

The Wrestler (1)

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[0 : 00] I have been asking myself this question as of late. How do people change?

That led me to ask the question, how does God change people? And then that led me to a time of introspection to say or ask Phil Stogner, Phil, how does God change you?

Another word for change is spiritual transformation. From one characteristic of behavior and attitude to another characteristic of behavior and attitude.

One that does not reflect Christ and another one that does reflect or image Christ. So in a series of two messages, if you picked up a paper copy, you'll notice that the title of this message is called The Wrestler.

Well, I would say this is Genesis 32, The Wrestler, Part 1. How does Jacob change Jacob?

[1 : 43] Because he does, and we do, have a responsibility. God is not going to change us without our participation. But then with verses 22 through 32, next Sunday morning, we're going to look at how does God change Jacob?

When I was, as you would say, a wee little lad, every week there was a program that me and my brother and my cousins look forward, all males all look forward to, because we were able to exercise our testosterone, I think, and it was worldwide wrestling.

And it was live, and it was on TV. And each one of us had our favorite character. Now, a couple of things that you need to know, growing up in the Southeast, the Southern states of America, to us, worldwide wrestling was as professional as you could get.

There was no acting. Now, that's wrong, but that was, in our mind, these were Olympians. And we didn't call it wrestling, we called it wrassling.

I'm watching wrestling this afternoon. And my cousins and my brother, we would be there, and we would watch, and we would hope, because it was live, we would hope that our favorite wrestling character, our favorite wrestler would appear.

[3 : 36] Because they all had names, and they all had characteristics that went along with their name. You might have heard of some. Fan or no. Andre the Giant.

Going way back, there was Haystack Calhoun. There was Nature Boy.

Rick Flair. I was at a brewer's fair at a carving station, and there was a young man there, and often enough, people will hear my American accent, and they'll say, oh, you're from America.

I mean, they're just, it's just amazing how stupid they are. And I'll always ask, because I'm interested, have you ever been to my fair land?

Yes, I have. And I said, let me guess, Orlando, right? And they said, yes! This young man said, yes, I went to Orlando. And I said, let me guess, Walt Disney World.

[4 : 39] I said, no. I said, really? No. I went there for a worldwide wrestling convention. Really?

A wrestling fan in Scotland. And I think, I found out there's more and more. And I said, all right, who's your guy? He said, the Undertaker. Ooh, the Undertaker.

You can imagine the characteristics. For everyone had his, not only his persona in his name, but it played out in his tricks, or his strategy in order to defeat his opponent.

Mine was Chief Wahoo. Chief Wahoo, the Indian. And he had nothing to do with flying soufflexes. He was not one to employ the call that could send you into semi-consciousness. He had the tomahawk trap.

[5 : 50] And so afterwards, my brother and cousins would get together outdoors, and we would strip off our shirts, and we would be in our shorts, and we would say, I'm Chief Wahoo.

Well, I am Andre the Giant. And we would play out those, but it was important that we not only had the name, but we had the strategy to face our opponent.

This morning, I want you to see three things. Because Jacob is a wrestler, and he has a persona, and he has a name.

You would have to go back when Jacob is first introduced, even at birth. He and Esau were twins. They were born, but Esau came out first from the womb, but then Jacob was a hill holder. And that set the trajectory for his strategies, his tactics, his scheming, his tricks, in order to serve himself.

[7 : 16] Or to get the approval of others. And the big idea that I want you to see is contained in three things.

Number one, Jacob's problem. Number two, Jacob's pattern of behavior, his pattern. And then number three, the gospel breaking through in Jacob's prayer.

But the big idea is that God has to wrestle us into change.

God has to wrestle us into a transformed life. And in these verses, 1 through 21, what you're going to see is that it's in the context of Jacob's fear.

It's in the environment. It's in the stage of life that he is in right now. It's that stage that is set. It's the context of suffering and anxiety and fear that God says, now the stage is set for change.

[8 : 37] First of all, Jacob's problem. Well, we, I read at great length and you probably picked up on his problem.

In verse 3, we read that Jacob sent messengers ahead. Now it's been 20 years since he left Canaan, the promised land.

A land that, though by deceit, he is pledged to inherit. He was, by rights of primogenitor, firstborn, not going to inherit the land, but Esau was through his father's blessing.

