

# Wrestling with God

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Preacher: Andrew Wingfield

[0:00] We want to welcome you to Union Baptist Church today on this glorious Sunday.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Welcome to all those who are here in the sanctuary with us. Welcome to all of you watching from home on the live stream. And we especially welcome anyone who's visiting for the first time today, whether here or at home. We really want you to feel welcome. You are very, very welcome here. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Because you tell us you care about us. Help us to really focus on you, our awesome God. Fill us with your spirit so that we might glorify you as we come together to worship you today.

[1:37] Amen. So today's the last in our series on the life of Jacob. And we've seen how even though Jacob hasn't been very faithful in his life to God, God has remained faithful to Jacob.

So let's praise our faithful God by reading Psalm 145 together. And as I read this, I encourage you to look at how the psalmist describes God's character, as well as the list of God's promises for us. So I invite you to stand. And you can read the words in bold with me. Let's start together.

I will praise you. I will praise you, my God, the King. I will praise your name forever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name forever and ever.

Praise the Lord and most worthy of praise. His greatness no one can fathom. One generation commends your works to another.

[2:46] They tell of your mighty acts. They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty. And I will meditate on your wonderful works.

They tell of the power of your awesome works. And I will proclaim your great deeds. They celebrate your abundant goodness.

And joyfully sing of your righteousness. The Lord is gracious and compassionate. Slow to anger and rich in love.

The Lord is good to all. He has compassion on all he has made. All your works praise you, Lord. Your faithful people extol you.

They tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might. So that all people may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

[3:47] Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. And your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does.

The Lord upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you and you give them their food at the proper time.

You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all he does.

The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him.

He hears their cry and saves them. The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord.

[4:57] Let every creature praise his holy name forever and ever. I'm going to invite the musicians up to continue our praise and worship.

I'm going to invite the musicians up to continue our praise and worship.

Let all people come to praise the one true God. Come as many, come as one, to praise the one true God.

We've traveled here now many ways, to praise the one true God. And all of us have a price to pay, to praise the one true God.

So we sing, Father, Spirit, song. You are God, one true God.

[6:18] We praise the one true God. We praise you here as one. You are God, one true God.

We praise the one true God. We are God, one true God. And all of us have a price to come as one true God. We are God, one true God. We will make our joyful noise to praise the one true God.

Come in, son, bless your name to praise the one true God. Be yourself with us today to praise the one true God.

So we sing, Father, Spirit, Son, you are God. One true God.

We praise you here as one. You are God. One true God.

[7:32] We share some signs as gods to praise the one true God. We join together all the gods to praise the one true God.

So bring your gifts and glory, Lord, to praise the one true God. Through your new blessings we shine to praise the one true God.

So we sing, Father, Spirit, Son, you are God. One true God.

We praise you here as one. You are God. One true God.

Father, Father, you asked for my hands, that you might use them for your own love. And can you please leave us. For your love. You are God. One true God.

[8:33] For your love. One true God. One true God.

the parts that are involved. Father, you asked for my hands, that you might use them for your purpose. I gave them for a moment, then I withdrew them, for the work was hard.

You asked for my mouth to speak out against injustice. I gave you a whisper that I might not be accused. You asked for my eyes to see the pain of poverty.

I closed them, for I did not want to see. You asked for my life, that you might work through me. I gave a small part that I might not get too involved.

Lord, forgive my calculated efforts to serve you, only when it's convenient for me to do so. Only in those places where it is safe to do so, and only with those who make it easy to do so.

[9:49] Father, forgive me, renew me, send me out as a usable instrument, that I might take seriously the meaning of your cross.

Amen. In 1 John, God promises that if we confess our sin, that he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God forgives us and cleanses us. As followers of Jesus, we can count on this because God is 100% faithful to his promises. And no matter what our circumstances are, we can find joy in the fact that we are saved, that we are forgiven, and that we have an amazing eternal future with our Lord ahead of us.

With that, let's stand up, and let's continue our praise and worship. Blessed be your name, arkada■lar's love game, and have our good faith andema.

And fullness of love are saved, and throughout the fact that we are saved, and that we are saved, and that we are saved, and that we are for you. beginning to move, andyorum Blessed be your name in the land that is plentiful, where your streams of abundance flow.

[11:27] Blessed be your name. Blessed be your name when I'm found in a desert place, though I walk through the wilderness.

Blessed be your name. Every blessing in your heart, turn back to praise.

When the darkness closes in court, still I will say, Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Blessed be your name. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Blessed be your glorious name.

Blessed be your name. When the sun's shining down on me. When the world's all as it should be.

[12:43] Blessed be your name. Blessed be your name. Blessed be your name. Blessed be your name. On the road marked with suffering.

Though there's pain in the offering. Blessed be your name. Every blessing in your name.

