Struggling Moving Forward

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[0:00] 33, and then we'll sing, and then we'll look at this passage together. Continuing our series in the life of Jacob, an ordinary man, and yet God was faithful to him, as he's faithful to you and I. He invested in him the future of the nation of Israel, and obviously the nations of the world. And if God failed him, there is no reason for us to have confidence in him, but he didn't fail him, and he never fails us, and he never fails in what he sets out to do. So here, let's look at this ordinary man. God has wrestled with him in Peniel, and now we see this is the point that Jacob dreaded for 20 years. We're coming to a key chapter. It's a good chapter. It tidies up a good part of his life. It's a very special chapter, and we'll enjoy this together. So after God, the Lord, wrestles with him, he leaves limping. And then in chapter 33, we read this. Jacob looked up, and there was Esau, coming with his 400 men. That was the very thing, excuse me, that he dreaded. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the 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 and threw his arms around his neck and kissed him, and they wept. Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. Who are these with you? He asked. Jacob answered, They are the children God has graciously given your servant.

Then the female servants and their children approached and bowed down. Next Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down. Esau asked, What's the meaning of all these flocks and herds I met? To find favor in your eyes, my Lord, he said.
But Esau said, I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself. No, please, said Jacob. If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God. Now that you have received me favorably, please accept the present that was brought to you. For God has been gracious to me, and I have all I need. And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it. Then Esau said, Let us be on our way. I'll accompany you.
But Jacob said to him, My Lord knows that the children are tender and that I must care for the ewes and cows that are nursing their young. If they are driven hard just one day, all the animals will die. So let my Lord go on ahead of his servant while I move along slowly at the pace of the flocks and herds before me and at the pace of the children until I come to my Lord and see her. Esau said, Then let me leave some of my men with you. But why do that? Jacob asked. Just let me find favor in your eyes of my Lord. So that day Esau started on his way back to Seir. Jacob, however, went to Succoth, where he built an altar for himself and made shelters for his livestock. That is why the place is called Succoth. After Jacob came from Paddan Aram, he arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped within sight of the city. For a hundred pieces of silver he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent. There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel. And we'll end our reading at the end of chapter 33. Let's stand to three and the moments that are remaining to us. We'll consider this passage together. But let's seek God's face.
[4:23] Let's ask for his help to understand. Father, with your word open before us, we pray that the Holy Spirit himself would be our teacher, that he would take these great historical happenings, but great theological truths and apply them to our hearts. So, Father, speak to us. Lord, we come as a congregation.

We come, Lord, as individuals. We pray, Lord, that you would speak to us as a church and as an individual, as one who has been redeemed by the blood of your son, special to you. So, Father, draw our hearts after you in love and help us, Father, even through this passage, perhaps, to make sense of perhaps what's happening to us in these days as individuals as well, how you're working in

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our life and how you often work in our lives. So, speak to us now, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I remember when I was in London hearing an introduction to a sermon, which has remained with me for quite some time. You know, Lucille and I were down in London. We, this was the second time we were there. My first pastorate was in southeast London. But this second time, we made up for lost time. We loved going to the theater. Any old rubbish we'd watch, as long as it was less than 30 pounds.
That was always the limit. We would never pay more than 30 pounds. And we would sit at the booth and try and get bargains and stuff. It'd be 42nd Street or whatever. It'd be a play, something that was good.
And we really quite enjoyed that. It was quite exciting. But in this introduction to the sermon, somebody had mentioned that they like going to the theater as well. But he mentioned something in it that isn't so exciting. And it's this image here of the interval. Nobody ever talks about the interval. [6:07] I went to the theater and the interval was great. I used to hate the interval. The safety curtain comes down and you have to just stand and stretch your legs. And you might decide to go for one of these ice creams, which is a wee plastic spoon. And it's the hardest ice cream you could ever imagine.

Your tongue's like, mmm, you're trying to break this thing. And you're waiting and it's shattering and getting in your eye. It's the hardest ice cream known to man. This rubber ball. And that's about the only exciting thing you get. It's boring. Nobody goes, oh, the interval was just amazing. It was this. You can't wait for the second half. And you'll talk about what happened before the interval and after it. But the interval itself is pretty boring. Most of life is like the interval. That's what this person said in introduction. And I thought, he's dead right. Most of it is just maybe not a lot to say.
We're almost, we had the excitement when the Lord saved us and we're waiting for the main attraction for the Lord coming back. And then he was trying new heaven and a new earth and that's going to be great.
But life is just one big long interval of struggle and just trying to get by. And there's something liberating about that when you realize that life isn't always a bundle of roses. When we lived in London, we lived in an affluent area. It was very easy to envy those round about you. But life is hard.
[7:39] Whatever walk of life you have, it's like one big interval. And you're weak in three might be as drab as mine. It probably won't be much better. But life aren't really that exciting as we wait on the Lord. God chose Jacob. As we're looking at the life of Jacob, most of his life was hard. It was a hard life. And we are coming to the end of a 20-year period when he left home. And yet God blessed him.