But through a strategy, through a scheme, he disguised himself as Esau and he got his father's blessing so he is now going to inherit the land.

he flees after that. At this point, Isaac is dead. And so, it enters his mind that I bet Esau is not going to honor my father's blessing now that he's out of the way.

[9 : 58] I bet Esau is going to say, listen, you deceived me, you tricked me, I was a firstborn, this land, you left this 20 years ago, I'm now in charge.

And so, he sends messengers and the word for messengers there appears in verse 1 as the word for angels. It's the same. So, imagine him sending ambassadors, diplomats, peacemakers.

He doesn't send soldiers. Not to show a force, but to show he's suing for peace. He says, go, go, you guys make peace, negotiate peace, tell him I come in peace.

And then, you look down to verse 8. Well, verse 6. The messengers, these ambassadors, returned to Jacob and they said, listen, on the way, we met Esau.

We didn't even arrive at home base. He already has heard about you returning to the land even before we brought him word. And guess what?

[11 : 11] Riding alongside of Esau were 400 red-haired men.

And I know you're like, how do you get that? Well, it has to do with Edom and it has to do with the 400 men with him.

One commentator, scholar says, it's hairy. And so I think about red, hairy guys carrying swords. Just suffice it to say, these are not diplomats.

And you read that this great, this calls in verse 7, Jacob to be greatly afraid and distressed. The word for distress to me is to be tightly pressed or to be in a tight.

To be in a tight place. And to just feel the pressure come on to you. I want to get out of this. But I just feel it coming on.

[12 : 19] to be tightly pressed. But then add to that fear. You read down in verse 8 as he begins to think.

See, he looks to his mind, his reason, his logic, even his history and his old stratagems that he's going to put into play. Like a good wrestler.

Sizing up, my opponent's coming. He divides into two camp, but why? Motivated out of fear, tightly pressed, he says, because he's going to attack.

he thinks the worst. As fear so often multiplies itself.

Paul Tripp calls it worrying your worry. Adding fear to fear that really is not realistic. But, he's afraid of attack.

[13 : 28] If you go over to verse 11, in his prayer it shows up because he prays very specifically about his fear, he says that he may come, as Esau, so he's going to come mad.

Number two, he's going to attack me, my person, me physically, he wants my head, my life, and the mothers with children.

And, scholars tell us that this mothers with children is an image. It's not mothers and their children's beside them. It's mothers who fall over their children to shield them in an attack.

And that the slayer or attacker, rather than be moved by mercy for a mother trying to protect her child, just runs a sword through them both.

distress. He is distressed. He is fearful. This is Jacob's problem.

[14 : 41] But before I go on to his pattern, let me say God has a problem with Jacob. Jacob has a big, big problem with Esau, but God has a problem with Jacob.

Because Jacob is coming into the promised land to take and to rule over Canaan, his inheritance. But no man is even to enter into God's inheritance and promised inheritance. If he looks to himself, if he puts faith in himself, no, he is to be completely dependent upon God.

For God is jealous even over us looking to ourselves and our own strategy. Going back as far as Moses and Joshua, when you come into the land, God will fight for you.

Follow God in faithfulness, not other gods. Don't yield even to yourself. Put your faith in God.

[15 : 55] So God has a problem with Jacob. Because his pattern is to resort to put faith and confidence in his fear, in his old strategies, his old tricks, his old ways.

That's his default. It's my default. There are a number of things going on here, but as I talk about his pattern, let me go all the way back to verse 1 and 2 to set the stage.

In chapter 31, Jacob is leaving the distant land where he's lived with his father-in-law and his wives and his children and where he's grown in possessions.

But he's leaving. If you turn in your Bibles to chapter 31, in verse 3 and in verse 31, God comes to Jacob in this distant land.

verse 13, then the Lord said to Jacob, return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred and I will be with you.

[17 : 13] Verse 13, I am the God of Bethel. Now that was where when he left 20 years ago, he met God as he was leaving.

where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred.

So he's doing that. He's called by God. He's got a call by God. He's got instruction by God. And so he's like, I am going to follow the word of God.

And so he leaves and he crosses over. And he's entering in. And there's this problem. But God as he crosses over in verses 1 and 2, he has a vision of angels.

And he sees them physically. We don't know that anybody else saw them. We don't know how he saw them or encountered them or anything like that. But he saw them. So much was it a reality that he said, this, I'm going to name this place.