Every blessing in your heart. Every blessing in your heart. Turn back to praise. When the darkness closes in court, still I will say, Blessed be your name. When the darkness closes in court, still I will



Bring a lunch and something to sit on. And we're going to meet at the entrance to the Lido after the service. Also a reminder of the Jubilee celebration service on June 5th.

Please, you are welcome to invite your friends to this. And there's also a Jubilee souvenir book that is available to everyone here. It's a great thing to give to your family, your neighbors, your friends.

[25:23] We have lots of them. I think there might be some at the entrance in front. There are some here and there are some in the information room. So please take some with you home today and give them away. Finally, not finally, there's also a reminder of the Cayley on June 18th.

Don't forget to sign up for that. And now I'd like to invite Sheena up. Well, good morning.

Good morning. Roger. Yeah. I'm Sheena and I'm the deacon for community. And as you know, a lot of different organizations which serve our community use the hub throughout the week.

And today I want to introduce you to one that we host permanently at the hub. And that is the Wickham Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme. It's run by Phil Thomas and his wife, Tracy.

And they do really vital work to prevent homelessness in the Wickham area in a variety of ways that you're going to hear about shortly. I know Phil well through my role at Wickham Homeless Connection.

[26:29] We work closely together and we really value Phil's work enormously. So I'm hugely delighted to welcome him today to hear more. Thank you, Phil.

Thank you, Sheena. Thank you very much. Welcome, everybody. Well, I recognize quite a few faces here, but I'm sure many of you won't know me. So I'm the chap that wanders around at strange times of the night and day on my own, sometimes meeting people who look rather surprised to see me.

So I'm actually sort of just behind the organ. My office is tucked right away. It's not a snappy title, the Wickham Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme. Although I did start the charity, I didn't choose the title.

Otherwise, I'd have come up with something slightly easier to answer the phone with. So a little history, first of all. In 1995, there were two organizations that were thinking of starting a rent deposit scheme.

One of those was the now defunct, sadly, Wickham District Council. And the other one was Wickham Churches Together. And they happened to meet at another defunct meeting now, the Wickham Housing Forum, which used to meet quarterly and come up with good ideas to try and make homelessness a thing of the past in our area.

[27:51] That was 1995. So we haven't quite managed to do that yet, unfortunately. But we have made some inroads. They met and both realized they were trying to start the same scheme.

So thankfully, they got together and thrashed out an idea. And for those of you who don't know what a rent deposit scheme is, and I imagine that's quite a few, it was originally an Australian idea.

And it comes from the fact that when you rent privately, you normally have to put down, certainly in this country anyway, a month's rent in advance and also a cash deposit as well. And that's a lot of money for people to get when they're on benefits.

And we help people who are generally unwaged. So we used to be able to get funds from the government to pay the rent in advance. And then we would cover the deposit with a bond.

So a promissory note, basically. And if there was any damage during the tenancy, or if there were any reentries during the tenancy, then they would claim from us. The landlords would claim from us.

[28:49] And so far, since 1995, let me check my figures here, we've pledged around £420,000 in deposits.

And out of that, we have had to pay up less than £5,000, which is quite extraordinary, really. Before I started this charity, I had my own estate agency.

And we would generally be taking between £15,000 and £20,000 a year against deposits. I mean, it was a big agency. But even so, the claim rate is something like 2.5% with the rent deposit scheme. It would be five or six times more than that in an estate agent situation. So what it does, that figure is actually crucial to me when I'm talking to new landlords. I can say, people assume all sorts of things about tenancy on benefits.

They don't have two heads. They're not challenged in any way other than they don't have a job for whatever reason. So that proves to me, and consequently proves to landlords, that these people are a good bet.

[29:56] You know, with the right support, they can actually make a tenancy work. And as I'm sure you already know, if you haven't got a home, everything stops there. You can't even open a bank account.

So getting a job is virtually impossible. So getting a roof over your head is the start of recovery in all sorts of ways for people. Some bare figures on what we've done in the last year are that we've housed 27 households.

Now, it may not seem that many, but if you think of the nature of the people that we're helping, they've quite often got all sorts of issues that they're challenged with. And so consequently, it doesn't make necessarily the easiest people to house.

But again, with the right support and a bit of coaching, we know we have had some considerable success. As Sheena said, it's not just housing people.

Because a lot of times, these projects previously, they build everyone up to the point where they move into a property, and then thanks very much, they're off, and they're left on their own. And invariably, within a few months, rent arrears start, problems and issues start, and eventually they get evicted.

[31:04] So we're not in the business of doing that at all. I mean, we're very lucky in this area that we have some great colleagues and other organisations that we can call on, as well as supporting these people ourselves, such as Wickham Homeless Connection, who, as Sheena said, we do an awful lot of work with.

We also work with another great organisation called Connection, who offers support, ongoing support, for people who have previously been homeless. And we also, I mean, we've had people now in properties that have been there for 20 years that we're still supporting, amazingly.

And so this year, we have supported, what's 52 and 18? That's not real. 52, 62, 70 tenancies we've supported and rescued.

And when I say rescued, when you do get rent arrears in this country, as soon as you hit two months arrears, you can then be evicted through the courts fairly easily.

So we have to get to the stage where, if people are coming up to that two-month level, we generate income from various sources and we repay those arrears and we keep people in the property.

[32:12] So it's not just a question of moving them in and leaving them on their own. We have to make sure that they're wrapped around with care and support so these things don't fail. 470 people we have worked with in the last 12 months, and that's not necessarily 470 individuals.

That's quite often seen people more than once. And as well as the basics of the rent deposit scheme, which are housing people, what we also do is provide a series of different types of advice.

So quite often we'll work with the local authority. They've recently, as I'm sure you know, amalgamated four district councils and the county council. And to put it politely, they're in a state of flux, I think I could say at the moment.

To be polite. So there's a lot of new faces around. They don't necessarily know too much about this local area. We've now in fact had to expand.

So we now cover not just Wickham District Council area, but also Chiltern and South Buck. So essentially we cover the south of the county. And what we do, we also, excuse me, I would say we, I contribute to another fantastic idea, I must say with Wickham Home is Connection.

[33:33] They have a legal housing clinic every Thursday afternoon. And that is so valuable, I can't tell you. To have access to free legal advice is invaluable.

And we, together, we've managed to save an awful lot of tenancies over the years that that's been going. And I think that's now expanded to pretty much cover the whole of the county.

It's been a challenging two years, to say the least. But again, working with Wickham Home is Connection, who had this splendid idea of keeping people off the streets, when the government said all in, they were already in, in this area.

So we were a bit ahead of the game. So what we've been doing since then, particularly over the last three months, as that emergency accommodation has come to an end, is we've been moving people into the private sector.

We've been helping people move into the hostels as well. So we've got the LT Warehouse, which does a great job helping people with all sorts of addiction issues. And we've got the YMCA as well.

[34:35] So what we tend to do, the path is, from the street into short-term temporary accommodation, from that accommodation into one of the hostels.

And then my link in this sort of chain is to move the guys out of the hostels into the private sector. Much easier to house someone that's had a bit of history, that you can say, well, this person has been, let's say, at the YMCA for 18 months.

These are the courses that they've done. They've worked on their addiction issues. They're now perhaps clean for the first time in their life of a drug addiction or alcohol. And you can actually show proof to a landlord that this person has really tried to make a change in their life.

And again, as soon as they can get a roof over their head, then the sort of recovery process starts to go along. As an example, Jack was found sleeping on the streets.

He was actually referred to us by the council, unusually. It's quite often Wickham Homes Connection that refer. But this particular time, it was the council. We managed to get him a room in the property.

[35:44] He had been sleeping rough, I think, for about 18 months. So room in the property, the landlord got on really well with him. He started doing a bit of odd job work for the landlord.

The landlord then said, well, you're doing so well. I'd like to give you a flat. I don't need any more money from you, Phil, because the chap's proved himself. So he then gets a flat. I think it was about four or five months from being taken off the street and housed that he rang me up and he said, now, you told me that if I get a job, I probably won't be able to get any housing benefit.

And I said, well, that's not strictly true, because most of the people that we work with, when they get jobs, they're quite often on minimum wage. So I said, no, it is a sort of sliding scale, but the more you earn, the less you're getting benefits.

How much are you going to be earning? He said, oh, it's either 52 or 53,000 pounds a year.

LAUGHTER I said, right.

OK. So I take it you're not doing the gardening anymore then. He said, no. I said, that's quite interesting. Where are you going to be working? He said, oh, I'm going to be working in Cowley, near Oxford.

[36:55] I said, oh, interesting. I said, what do you do? I've never asked what you did before you fell on, you know, on hard times. He said, oh, I design BMWs. So it just proves, you know, you see people in the street, you might make a judgement.

You just do not know. The old cliché, never judge a book by its cover. You know, everybody deserves a chance in life. Everybody deserves more than one chance in life, because quite often these guys aren't able to make that change, you know, immediately.

It takes a bit of work. But as soon as you get a roof over your head, it opens all sorts of doors.

Pardon the pun. So that's what we do. The Wickham Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme.

Should you ever need to fund a local charity? We're always here. Thank you. Let me just pray for you, Phil.

Father God, we pray for many who are facing homelessness and fear for their future. We thank you for organisations that work together to tackle homelessness in Wickham, and in particular, the remarkable work done by Phil and Tracy at the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme.

[38:09] We thank you for the gifts, skills, knowledge, and dedication that they bring to each case to see it through and more. We pray that you will provide them with the resources that they need to continue their work and bless them each day with fresh insights, wisdom, and patience as they minister your love and care to people facing homelessness through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen. Thank you. Let's continue in prayer together.

Colossians 4, verse 12 says this, Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends his greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

Lord God, we worship you because you are great. You are the only one deserving of all of our worship. In the words of Nehemiah, blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise.

You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host. The earth and all that is in it, the seas and all that is in them.

[39:40] You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you. So we join with the hosts of heaven to praise you for who you are.

Thank you for demonstrating your great love towards us, that even when we were your enemies, you sent your only son, Jesus, and through his death on the cross, you brought us to your side. Lord God, thank you for the confidence that this gives us in approaching you in prayer, like a child approaching his good father.

But we recognize it can be hard to pray, and there are so many voices which seek to get our attention after them instead. Please help us to stand firm against any temptation to drift towards other things and away from you.

And where we have drifted, please show us afresh your incredible grace towards us, so that we can turn from those things and back to you.

[40:46] Thank you that your grace is sufficient for us. We are fragile, like jars of clay, but you are all in all. You know what each one of us in this building needs.

Please strengthen us with your power, so that together we might grow in maturity. We pray for Boris Johnson and for his government.

Please help them to make wise decisions, especially towards this war in Ukraine, so that justice is upheld in a way which honors you.

We pray that he would come to acknowledge you as the king over all the nations on earth and to discharge his responsibilities in the fear of the Lord.

And we thank you for Love Wickham, for the opportunities that we have to show kindness to the people in our community. We ask that our imperfect acts of love will point people towards your perfect love.

[41:55] The love that sent Jesus to be our rescuer. And we pray for opportunities through Love Wickham to share this good news. Jesus told us that there is rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents.

Please help us, each of us, to spread that pleasing aroma of the gospel message. And Father, we thank you for our time together this morning.

And as the Bible is read, please help us to pay attention to what you are saying to each one of us. Your word is more important to us than our daily food.

Your word gives us direction like a lamp for our feet. And it's like a sword which cuts to the heart, laying our thoughts and our attitudes there before you.

Please give us ears to hear what you are saying to us this morning for our good and for your glory. And we ask all of these things in the name of Jesus.

[43:00] Amen. Amen. Thank you. Thank you, Tim.

I'd like to invite the musicians up. Before we have our reading, as Tim just prayed, we're going to also sing a prayer that God will speak to us through his word.

And that he'll teach us and plant his truth deep within our hearts so that his light will shine through us for all the world to see. Please stand.

Amen. Speak, O Lord, as we come to you to receive the food of your holy word.

[44:10] Take your truth, plant it deep in us, shape and fashion us in your likeness.

That the light of Christ might be seen today in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.

Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us all your purposes, all your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience, holy reverence, true humility.

test our thoughts and our attitudes in the radiance of your purity.

[45:24] Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see your majestic love and authority.

words of power that can never fail that their truth prevail over unbelief.  
speak, O Lord, and renew our minds.

Help us grasp the heights of your plans for us. Truths unchanged from the dawn of time that will echo down through eternity.

And my grace will stand on your promises and my faith will walk as you walk with us.

[46:39] Speak, O Lord, till your church is built and the earth is filled with your glory.

Amen. Our reading today is Genesis 32.1 to 33.4 and you'll find it on page 35 to 36 of the Pew Bibles.

Jacob also went on his way and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, this is the camp of God. So he named that place Mahanaim. Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

He instructed them, this is what you are to say to my Lord Esau. Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and I have remained there till now.

I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, male and female servants. Now I am sending this message to my Lord that I may find favor in your eyes.

[48:16] When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, we went to your brother Esau and now he is coming to meet you and 400 men are with him. In great fear and distress, Jacob divided the people who are with him into two groups and the flocks and herds and camels as well.

He thought, if Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape. Then Jacob prayed, O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, Lord, you who said to me, go back to your country and your relatives and I will make you prosper.

I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps.

Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, I will surely make you prosper and I will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.

He spent the night there and from what he had with him, he selected a gift for his brother Esau. 200 female goats and 20 male goats, 200 ewes and 20 rams, 30 female camels with their young, 40 cows and 10 bulls and 20 female donkeys and 10 male donkeys.

[49:51] He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself. And he said to his servants, go ahead of me and keep some space between the herds.

He instructed the one in the lead, when my brother Esau meets you and asks, who do you belong to and where are you going and who owns all of these animals in front of you?

Then you are to say, they belong to your servant, Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau and he is coming behind us. He also instructed the second, the third and all the others that followed the herds, you are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him and be sure to say, your servant Jacob is coming behind us.

For he thought, I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead. Later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me. So Jacob's gifts went on ahead of him, but he spent the night in the camp.

That night, Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions.

[51:07] So Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

Then the man said, let me go, it is daybreak. But Jacob replied, I will not let you go until you bless me. The man asked him, what is your name?

Jacob, he answered. Then the man said, your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God, with humans and have overcome.

Jacob said, please tell me your name. But he replied, why do you ask my name? Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, it is because I saw God face to face and yet my life was spared.

The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore, to this day, the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

[52:19] Jacob looked up and there was Esau coming with his 400 men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and two female servants. He put the female servants and their children in front, Leah and her children next and Rachel and Joseph in the rear.

He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother. But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him. He threw his arms around his neck and kissed him and they wept.

This is the word of the Lord. I just want to pray for Andrew before he preaches.

Lord, thank you for Andrew. Thank you for his gift of teaching. We ask your blessing on him as he teaches us from your words and Lord, fill him with your spirit. Anoint him. Lord, I pray for us listeners, please open our hearts to your word.

Help us to understand what you want us to understand and apply it to our lives. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Thank you, Kathy. Good morning, everyone. Great to see you. So we're continuing this exciting journey with Jacob.

[53:31] There's never a dull moment in the story of Jacob. If you remember from last week, we saw Jacob struggling with the universal problem of inner emptiness. We saw him seeking to find the one true love and it didn't really work out for Jacob.

He got deceived by his uncle. He married the ugly sister. He ended up struggling in a marriage between two sisters who were fighting over his love and wanting to have children. He continued to struggle with his uncle who was now his brother-in-law over who had the most livestock.

But we saw last week by the time we got to chapter 31 when Jacob had been told clearly by God to go back home to his family that he'd actually grown up a bit. He'd started to be aware of God's presence.

He started to be aware of God's help and acknowledged this. So I'd love to say that Jacob went on his journey trusting in God in everything, putting God first, seeking God and being aware of God's presence.

But instead we have more drama because he didn't do that consistently. Does that sound familiar? Well sometimes we have to be taught lessons over and over don't we? I'll leave you to read at home through chapter 31 the bit in between where Jacob and his wives and kids fled from Laban and all the shenanigans that go on with that.

[54:44] But we're going to pick up the story where Hannah read to us from the start of chapter 32 which is on page 35. So you can have that open in front of you as we work through. So in verse 1 we see as Jacob and his group go on their journey he has a supernatural experience which is an encouragement to him.

It says the angels of God met him. Evidently these were angels in the guise of soldiers and he names the place Mahanaim meaning two camps. He was aware that God was with him.

There was a camp of angels. We sang that song in the service last week the God of angel armies is by my side and Jacob became aware of God's angel armies encamped with him.

But then he starts to plan for what he's about to face which is meeting his brother his nemesis. Now he could have gone back to the land totally avoiding Esau but he's acting in obedience.

He doesn't just say well let's let bygones be bygones. He knows he's done wrong and he knows that he needs to seek forgiveness from his brother. So in verse 3 he sends ahead these messengers and in the message he gives them he humbles himself.

[55:54] He addresses Esau as my lord and he addresses himself as your servant. Then in verse 6 these messengers come back and the messengers say we've seen Esau and he's coming to meet you.

Oh and by the way he's bringing 400 men with him. Now this was not a welcoming committee 400 men meant an army. Oh no this is terrifying. This is not what Jacob wanted to hear.

It seems that his diplomacy efforts haven't worked. So Jacob starts to scheme a bit more. He plans a bit more. He splits his people into two camps to minimize the risk if they are under attack.

He splits his people into two camps and said we're two camps now. He's forgotten hasn't he that there are already two camps because there's God's army camps with him. He's already named the place two camps but he's forgotten that.

But on the positive side what he does here is he prays and there's actually a wonderful prayer in verses 9 to 12 which is actually a model prayer in many ways. He prays to God and he remembers God's promise to him what God has said before.

[56:55] He humbles himself before God. He acknowledges that he's not worthy of anything that God has given him. And in verse 11 he cries out for help to God. He's very honest with God about how he's feeling.

He's honest about his fears. He's fearful for himself and for his family as well. And in verse 12 he repeats the promise again. But then straight after the prayer it seems like in his mind it's all down to him again and he comes up with more strategy.

This time he sends gifts different groups with different gifts a lot of livestock sending to Esau to try and appease Esau before he meets him. And then what follows in verse 22 to 33 the bit where Jacob wrestles with God.

It's a bizarre and mind-blowing encounter with God. Now theologians would call this a theophany. It's a pre-Christ visible manifestation of God to a person.

There are actually a number of these in the Old Testament through the Bible but this one is quite unique in the physical nature of Jacob's encounter with this figure.

[57:58] Now I'd like to highlight seven aspects of this wrestling match as we work our way through. The first one is confrontation as we look at verse 24. But let's just go back a couple of verses.

We're told in verse 22 that Jacob got up in the night. Now I imagine he couldn't sleep. His mind would have been filled with what was going to happen the next day when he would be face to face with his brother, his angry brother.

And he recognised that he needed time alone with God. Now I don't know if you've ever not been able to sleep at night and got up knowing that you just need to spend time with God.

You need to pray about something. You need to do business with God. Jacob got his wives, the two female servants and his sons and he sent them on ahead. And then he sent over all his possessions so he was free from all distractions.

Now when we need to spend serious time with God it may help us to be away from all distractions, to turn off our phone, to be in a place where we're not drawn to other things so we can focus on that time with God.

[59:04] So verse 24 tells us very clearly that Jacob was left alone. And it's when he's alone with himself that he has an encounter with God. And there comes a point for each of us when we have to meet God individually, alone.

This doesn't negate anything that we say about the importance of community, of being church, of growing and serving together with other Christians. That's so important. But it's important that we have our own faith.

It's important that we have our own individual encounters with God and we don't just ride on the face of others, on the faith of others. It's easy to think you're experiencing God when you're experiencing other people's experience of God.

And it says in verse 24, a man wrestled with him until daybreak. This is seen from Jacob's perspective. Obviously, we see later, he gets an insight that this isn't just a man.

But the timing of where this appears in the narrative is very important. Jacob is facing the hardest, toughest challenge of his life so far, to go back to his brother to seek reconciliation from that brother whose last words were, and I still have an image of Ollie shouting through that door in the drama last week, I'm going to kill you!

[60:17] And this is the biggest test of obedience for Jacob because he's been clearly told to go back to his home and back to Esau. And when we hear God telling us things which are difficult for us to do, or sometimes

God tells us to stop doing things which are difficult to stop doing, we often go through a spiritual process of wrestling with God.

We try to dodge and duck and weave and try to find ways to avoid the difficult thing that God is calling us to. And all the while we feel the force of knowing deep down what God is telling us, knowing that if what we're hearing or what we're reading is true, then I'm going to have to do something about it.

I can't avoid it. That's the confrontation of being up against God in the battle for our mind and our heart. The other thing to note is that Jacob enters this wrestling match in vulnerability.

We see Jacob at his most vulnerable here. He faces his angry brother and his army and he knows that he's in the wrong. We've already seen in his earlier prayer that he fears for himself and for his family.

And this is, in that context, this is really the surprising and shocking thing here. In your wildest imagination, how do you imagine God to respond to someone who is fearful but has decided to obey him and is risking his life to obey him, he comes and starts beating him up.

[61:42] There's a quote I've shared here before from *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* where Susan finds out that Aslan is in fact a lion and she asks Mr. Beaver about this. Is he quite safe?

I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion. Safe? said Mr. Beaver. Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe but he's good. He's the king.

God is not safe. That is very clear from this passage. In fact, he's very dangerous but he's good. And there's something in the confrontation and the grappling of wrestling where love and struggle and danger and security come together.

Now having two very energetic boys in my household, wrestling for us or bundling as we call it in our family has always been part of family life. Now one of my sons in particular is very physical by nature and he really needs to experience love from me as a father expressed in wrestling with him, in bundling with him.

He actually feels more loved when I take time to pin him down to the floor. Although we're actually getting to the stage where he can pin me down to the floor too. But Jacob's wrestling is a very physical picture of the tough love of God.

[63:04] Yes, God comforts us very often when we need it but often he confronts us in a challenging way. Tim Keller said, God often has to wrestle us into a transformed life rather than comfort us into a transformed life.

I think that's very true. Second thing, verse 25, the crippling. The struggling goes on until close to morning and it says, the man touched the socket of Jacob's hip.

Now the word there that's translated touch means the very lightest touch, the slightest touch. It's the slightest touch and Jacob's hip is immediately dislocated. All night long, Jacob's been struggling with this man and they seem equally matched.

It seems like it's a draw, it's a stalemate and then with the slightest touch, his hip is wrenched out of its socket. Now, this is an incarnation of God.

So any moment, he could have incinerated Jacob, but he struggles with him all night long. I'm reminded of the words of a children's song. I'm not sure if you've ever sung it here at Union, but the words go, because my God, he's big, he's gigantic, he's enormous, he's powerful and strong, he's amazing and he's awesome, and there's nothing in this world that he could not pulverize.

[64:19] And that's true, isn't it? Because God could have pulverized Jacob at any moment. What's going on here? Well, God has moderated his strength against Jacob, just like any father wrestling with his kids has to moderate their strength so he doesn't hurt them, but then, with just a tap, the slightest touch, Jacob is crippled.

When we wrestle with God, there comes a point where God has to break us to remind us that he's God. Now, looking back on my own life, there's a period when I wrestled with God, and he broke me.

For me, it was a test of obedience when God called my family and I to come back to England from Tanzania where we'd been living, and I was resistant and hesitant and fearful for myself and my family.

I wanted to dodge that, but at the same time, I had a sense of being drawn into spending time with God and going deeper into prayer. And I had a feeling that God was at work as the battle went on in my mind and in my spirit, until one evening God broke me and I ended up weeping in a heap on the floor.

And I knew it was the Holy Spirit at work, but it was very painful. I felt utterly crushed. A few weeks later, we told our friends that God was calling us to leave Tanzania and come back to England and how we'd been doing that.

[65:38] And our friend said, wow, it must be really special to have that close experience of God working in you and speaking to you like that. And I remember answering at the time, well, actually it's really painful.

Being broken by God is painful, but it's necessary. Verse 26, we now see the clinging. This is the point where the penny drops for Jacob.

He realises that while he's probably squirming in agony, but he realises at this moment, this man is God. And how does he respond? Well, he holds on.

He clings to the one that he struggled against all night. The one who's just broken his body with the slightest touch. Amazingly, he says in verse 26, I won't let go until you bless me.

Do we cling to God in order to receive his blessing? Often I think the reason that we end up unblessed, that we end up unfilled, is that we don't cling to God.

[66:37] Often we cling to other things instead. Jacob spent his whole life clinging to other things. The hope of getting his father's approval. The hope of one true love in Rachel.

The hope of gaining prosperity, hustling for sheep and goats with his father-in-law. Now he sees the need to cling to the only one that can truly fill him. The only one that can truly bless him.

This is a different kind of seeking now for Jacob. Up until now, he's been using God as a means to an end. He's been trying to negotiate with God, we saw that at the end of chapter 28, saying, I'll do this and that if you bless me.

But now he realises, clinging to God himself is the only true way to get blessing. So he says to God, I will not let you go until you bless me. And this is the real approval that he was seeking from his father.

This is the real beauty behind the beauty he was seeking in a wife. This is what can truly fill his inner emptiness. Jacob holds on to the source of blessing, despite the pain.

[67:39] He says, I'm not going to let go, even though I might die if I see your face in the sunlight. Verse 27, reading on, the man asked him, what is your name?

Now, does that surprise you? If this man is God, he doesn't need to ask Jacob's name. He knows. He knows everything, right? There's something deeper going on here. And I think just as I expect Jacob felt a pang of conviction and guilt when Laban said to him, we don't put the younger before the elder.

I expect this question reminded him of the same question asked by his father when he dressed up as his brother back in chapter 27. His father asked him that question. And at that time, he lied and said, it's Esau.

But this time, in front of his wrestling opponent, Jacob doesn't lie. He tells the truth. My name is Jacob. But there was meaning behind his name. Jacob, we're told in the footnote in chapter 27, verse 36, it means he grasps the heel.

A Hebrew idiom for he takes advantage or he deceives. So when Jacob answered his name, he was saying, I'm a deceiver. I'm someone who tries to take advantage of other people.

[68:47] You know, when we encounter God, we're forced to examine who we really are inside. The stuff that we're not proud of. The stuff that we regret. The damage that we've done to others and the damage that we've done to ourselves.

Our selfishness, our pride. And part of wrestling is confession. It's at that point that we turn to God, acknowledge our sin, acknowledge our selfishness, acknowledge that we need him.

And that's the point at which we can receive his blessing. Which leads us to verse 28. Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you've struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.

I've called this section consecration. That's a fancy word for God changing us, God transforming us. Jacob, the deceiver, has been given a new name, Israel, the one who struggled and has overcome. This marked the change, the transformation in Jacob. Jacob tried so hard to be successful, to save himself, using cunning, using all kinds of strategies, sending men ahead of him to Esau, sending all kinds of gifts.

[69:54] But he realised it wasn't about that. Jacob walked away from this wrestling match with a new name. A name that meant he could finally put his past behind him.

Except he didn't walk away. You may have noticed in verse 31, he limped. A constant reminder that he'd been broken by God. And that's where we find consecration.

That's where we find transformation. Not in our own plans to fix our problems or to fix ourselves. We find consecration when we're prepared to be broken and brought to a place of confession.

When we surrender to God. That's where God simultaneously breaks us and heals us. When we cling on to him for dear life, then we actually find we're finally free.

Verse 29. Then he blessed him there. And on to verse 30. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, it's because I saw God face to face and yet my life was spared.

[70:57] And this is the contradiction of the wrestling match. That God blessed Jacob and didn't kill him. One theologian called Frederick Buechner calls this the magnificent defeat. God is saying, you've been a deceiver.

You've been conniving. You've been a terrible person. You've been wrestling with everyone. You've been wrestling with me. And I reward you. This is the contradiction. This is the paradox.

Here's a man holding on for dear life, crippled, utterly powerless, and God stands over him and pronounces him the winner. How can God say winner to a loser?

How can God say good to bad? How can God say accepted to the unacceptable? Jacob doesn't understand. That's why he calls the place Peniel. He doesn't understand why his life was spared by God.

He's shocked that all he did get was a blow that woke him up and didn't kill him. All his life he's been cheating, cheating people, trying to cheat God. Now God says, you're the winner.

[71:59] You've overcome. How can God accept him like that? Well, the answer is back in verse 25. We touched on this. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, it says, wait, this is God.

We saw that he could have annihilated Jacob at any moment. But he made himself weak so that he failed to overpower Jacob. You see, if he had overpowered him, he wouldn't have got what he wanted.

A changed heart. A transformed life. So God failed in order to succeed. God lost in order to win. And this points to the ultimate place where God won through losing.

On the cross. See, Jesus wrestled on the cross. But unlike Jacob, he wrestled with the full weight of God's wrath on him. Jacob got a blow that woke him up, but didn't destroy him.

Jacob said, I won't let go until I get the blessing. Jesus said, I won't let go until they get the blessing. On the cross, Jesus was taking the curse of the law, which we break, to get the blessing for us.

[73:08] So Jesus is actually the ultimate Jacob, who took the ultimate blow, the full weight of God's justice, so that we just get the loving blow to wake us up.

And it is a blow for us to know that, to know that we can't save ourselves because we're not good enough. And because we're not good enough, the Son of God, the creator of the universe, had to make himself weak and had to die for us.

It's a blow because we have to accept who we are and surrender to God. If you can wrestle with that, if you can confront this truth, cling on to God and confess who you are, you will find blessing, peace and transformation.

And he will say, you're a winner and I want to bless you and I want to keep on blessing you because of what Jesus has done for you. Well, the next part of the story now seems almost incidental, but it's a beautiful conclusion as Jacob looks up and sees Esau coming with the 400 men in chapter 33, verse 4.

And he bows down seven times. But Esau ran to him and hugged him and kissed him. Instead of wrath, he gets a hug. Instead of a beating, he gets a kiss.

[74:29] Instead of retribution, he gets forgiveness. forgiveness. That's the power of God who makes himself weak for us. If you haven't wrestled with God over that, then I encourage you to.

Let's just take a moment to pause and to be still and to respond to God. You may find it helpful just to close your eyes as we consider what God is saying to us and how we can respond.

Maybe you're aware that you've been wrestling with God. Maybe it's felt like you've been wrestling with people or situations whereas actually your biggest wrestling match is with God.

And maybe you need to engage with God at this moment. It's good to wrestle with God. To find the point where our own desires and our own plans clash with him.

You know, often this happens when we know what God wants us to do and we resist. And it may be that you're here this morning and you know what God is telling you. And you feel it deep down like a knot in your stomach.

[75:46] You feel it when you're in this place. You feel a sense of unease and you know God is calling you to take that step. He wants to grapple with you over that.

He wants to wrestle with you. He invites us to wrestle with him. But ultimately, he invites us to be broken by him. Are you ready to be broken by God?

It's when we're broken that we can be healed. It's when we're empty that we can be filled. Are you ready to surrender to God?

Because he's here now. And he invites you to do that. Let's pray.

Lord God, we might often shy away from confrontation, but you don't. And we thank you for that.

We thank you for meeting us here today in your word.

[77:07] Lord, we recognize that sometimes you have to break us. So break us, Lord. Do your work in us.

And help us to cling on to you. Because you are the only thing that we need. We recognize as well that you don't give us the blow that we deserve.

And we're so thankful. We're so thankful that Jesus took that for us. We thank you that he took your full weight. He wrestled for us.

So that we could be free. That is a blow to us. Because it means we're not good enough. It means we need to surrender to you. Help us to surrender to you now, Lord.

Amen. I'm going to invite the musicians to come up and to lead us in our final hymn. Just like to encourage you just to continue to respond to God.

[78:14] And if you sense that God is doing something in your heart, I just really encourage you to come and talk to me or talk to any of our leaders afterwards. We'd love to talk that through with you, to pray with you.

Don't stop the work that God has started here. As we sing, I'd like to encourage you to stand if you feel able to, but just feel free to take this moment just to sit in quiet and just continue to encounter God in this time.

great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father.

great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness, morning by morning, new all I have needed, and thy hand hath provided, great is thy faithfulness, Lord, come to me.

Son, moon, and stars in their courses above, join with all nature in manifold witness, to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

[80:35] Great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness, Lord, come to me.

Lord, come to me. God, come to me. All I have needed, thy hand hath provided, great is thy faithfulness, Lord, come to me.

Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, come to me. Lord, I'm for sin and a peace that endureth Find on dear presence to cheer and to guide Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow Blessings are mine with ten thousand beside Great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness Morning by morning, new mercies I see All I have need and thy hand and your mind

Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, come to me Let's receive the blessing Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely And may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless At the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ He who calls you is faithful He will surely do it In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, amen So we invite you, if you would like prayer To seek out one of the church leaders Or anyone with the white praying hands badges And also there's coffee served in the information room God bless you