' skadoosh, that's what this is. Okay? And so what happens is, Jesus changes his name. This is significant. You were Jacob, means trickster, deceiver, conman. You're now Israel, means you have enough courage you'll actually wrestle with God. Let me tell you this, if you're able to wrestle with God, then you're able to wrestle with anybody. And sometimes the change in your life is so significant that God literally renames you. See, some of you were enemy, God now calls you friend. You were orphaned, God's adopted you, He now calls you son or daughter, right? That Abram became Abraham, that Sarai became Sarah, that was his grandma and grandpa. Jacob becomes Israel, later, Cephas becomes Peter, Saul becomes Paul. When God really sees a transformation inside of you, he speaks a new name over you. And so this name, Israel, gets mentioned about 1,800 times in the Bible. It's a big deal. Gets a whole country named after him. Like "Markistan," that would be amazing.

You know? I just thought of that. If anybody's on the internet, you got a piece of dirt? Let's do it. Okay? So his life, he's been wrestling his whole life, right? He wrestled with his brother, Esau, he wrestled with, and tricked his dad, and then he wrestled with his uncle Laban, and Jesus shows up and he says, "Actually the whole time, you've been wrestling with me." Okay? Your whole life, my friend, you're ultimately wrestling, fighting, battling, God. You're like, "But no, there's somebody in front of me." Well there's somebody over them. Here's what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that God made Esau attack Jacob. I'm not saying that God made Laban abuse Jacob. But I'm saying that God used Esau and Laban to strengthen Jacob, so that then he could bless Jacob, and bring him into a new level of leadership. The people are hurting you, the people that are attacking you, the people that are exhausting you, God is using them to strengthen you, so that you'll be prepared for the next season that he has for you, that's the story of Jacob. Let me say it this way. If you're in a battle, be encouraged, it's to prepare you for the blessing. Jacob is in a battle, and it's to strengthen him, so he can walk into his blessing. And when does he wrestle with God? Like what time of day is it? He's in the dark. And when you are in a season of wrestling, it's almost always in the dark. "I don't know what's going on, I can't figure this out. What in the world?" And let me just transition this, try to make it as personal as I can, 'cause I love you. There are lots of ways to wrestle with God. Okay. Is Jacob physically wrestling? Yeah. Do you think he's emotionally wrestling?

- Yeah.

- Yeah, he's in the desert in the middle of the night, all by himself, and one dude showed up to fight him. Emotionally, that's a struggle too. Mentally, do you think he's struggling? Like, "Am I gonna die here? Is this my last day?" You think he's spiritually struggling? "God, I did everything you said, and here I am, just getting beat up all night." There's lots of ways to wrestle with God. Some of you are wrestling physically. "I don't know why my body is my enemy." Some of you are wrestling emotionally. You're like, "I'm not doing good, I'm not doing good." Some of you are wrestling mentally. You're like, "I'm struggling to, to be a healthy person." Some of you are struggling spiritually. Like, "God, are you there? Do you care?" Everybody's got their, their dark night where they're wrestling, and the blessing in this, is when he walks, so ultimately does Jacob walk away? Yeah, he does. So that means you're gonna live through it. Okay? But it's gonna hurt. How does Jacob walk away? He doesn't run away, he's not really excited and skipping away. He's limping away. When you wrestle through your dark night, you will walk away, but you're gonna limp for the rest of your life. And it's a gift to you. It humbles you, "Okay, I do need the Lord." It gives you wisdom. "Okay, I gotta be careful where I step." It's all gonna give you gratitude, "Could have been worse." And, let me just close with a little bit of a story, I was thinking about this. So I've been binge watching a show called, "Alone." Is that like a Christian show? No, it's awesome. So, what happens in "Alone," They drop a person off, they get 10 people, drop 'em off in the middle of nowhere, usually a very harsh, barren, treacherous environment, bears and coyotes, and bobcats, and javelina, and you get to bring 10 things, And then you gotta make a house, you gotta find food, you gotta start a fire, you gotta ward off the predators. You're totally alone. And the last person who doesn't tap out and call in gets \$500,000. Almost everyone who quits, it's not because they're starving. It's not because they're

an imminent danger, it's because they're alone. Grace and I were watching it last night, or I was, Grace fell asleep, but, there's a dude, military, big, thick neck dude. You know, he's got a bunch of fish, huge house, built, a cabin, fireplace, he's like, "I'm going home." What? Because he was alone. Mentally, emotionally, spiritually, most people find their breaking point before they do physically. Here, Jacob finds his breaking point, and God moves it. You can handle more than you think, you can go further than you anticipated. There was one season, my favorite season, a guy won and he was a pastor. So Grace and I are like, "Yes!" 'Cause here's my deal. Always root for the pastor, if you forget everything I've said today, if you forget everything I've said, remember this. Always root for the pastor, okay? He wasn't the toughest, he didn't have the best survival skills, I don't think he had been in the military, he didn't have the best piece of land, but he won, because he was the only one who knew that he wasn't alone.

- [Congregation Member] Amen.

- [Congregation Member] Yeah!

- He wasn't alone. And what they would say is that the night was the most difficult, the darkness. Nobody to eat dinner with, nobody to visit with, you can't snuggle up with your beloved, and it's dark all night and you're alone. We were learning Genesis, it's not good to be alone. And sometimes you have to be alone, and the good news is, you're still not alone. So this pastor would pray at night in the dark. And he would sing at night in the dark. And every time he got a fish, he would stop and thank God. And he worshiped his way through his wrestling. And he won. Because he knew, "I'm in the dark, and I'm wrestling, but I'm not alone." I'll close with this, maybe. Through Jacob comes the guy named, Jesus. And Jesus spent the night, in the dark, wrestling with God, all night, just like Jacob. He was gonna go to the cross, and He was gonna die, to what? Atone, for our sin. That the wrath of God would be poured on the son of God, so that we could receive the grace of God, and become sons of God. Jesus took our place, so he could put us in His place. This was the darkest night of Jesus' life, He's entering into the most significant moment of His life, He's literally in the dark, everyone abandons Him, He is totally alone, and what does He do? He wrestles all night. Sometimes friends, you gotta wrestle all night. And then He says this amazing statement, "Your will be done." And then He gets up, and He's like, "That's it. I'm now ready to go to the cross, I'm ready to die, I'm ready to experience the wrath of the Father, I'm ready to make atonement for the sin of the world." The wrestling in the dark is to prepare you for the next season. And that season will be the hardest thing you've ever been through, but God will use it for the greatest glory to Himself, and the greatest good for your soul. I love you, I'm sorry for what you're going through, but don't waste it, invest it. Don't run away from it, wrestle through it. Find God's will and know this. No matter how dark it is, or how much it truly, in fact, does hurt, you're not alone. And that ultimately, you're wrestling, with God. Who's not punishing you, but preparing you, for the next season of leadership and blessing. Father, thanks for a chance to look at a guy's life, I pray against the enemy's servants, their works and effects. God, I appreciate Jacob saying, "I'm afraid." God, we've all been there. Some of us are there right now. And God, as he was looking forward, all he saw was destruction, and so he looked up and he prayed. I pray that now we would do the same. God, I

thank you that he stopped to pray, and we stop now to pray and also to sing, which is our corporate prayer. God, thank you that Genesis is not just about what happened, but about what always happens. God, I pray for family and friends that we have conflicted or difficult relationships with. I pray for people that have a murderous spirit toward us. I pray if we have a murderous spirit toward anyone, that we would repent and make restitution. And Lord, I thank you that, that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is Jesus. Jesus, thank you for staying up all night. Thank you for wrestling in the dark. Thank you for walking in obedience to the cross so that there could be atonement for us. And thank you that you'll never leave us nor forsake us, and as we're wrestling in the dark, you're always there to lead us and guide us, and you're gonna use it to prepare us for the blessing that you have for us on the other side. God, I pray for these dear people to meet with you now, in Jesus' name. Amen.