[18 : 25] Just like he had named Bethel the house of God because I saw the stairway of heaven. That was a place of God making contact and is abiding in.

As I was leaving, now that I've come in, I want you to see the symmetry. It's no accident. God is saying when he left his family and going into a strange land, I will be with you.

Do not fear. And now that you're coming back home with a problem, do not fear. I am with you. And it was so impactful that he gave it a name of Mahanan.

Mahanan meaning two camps. There's my world, my life, my family, my work, my class, my peers, all of that is a camp and there's God.

And it's not that they're so distinct that his camp is way over there, God's presence, so that I'm only in that camp and that camp only intersects on Sunday morning. It's like wherever I go there's two camps.

[19 : 39] Wherever I go God is present with me. Wherever I am in any situation God is present with me. But fear shrinks it. fear forgets.

Fear forgets. If you forget everything else, don't forget that. When you're afraid to the point of being greatly afraid, add an adjective to it, and even to the point of being distressed, you will forget God's faithfulness.

I think Christian maturity is that forgetfulness becomes more like, it becomes shorter and shorter. But Jacob's pattern at this point holds true.

It was as if he never saw the angels. It was as if he had never, he forgot that God himself said, listen, I'm calling you to go, you follow me because I'm with you.

And I'm going to bless you. I'm about your good. He forgets that. And that's his pattern. This week, this week, by x-ray, there was a discovery.

[20 : 57] And the National Galleries of Scotland and one Leslie Stevenson, she's the gallery senior conservatory, said, we did an x-ray as we do with all of the art that we're getting ready to put on the wall.

Didn't know they did that. But we had a painting. It was called The Peasant Woman's Head of Dan Go. And so we had this Dan Go, we were going to put it on the wall, we did an x-ray, and amazingly, we saw through x-ray the artist himself looking back at us.

In other words, we saw through this persona, we saw through even his strategies to hide himself, we saw the real Van Go, we saw his portrait.

x-ray questions. We need x-ray questions that we see the real self and not the false self.

God doesn't want to bless the false self, folks. He doesn't like a phony feel. He doesn't like the poser, particularly when I pose and I'm an imposter because I want for acceptance or peace or approval or achievement.

[22 : 33] Those are all strategies to try to protect myself from my fears. God says, no, I want the real person.

Let me give you a sample of x-ray questions. What are you fearing right now? For Jacob, it was Esau.

Where are you taking comfort and refuge? For Jacob, he could say, my action steps. I'm dividing the herds, I'm dividing the people to camps.

You can send it out in droves. He's got this very elaborate stratagem. What voices are you listening to? Can you imagine the voices that Jacob was listening to?

You know what? My father didn't love me. He didn't approve of me. So I had to do these things to get his acceptance. Laban, he tricked me so that I wanted Rachel on my wedding night, my first wedding night.

[23 : 40] And he gave me Leah, the woman who I wanted, his approval I wanted for. I was denied that initially. There's all these tricks going on about the herds and everything with Laban.

And now, what voice is he listening to? Here's a good one. Where are you setting your hopes? Where are you setting your hopes?

The hope, back to the kids talk, that Jacob had was, my present will appease him. Commentaries talk about in those series of verses about the present, appeasing him, and then maybe he will receive my face.

They say the term face is used four times. And it's significant. But in essence, what he's saying is, here's my hope, that I'll do something nice, or I'll give a present.

Part of my strategy is, is I will, I will present them something really nice and attractive, and then they will receive me.

[24 : 55] In other words, it'll make him smile. I will work to make them smile, and then they'll smile toward me. All of your answers reveal your orientation.

All of your answers reveal your orientation. answers. I would say also that all the answers have an impact on how I treat other people.

I may manipulate people with my strategies. I can't trust God. Answers really do expose the real you.

And that was his pattern. All in the backdrop, all on the stage that God said, my presence is with you, my presence is with you. I've called you, I've been very clear, I've told you that my presence is with you.

I've sent angels so you can visually see that you've got mighty angels with you. You've got the history of your father's blessing, and that is true and valid.

[26 : 12] I'm calling you back to your inheritance. If this was a television program, then it would be like, tune in next week to see how God works to change Jacob.

well, we read finally that Jacob prays in verse nine. One scholar said that in all of the Old Testament, there's not another prayer like this.

That there are few prayers prayers in all of the Old and the New Testament that we can mine and learn as much from.

What can we learn from this? I'm going to suggest that you can learn four things. For the sake of time, you might want to just put this in your notes because I'm not going to be very expansive on them, but number one, deepen your faith, a deepened faith, number two, repent of your strategy, number three, pray specific fears, and number four, settle your heart on the steadfast love of God. And deepening your faith in order for you to experience spiritual transformation and change, you don't have to go take a class, you don't have to say, I'm so young as a disciple, I need more Bible knowledge, I need to grow in this area, but I can't, my faith is not very deep as it is.

[28 : 10] No, you've got enough already. You already know enough, now bring your life in alignment with what you know to be true about God, about Jesus, about the Holy Spirit.

It's simply saying, I have put my faith in God, now I'm going to ask in prayer that my life be aligned with what I know to be true.

So it's not mysterious, it's not complicated. Start with what you know to be true. Align your life there. Here, he says, what do I know to be true? He's my grandfather's God, he's my father's God, and he said to me to return, that he's going to do me good.

He's a good God. Number two, repent of your strategy. Now notice in verse 10, he says, I'm not worthy.

[29 : 21] In the Hebrew, unworthy means I'm little. So his strategy was to say, I'm a big cheese. I've got all of this wealth, and he was very rich.

I've got all the, I've got female servants and male servants to, I've got drove upon drove and herders upon herders, I've got all of these things, but here the four guys says, you know what, without you I don't have anything.

you can have all the money in the world and health insurance until you get cancer. It's not a cure.

You can have loads of resources until you're out of relationship with your wife or your husband.

The material thing is just, it's just a strategy. Here he says, you know what, and I believe, I like visuals. He says, you have been, you know, he says, you've shown mercy, you've shown steadfast love and faithfulness to your servant with only my staff.

I believe he had a staff while he was praying. You know, maybe he was bent over that staff praying, but that staff that he left with, with only a staff 20 years ago when I left, that staff that he had been a sheep herder of all things, a shepherd.

[31 : 02] All Canaan is his land, but he's herding sheep. He's working slavishly for his uncle. That staff, he says, you know what, all I got is a staff, but I've never, never been, had a deficit of your love and your faithfulness.

You've always been with me. So he's repenting of his strategy. What happens is, God becomes bigger, and he and his accumulations and his resources and his ability becomes less.

And he sees that's not a bargaining chip. Number three, he prays specifically his fear. and I'll leave it at that, but can I just say, consider doing that.

It is not only helpful to identify what is it that I'm afraid of, and yes, I am afraid of things or circumstances or people or poor health or financial difficulty or what is it that you fear.

Identify that, but then pray it specifically. And might I add, if you can identify how you've been trying to meet that fear with your own strategy, you confess and repent of that as well.

[32 : 32] Folks, the gospel is not just about your forgiveness. The gospel at work in our life, the good news is that Jesus Christ by his death in our place on a bloody cross forgave us of our sins and then equipped us with the Holy Spirit and this is the gospel that you can be transformed into sons and daughters for your inheritance in heaven.

He is at work right now changing every one of us and that's the gospel. and he finds us in partnership when we turn from our strategies even turn from our fears and ask in repentance to be forgiven of that and then we ask in faith to follow him and then the final thing here is settle your heart for once let the inner lawyer be fired that inner lawyer that says he doesn't really love you you know what other people wouldn't like you if they knew what you really think or what you really do how do you think God feels about that?

What voices are you listening to? That's not God's voice God's voice is ever one of steadfast love I love you through Jesus Christ unconditionally and I am faithful I am always with you even some of Jesus' last words lo I am with you always even to the ends of the earth there is a passage in verse 15 of Colossians 3 and the word in the passage talks about ruling and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you are called in one body and be thankful Paul was referring to a

referee at the Greek games and he said you know a referee reminds you of how the game is played and there are certain ways to play that game and you don't get to make up your own rules and you don't get to get out of bounds and benefit yourself that way but a referee is also there to encourage you and he says let the peace of Christ guide you let the peace of Christ settle your love with God hear Christ even through the Holy Spirit this day hear the gospel and that gospel at work to change us and to his sons and daughters amen