

# ADVERSITY GOSPEL #5 – LIFE IS A STRUGGLE

*Sermon by Todd Lester*

*March 5, 2017*

Genesis 3:17 All your life you will struggle ....

**A. WE STRUGGLE WITH \_\_\_\_\_**

James 1:4a

c\_\_\_\_\_, c\_\_\_\_\_, d\_\_\_\_\_, m\_\_\_\_\_

**B. WE STRUGGLE WITH \_\_\_\_\_**

Romans 7:15, 18, 23

f\_\_\_\_\_, f\_\_\_\_\_, t\_\_\_\_\_, i\_\_\_\_\_, g\_\_\_\_\_, r\_\_\_\_\_,  
r\_\_\_\_\_, c\_\_\_\_\_, w\_\_\_\_\_, a\_\_\_\_\_

**C. OUR REAL STRUGGLE IS WITH \_\_\_\_\_**

Hosea 12:3b (NIV), Matthew 22:37-39

1. We doubt God's \_\_\_\_\_ so 2. We want to be in \_\_\_\_\_

**D. JACOB'S WRESTLING MATCH**

Genesis 32:15-30

Wrestling – an i\_\_\_\_\_ sport about trying to win \_\_\_\_\_  
God would rather have us f\_\_\_\_\_ than f\_\_\_\_\_.

## HOW TO WRESTLE WITH GOD AND GET A BLESSING

**1. I TELL GOD WHAT I THINK IS \_\_\_\_\_ OR \_\_\_\_\_**

Job 13:14-17, 23-25, Psalm 88:3, 18, Psalm 55:17

Key to lament: complain \_\_\_\_ God not \_\_\_\_\_ God (complain in \_\_\_\_\_)

**2. I APPEAL TO \_\_\_\_\_**

2 Chronicles 20:6-12

God is g\_\_\_\_\_, f\_\_\_\_\_, l\_\_\_\_\_, p\_\_\_\_\_, a\_\_\_\_\_

**3. I REMIND GOD OF WHAT HE HAS \_\_\_\_\_**

Genesis 32:9-12, 2 Corinthians 1:20

**4. I PUT MY \_\_\_\_\_ IN GOD**

Job 13:15 (NKJV), Genesis 32:31

## The Struggle is Real

What is (or was) your nickname? How did you get it?

Who is the person in your family who won't give up until they get what they want?

1. Jacob wrestles with God. What does that tell you about Jacob?

- He's stupid
- He's desperate
- He's loved by God
- He's strong
- He's not as strong as he thought

2. Why do you think God wrenched Jacob's hip?

- to humble Jacob
- as a reminder of God's power
- as a reminder of God's favour and faithfulness
- because pain brings people closer to God

3. Why do you think God chose to wrestle with Jacob?

- to show Jacob God's strength
- to show Jacob his own strength
- to see how much Jacob wanted to be blessed
- to correct Jacob's life-long pattern of struggling with people and God

4. How can you relate to this story?

- Taking big steps like Jacob did has resulted in some loss of stability and security for me
- The fact that Jacob's strong-willed nature and persistence was rewarded gives me hope
- I struggle with giving control over an area of my life or circumstances to God
- I'm encouraged that Jacob, with all his faults, was blessed

5. How have you discovered your own character?

- through struggle
- through pain
- through God's blessing
- through disappointment
- through disabilities

6. What are you wrestling with now?

- God  fear
- a decision  the past
- some person(s)
- trying to make it on my own
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Where are you at in your 'wrestling match' with God?

- still fighting
- injured, but still struggling
- bargaining
- limping
- fully surrendered
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Name a struggle that you have had in the last year that you can see has resulted in some good. How did it help you grow spiritually?

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Genesis 3:17 All your life you will struggle ....

### **A. WE STRUGGLE WITH OTHERS**

James 1:4a What is causing the quarrels and fights among you?

competition, conflict, disappointment, misunderstandings

### **B. WE STRUGGLE WITH OURSELVES**

Romans 7:15, 18, 23 I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate ... I want to do what is right, but I can't. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind.

fears, flaws, temptations, insecurities, guilt, resentment, regrets, compulsions, weaknesses, addictions

### **C. OUR REAL STRUGGLE IS WITH GOD**

Hosea 12:3b (NIV) (Jacob) as a man he struggled with God.

1. We doubt God's wisdom so 2. We want to be in control

Matthew 22:37-39 Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

### **D. JACOB'S WRESTLING MATCH**

Wrestling – an intimate sport about trying to win control  
God would rather have us fight than flee.

Genesis 32:23-24 After taking them to the other side, he sent over all his possessions. This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break.

Genesis 32:15-26 When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket. Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!" But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

Genesis 32:27-28 What is your name?" the man asked. He replied, "Jacob." "Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won."

Genesis 32:29-30 Then he blessed Jacob there. Jacob named the place Peniel (which means "face of God"), for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared."

### **HOW TO WRESTLE WITH GOD AND GET A BLESSING**

#### **1. I TELL GOD WHAT I THINK IS UNFAIR OR PAINFUL**

Key to lament: complain to God not about/against God (complain in faith)

Job 13:14-17, 23-25 Why should I put myself in mortal danger and take my life in my own hands? God might kill me, but I have no other hope. I am going to argue my case with him. But this is what will save me—I am not godless. If I were, I could not stand before him. "Listen closely to what I am about to say. Hear me out ... Tell me, what have I done wrong? Show me my

rebellion and my sin. Why do you turn away from me? Why do you treat me as your enemy? Would you terrify a leaf blown by the wind? Would you chase dry straw?

Psalm 88:3, 18 For my life is full of troubles ... Darkness is my closest friend.

Psalm 55:17 Morning, noon, and night I cry out in my distress, and the Lord hears my voice.

### **2. I APPEAL TO GOD'S NATURE/CHARACTER**

God is good, fair, loving, powerful, all-seeing

2 Chronicles 20:6-12 He prayed, "O Lord, God of our ancestors, you alone are the God who is in heaven. You are ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth. You are powerful and mighty; no one can stand against you! O our God, did you not ... give this land forever to the descendants of your friend Abraham? ... "And now see what the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir are doing ... O our God, won't you stop them? We are powerless against this mighty army that is about to attack us. We do not know what to do, but we are looking to you for help."

### **3. I REMIND GOD OF WHAT HE HAS SAID/PROMISED**

Genesis 32:9-12 Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my grandfather Abraham, and God of my father, Isaac—O Lord, you told me, 'Return to your own land and to your relatives.' ... O Lord, please rescue me from the hand of my brother, Esau. I am afraid that he is coming to attack me ... But you promised me, 'I will surely treat you kindly, and I will multiply your descendants.'"

2 Corinthians 1:20 For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding "Yes!" And through Christ, our "Amen" (which means "Yes") ascends to God for his glory.

### **4. I PUT MY TOTAL TRUST IN GOD**

Job 13:15 (NKJV) Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.

Genesis 32:31 The sun was rising as Jacob left Peniel, and he was limping because of the injury to his hip.

Luke 18:1-5 One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up. "There was a judge in a certain city," he said, "who neither feared God nor cared about people. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, 'Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.' The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, 'I don't fear God or care about people, but this woman is driving me crazy. I'm going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!'"

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## Icebreaker/Introduction

Use 'The Struggle is Real' activity to introduce this week's discussion. Choose one of the 2 questions (or use both) at the top of the page as an icebreaker. Then give time for participants to read through the multiple choice questions on the page. Note that there is no right or wrong answer and that some questions may be difficult to respond to but are good for getting us to think more deeply about what is going on in the story of Jacob wrestling with God. Take time to share some responses.

Do you think the perspective of 'life is a struggle' is accurate? Helpful? Too negative? What are some other ways of looking at life – life as an adventure, journey (with ups and downs, calm and storms), ...

## A. WE STRUGGLE WITH OTHERS

**Focuses on James 4:1a**

competition, conflict, disappointment, misunderstandings

What have you learned over the years about how to handle conflicts with other people?

Todd said that not everything in the Bible is condoned by God (eg. polygamy). Why is this an important statement?

## B. WE STRUGGLE WITH OURSELVES

**Focuses on Romans 7:15, 18, 23**

fears, flaws, temptations, insecurities, guilt, resentment, regrets, compulsions, weaknesses, addictions

What word (or words) in this list of 10 resonate with you the most? What are some words that could be added to this list? (eg. attitude, anxiety, depression)

## C. OUR REAL STRUGGLE IS WITH GOD

**Focuses on Hosea 12:3b (NIV), Matthew 22:37-39**

Todd said that our other struggles (with others and ourselves) are rooted in our struggle with God. What do you think he meant by this?

1. We doubt God's wisdom so 2. We want to be in control

Do you think that part of why we want to be in control is that we sometimes think that God doesn't seem to be? (do we doubt His power more than His wisdom?)

Read and discuss **Matthew 22:37-39**. Does this verse help to give a counterpoint to our struggles? (with others, ourselves and God)

## D. JACOB'S WRESTLING MATCH

**Focuses on Genesis 32:15-30**

Wrestling – an intimate sport about trying to win control

God would rather have us fight than flee.

Discuss Todd's statement that 'God loves it when we struggle with Him.'

Todd said that the deep work of God in our lives involves our identity. What are some things that you feel make up your identity? How do you see yourself and why might that be so? Is there some work for God still to do on your identity?

## HOW TO WRESTLE WITH GOD AND GET A BLESSING

### 1. I TELL GOD WHAT I THINK IS UNFAIR OR PAINFUL

**Focuses on Job 13:14-17, 23-25, Psalm 88:3, 18, Psalm 55:17**

How does this step help? Is it just a natural reaction anyway? Or is it helping us turn our attention to God?

Key to lament: complain to God not about/against God (complain in faith)

Do you think it is okay to complain against God when we are angry? In an earlier message Todd said that even when we do that God can understand/take it.

### 2. I APPEAL TO GOD'S NATURE/CHARACTER

**Focuses on 2 Chronicles 20:6-12**

God is good, fair, loving, powerful, all-seeing

What characteristics of God would you add to this list?

Do you think it might be better to title this section "I acknowledge God's nature" rather than "I appeal to...?"

How is appealing to God's nature helpful? Are we reminding God or ourselves? Does it just lead to more questions sometimes (eg. I know you are loving and all-powerful, so why is this happening – or does this show a misunderstanding of His power [which He has chosen to limited to allow free will]?)

### 3. I REMIND GOD OF WHAT HE HAS SAID/PROMISED

**Focuses on Genesis 32:9-12, 2 Corinthians 1:20**

What has God promised? (eg. to never leave us, heaven, Jesus' return, strength, peace, ...)

What has God not promised us?

### 4. I PUT MY TOTAL TRUST IN GOD

**Focuses on Job 13:15 (NKJV), Genesis 32:31**

Todd said that God touched Jacob in a place of strength to remind him to depend on God. What might be your 'place of strength' which God could touch to remind you of your need to depend on Him? How might He do that?

Todd reminded us that we only win our struggles with God by surrendering – did Jacob? Compare this idea to the story of the persistent widow in **Luke 18:1-5**.