His life wasn't all moonlight and roses. And you know the story up until this point. He stole his brother's blessing. It was prophesied that that would be the case. The older would serve the younger.
And he has to flee. Esau wants to kill him. So he runs away. He goes 500 miles. I can't remember. Is there a map next? There is. Yep. From this wee bit down here. From the wee pointy arrow. This is us coming back. But he went away up 500 miles, London, to Fort William. I remember that was the way I'd measured it. And away up there, he goes away up there to Uncle Laban. And Uncle Laban gives him grief.
He has to work 14 years. He's deceived. As he deceived his brother, his uncle deceives him. And he slaves away. His wages is changed 10 times. And he's tricked and deceived. And he finds it hard to make a living. He's making much for Uncle Laban. But he's not getting much himself. His life is a struggle. And eventually, after 20 years, the Lord tells him to go back. To go back home. It was always the plan. His mother thought he'd be back a lot sooner. By the time he gets back, she has passed on.
But he says, I'll call you and you can come back when it's safe. When your brother's anger calms down. But it never quite worked out that way. And you know, recently, as we've been looking at this, the Lord comes and says to him, now's the time for you to go back. Uncle Laban and the boys, his sons, really, they don't view you the same. Everything, in some ways, is going pear-shaped.
[9:50] But God blesses him. He blesses him financially with cattle and camels. And he says, now, everything's right for you to go back. It's great when the Lord makes his will clear for us. Whatever that is to be, do this now. Do that. And that's what happens to him. He comes back. And then on this map here, he comes all the way down. Thank you, Daniel. He comes to Peniel. And it's round

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about there that Uncle Laban catches up with him. And Uncle Laban had the power to destroy him, because he ran away with his daughters as he sees it. But God intervenes and says, don't say anything good or bad to Jacob. And God is looking after Jacob despite the hardships of life, as he looks after you despite the hardships of our life. And then, as we saw last time, in the midst of those 20 years, Jacob has a particular character where he's driven as an individual. He's driven to get ahead. He wants to be blessed. You and I want to be blessed. And Jacob has lived his whole life like this, planning and scheming and trying to bless himself and so forth. And yet, he acknowledges that God has been blessing him as well. But he's a man who likes to plan and to organize. And we saw this in chapter 32, where now Uncle Laban's gone. They've had a hug fest. He's a way back. That's sorted. And now, this new chapter, he's coming back to the promised land, the land that God promised him, where he wants him to be. But Esau still waits. And he's told, he starts to send these animals and family across. And he's told simply, Esau's coming to meet you, which would have been good, except he's coming with 400 men. And you remember last time, in great fear and distress,

God breaks into his life. And that is something that often happens to us. We can go through life, like Frank Sinatra, I did it my way. I'm doing fine. I'll just pull up myself with my bootlaces. I'll plan and I'll scheme and I'll get it to work. But occasionally, because we are a work in progress, there are times when God singles us out. God doesn't shine us all up like the car wash we were thinking this morning. You don't get the deluxe diamond version. If you ever go through these, you have to choose, don't you? You don't get the economy one that's a guy in a bucket. You get the all singing, all dancing, diamond, polish one. God doesn't do that with you from day one of your conversion. But every now and again, he'll say, John, enough is enough. You've been walking for me and you've been singing songs on Sunday. But every Monday, you're almost feeding an ulcer because you're worried about where the future's going, what's going to happen. You're worried and troubled about many things, a bit like Martha. And you'd need to learn to sit at my feet. And basically, that's what's happening when God wrestles with them. The Lord wrestles with him. And then there's wrestling. He still wants to be blessed. Bless me, bless me, bless me. And the Lord does this. The Lord says, you've struggled with God and with men. Changes his name to Israel, which basically means one who struggles. And that will be the history of Israel to come. But it's certainly his history, his life. And God comes, and he wrestles with him, and he changes him. And that's what I want us to look at. I want to look at chapter 33. I've struggled, I'll be honest with you, trying to think, why is this in the Scriptures? It's a nice tidy end to things, because you'd be less wondering, did this guy Esau ever kill him? Whatever happened? How did it finish the whole Esau-Jacob thing? Well, this is recorded for us. But what can we learn from this? So, that's what I want us to look at this evening. I want to mention four things that we can learn from this passage. I have four S's. You'll need to forgive the first point. I really struggled with my thesaurus, trying to get another S. Because there has to be another S for the word changed. If you can do this, sometimes when I've preached, somebody's come up, I think they've done it during the service. I'll help the pastor. Pastor, here's an S you could have used. And I go, ah, I wish you'd told me that sooner. Anyway, I'm going to describe them in four ways in this passage. The first one, I've chosen this word, shuffling. Shuffling. Yeah, no wonder you're laughing. It was to do with the word limped. [14:40] If you do a thesaurus for limped, you'll get shuffling. But it's a good word. What I'm going to communicate and what this passage communicates is, after God works in his life, he doesn't walk the same way. We talk about our walk with the Lord. How is our walk with the Lord? Do we have a good walk? You want to walk well with the Lord this week? Walk in close fellowship with him, not quenching the Spirit. His walk, after this encounter with God, when God wrestles with him, he walks differently. He's not strutting. He's not the same arrogance. He's not running. He's not bold and brash. He's shuffling. He's limping. He is different. And that is what happens. After this encounter, we read this at the end of chapter 32, the sun rose on him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. God, in that great wrestling move that decapitated the touch, he simply just touched him. Boom. And that was him finished. The contest was over. And that's what happens to us.

Sometimes God says, John, enough is enough. You've been a Christian for 40 years, and you're not really trusting in me. You're not really resting in me. You're still fighting. And that is very much Jacob's life to this point. And he does this. God has to get him to walk differently with him, to be more dependent on God. As we were saying this morning, whenever you become a Christian, God

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changes our standing before him, from unrighteous to righteous, from a child of the devil to a child of God, from hell to heaven. He changes us in so many ways. But there's still a big change still needs to happen, and God will often break in. Martin Lloyd-Jones, I mentioned him this morning. He was asked this question. What does a person look like who has truly met God? Alluding to this passage, and he says, he walks with a limp. Whenever you meet God, you are changed. And that might just be a quiet time, and it might just be a small change. Lord, I was fearful about Monday, but Lord, I heard you speaking to me through the Psalms, through your Word. Whenever we draw close to God, we were saying this morning, he draws close to us. And when this happens, we are changed. You cannot meet God in the Word and not be changed by the Holy Spirit. That should really excite us. So when a person who has met God, they walk with a limp. They start to shuffle. They don't have the same arrogance.

Watch me. I'm gifted. I can do this. They're not full of themselves or full of self-righteousness. They become a humble person. They don't strut. They begin to shuffle along. And that's what's happening to him, as we'll see in this passage in a minute. His pride has turned to lowliness, and his greed to generosity, and his self-reliance turns into worship. And that's what we'll look at in the moment. But he's in a better position. People, I was thinking as I was preparing this, it was a bit like the MP. You know who lost his limbs, his arms and his legs, and you saw him getting a big round of applause. Have you ever saw the pictures of that when his limbs were black?

Like plastic, he said. It was like his mobile phone, and how he has come through that. He's different. He's not the same. And Jacob, in some ways, isn't the same. Look at how things change. Courage. Look at verse 1, 2, and 3. He puts various—I think if you look at this, you think, well, he's putting the favorite ones to the back. He's keeping Rachel and Joseph to the end, and he'll put the expendable ones to the front. But verse 3 says, he himself went on ahead. As you know, when he meets Esau, he's at the front of the queue.

[18:52] There was a time he wouldn't have done this. He had a time he'd have sent them off, and he's at the back. And if he attacks them, you remember, we can do a runner. We will do this. He's looking after himself. Now, here is someone who, yes, he might be in great fear and distress, or maybe he's more confident now. But he goes at the front. He's no idea. We read here in verse 1, there's Esau coming, and with his words, coming with his 400 men. That's supposed to strike us with fear. And there they are, the 400 men coming, and he's at the front. He goes on ahead of them. That's a changed man.

I don't know what troubles or problems you might face Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday, day. But to walk confidently into them, you can only do with the power of God, with the strength of God. You can't do it. I don't know what short-term fears you might have, or what long-term or mid-term fears. How's it going to work out for you over these coming weeks and months and years?

He walks straight into it. He's being wrestled with God. He's not the same. He's shuffling. He's not strutting. He's walking humbly with his God. Then he comes in humility here. Look, he bows down seven times as he approaches his brother. It's great humility here. