**Intro**

(Make sure you are the one who is anxious in an opening story) The Bible is the kind of book that so many of us don’t pick up because we don’t even know where to start. In my first experiences with church, the youth group played some game where a verse was called out and the first person to find it and read it won the game. I got the impression that everyone else in the room was a Bible brainiac, and I was the only one that was lost. The funny thing is, I still can’t find half the books in here! (holding up a Bible)

We know the Bible is important. In fact, research shows that regardless of where a person is in their spiritual journey, regularly reflecting on Scripture is the most impactful practice a person can experience for spiritual growth. We’re on an 11-week journey through the Bible to help all of us engage Scripture. In addition to what we’re doing here on Sundays, there’s also a Monday through Friday Turn the Page Bible Experience that we are encouraging everyone to participate in. It’s not too late to sign up by going to our app for an email or podcast version. You can find past weeks at our website as well.

This series is a great opportunity to gain an overview of the Bible, but this isn’t meant to just be head knowledge. Our goal is that as we engage the Bible we will come to know God, His ways, and to allow the Holy Spirit to use the pages of this book to transform our lives.

This week we’re in a section of the Bible made up of Genesis 12-50 known as the period of The Patriarchs. Here’s a quick overview:

Video: Overview of Patriarchs

On the last page of the story, God initiated a new beginning by making a covenant with Abraham declaring that God would make him into a great nation, “the people of God,” who would be blessed to be a blessing for the whole world. But as we turn the page, we find that living into this identity as “the people of God” is not something that just happens. It’s a journey. And along the way, there is some wrestling.

**Overview of Jacob**

Family Tree Graphic So picking up the story from last week, here’s some family history. Abram is renamed “Abraham” and he and his wife have a son named Isaac. Isaac and his wife, Rebekah, become parents of twin boys, Jacob and Esau. You wouldn’t expect all of this to go smoothly now would you? Already, the birth story hints of the kind of trouble you only see on daytime talk shows. We’re not talking Oprah either. These are Jerry Springer problems. Jacob, the second born, is given a name that means “he deceives.” (Jacob – “he deceives”) I’m not sure what you could do at birth to deserve such a name, but he definitely goes on to live up to the name.

Make this more concise. First, he deceives his brother by stealing his birthright in exchange for a bowl of soup. Then, with the help of his mother, Jacob deceives his dying father and steals the blessing out from under his older brother. His dad’s vision is so bad, that he can only recognize which of his sons he is talking to by touching his arm. trim here or below Esau is *really* harry, so Jacob takes some lamb’s wool and covers his arm with it. Somehow his dad buys it and gives his blessing to Jacob instead of Esau. In his rage, Esau forms a plot to kill his brother for stealing his blessing too. Jacob’s mom sends him away to live with his uncle Laban to keep him safe from his brother. I’m telling you, this sounds more and more like a Springer episode every time I read it! For the next 20 years of the story, Jacob lives with his uncle and the two of them take turns deceiving one another there as well.

Trouble seems to have a way of finding Jacob, until finally there is a turning point in his life. As we turn the page to Genesis 32, that’s where we want to spend some time this morning.

**Jacob’s Wrestling Story**

Could the idea of two hands come into this part. So after 20 years of living in a foreign land with his extended family. Jacob is commanded by God to return home (Gen 31:3a “The LORD said to Jacob, Return to the land of your Fathers and your relatives.”) to the land that God had promised him and his family...But there is a catch...a big one.

As we just discussed Jacob has lived his life deceiving, striving, and manipulating.  He was always only looking out for “#1” and he was willing to do whatever it took to get ahead.

And as a result, Jacob left piles of wreckage from all his schemes behind him.  Don’t go to “our” yet. ~~Interpersonal Wreckage that is an unavoidable consequence of self-focused striving in our relationships, our schedule, our image or finances…~~

The oldest and most significant “wreckage” for Jacob was with his brother Esau...Esau had every reason to hate Jacob after he swindled their dying father into blessing him instead of Esau. In fact, Esau was so upset about the ordeal that he threatened to kill Jacob (Show Gen. 27:41 and highlight “I will kill my brother Jacob.”) for wronging him. Jacob’s striving and grasping had torn apart this family and left a rift with Esau that seemed beyond the reach of forgiveness.

So, the catch for Jacob in this moment is this...After 20 years of running away, in order to return to his homeland he has to pass through a territory called Edom which is run now run by guess who?!?! Esau!!!...Yikes!!!

I think it is safe to say that it doesn’t feel good when you realize that you are going to come face to face with a person who wants to kill you in a place where they have the power to do so without consequence…

But God knows Jacob and God knows that Jacob will be filled with fear so in the same breath He calls Jacob to go back to the land of his Fathers God promises Jacob something very important…

Genesis 31:3 reads; “The LORD said to Jacob, Return to the land of your Fathers and your relatives. **I WILL BE WITH YOU.”**

When God personally promises to “be with” Jacob He is guaranteeing his things with Esau are going to be OK success.  Jacob should have confidence right?! God saying he would be with Jacob is like Find a different image ~~Mike Tyson~~ (Scary Picture of Mike Tyson in his prime) promising to walk a grade schooler past a bully in the hallway (Juxtapose the picture of Tyson next to a picture of a pathetic looking bully...the more similar the pose between the two pictures the better!)

Is this part necessary? And God doesn’t stop there! Not only does He give Jacob a verbal guarantee of his protection but right as Jacob is about begin his journey home through Esau’s territory we are told that Jacob actually physically meets with the “Angels of God” (Gen 32:1)...

So right before Jacob is about to face his brother Esau he gets a personal guarantee from God that He is with Jacob and then a Jacob gets a confirmation of that guarantee as he meets the angels of God...

So the question is, how is Jacob going to walk into this encounter? He ought to be strutting with faith and confidence right?!

Not so much...Jacob shifts back into his conniving ways and the text says...filled with fear and distress (32:7-8) He divides everything he owns and his family into two camps in the hopes that When Esau kills everyone in one of the camps he might be fooled into thinking he got everyone.

This is not the actions of a man who is resting in God’s promise...This is a desperate and striving attempt to save himself.

And from this place of faithlessness, desperation and fear...Jacob finally takes a break from his anxious striving and calls out to God in prayer.(Gen 32:9-12 Highlight verse 12)

Jacob prays this amazing prayer affirming God’s faithfulness in the past throughout the generations and God’s promise to be faithful and kind to him and his future generations!

Surely ***now*** Jacob will be at peace and full of faith right?!

Nope. In the very next verse Jacob continues plotting and striving in his own power...He says amen to his prayer of trust in God and immediately starts scheming and preparing an elaborate bribe for Esau.

Despite what God has said to him that has been confirmed by his own experience Jacob is still stubbornly trying to take matters into his own hands...AGAIN! He is placing his trust in his efforts pacify or trick Esau rather than God’s promise.

But none of his efforts actually give Jacob any real peace…

And on the night before Jacob believes he’s about to face his reckoning with Esau we find him alone, standing on the banks of river in the middle of the night, filled with anxiety.

And then something very unusual happens...As Jacob stands alone and afraid, he literally starts wrestling with God (though he doesn’t realize at first that it is God).

They wrestle through the night until daybreak when the significance of the fight begins to dawn on Jacob. This can’t come before Gen 32:27 He finally realizes who he is wrestling with and since it was futile to fight, he simply holds on in an attempt to get God’s blessing.

So what is happening here? Well, God is showing Jacob that he cannot win in a fight against God. But God, in his mercy, is not going to destroy him. He patiently allows Jacob to exhaust himself. Maybe a bit more here.

When Jacob finally asks, “Who are you?” God declines to answer and instead asks, “What is your name?” Gen. 32:27 Ask: Why would he ask that?

Now of course God already knows his name, he knows everything about Jacob, but the question here is really about Jacobs character not his identity…

Did we talk about this earlier? Remember the name Jacob literally means “Heel-grabber, deceiver or usurper” and by giving his name here he is confessing his nature to God…He has to admit “I am a deceiver”

Jacob had to acknowledge the reality of his current identity before God would bless him with a brand new identity.

Then God said to him, Gen 32:28, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”

God renames the Jacob, the deceptive striver, Is this right? One of the ways the meaning of this word… Israel which means “God Fights” (Israel: “God Fights”) God first had to fight with him, but now God would fight for him.

This is an incredibly beautiful moment in the story of God and His people...Throughout his entire life Jacob had been striving to seize God’s blessing by his own efforts and by any means necessary.

Jacob saw the value of God’s blessings but he was too proud to just receive it without striving.

So God meets Jacob in his stubborn striving and patiently wrestles with him until he is ready to embrace surrender...and Before God lets him go, he touches his hip, and from that point on Jacob walked with a limp, a constant reminder that he is to no longer walk in his own strength but to rely on God in faith.

Don’t use “our” language until you make the turn. Jacob thought he would be able to return to his land simply by tricking his brother yet again, but here at the doorstep of his new home he is shown that self-sufficiency, trying to achieve blessing by our own striving is a dead end filled with wreckage, fear and anxiety...the only way to get the keys is to let God fight for him.

**Our Story**

In reading Jacob’s story, there’s a part of me that’s astonished at how someone could be so slow to figure it all out. What was he thinking? But I wonder if Jacob might say the same thing of us if he could read our stories, stories filled with the same kind of striving and manipulation. Time and again we strive to seize control from God and take matters into our own hands.

We strive in relationships to get what we want from people.

We strive in finances because we never feel like we have enough.

We strive to maintain an image because we want to be seen a certain way.

Add our “busyness” / schedule /calendar

Our striving has all the hallmarks of a bull in a china shop. *There is wreckage in our wake.*

And it’s wreckage that we, like Jacob, typically spend years trying to ignore. In the brokenness of those striving relationships it’s just easier to avoid that person. But we’re faced with the wreckage at every time we see them or are reminded of them. In the wreckage of our finances, it’s just easier to find ways not to think about it. Any way we can divert our attention to something else and put off the problem is sweet relief, but the wreckage remains. In our striving to maintain that image, the wreckage piles as we twist stories and white wash the real truth. The outside is clean, but the inside is a disaster. Add sentence about schedule.

Ask: What are you striving to achieve?

In the places we try so hard, do we really believe that God will come through for us? Don’t get me wrong. We’re not saying don’t take any action. Just sit back, “let go and let God.” It’s about being honest with ourselves in how we strive for our own agenda. When we’re trying to do all of this in our own power and fight our own battles, we’re going to leave behind all kinds of wreckage that sooner or later we’re going to have to face. The question is, what will you do at that moment? Will you call out to God or try to fix it yourself?

What makes this so hard is that this doesn’t simply happen with the snap of a finger. Living into our identity as “the people of God” is a journey, and a lifelong one at that. And this journey calls us to a life of daily surrender.

**Response**

Hold out your hand like this. (palm up, extended) (screen support with “my striving” on one side and “God’s power” on the other)

In your left hand (communicator holds out right hand), I want you to think about the biggest area of struggle in your life. This is the place where you feel like you have to strive more than any other to make it work. Consider its weight. It’s heavy with worry, heavy with anxiety, heavy with failure and regret. It’s a weight you’ve tried and tried to carry but can’t.

Now in your right hand (communicator holds out left hand), consider the immensity of God. We’re not even through the first book of the bible and God has already shown His power through creation and His love in promise. Imagine the immensity of his power in speaking creation into existence. He said “Let there be” and galaxies began to spin. Consider His promises. His promise is to love us, and for us to be His people. He never breaks His word. He’s always trustworthy. He’s always faithful.

What’s has more weight? ~~bigger~~? The left or the right? The weight of your struggle and striving or the weight of his power and promises? Who will you trust the most? Your strength or His? There has never been a single time that God couldn’t stand the weight. Our striving has to fall in surrender to God. See how things turned out for Jacob and Esau.

**Conclusion**

Maintain image of two hands in this conclusion. When Jacob finally came face to face with Esau, he finds that all his scheming all his striving and all his anxiety was for nothing.

As Jacob approaches his brother, bowing and limping, he is interrupted by Esau (Gen. 33:4) who ran out to meet him...embracing him...Kissing him and there they wept together.

You see God always delivers on his promises...God was with Jacob all along and He had gone before Jacob to prepare Esau’s heart to receive Jacob with open arms.

The reality is that as Jacob prepared to meet Esau, he already had the promise, he didn’t have to worry, scheme or be afraid! BUT it wasn’t until he gave up his striving and surrendered to the God who fights for him that he experienced the blessing.

This same principal is true for us today... The more we allow ourselves to get caught up in striving in our own power through the more anxiety, wreckage and sleepless nights. The more we surrender our lives to the God who fights for us the more peace and blessing we will experience in life.

The truth is that God has given us a new and greater promise than the one he gave Jacob and he has given us a new and greater identity than he gave Jacob.

When we place our trust and our life in Jesus we receive the promise that God will always be with us and that he will never forsake us...And scripture tells us that we also receive a new identity in Jesus name.

You see Jesus is the ultimate expression of the God who fights for us...He came, fought for and won everything we couldn’t accomplish through our own striving…His victory for us on the cross is the fulfillment of the name Israel...And now we take on his name as Christ-followers. Christians.  Our reality is not just that God fights for us BUT it is that God has fought for us...and won!

Use COMMUNITY language in this list.

It is in Jesus that we receive the promised kingdom of God that is to come

It is in Jesus that we receive justification through faith

It is in Jesus that power of sin, fear, and death are overcome

Jesus’ life, death and resurrection are the declaration of ultimate victory God has won on our behalf.

A victory that is freely given to all who would receive it.  And perhaps there is no better symbol of this gift than in communion as we remember the price that was paid, the body and blood - the bread and the cup, for the victory...for the blessing we receive when we surrender to Him.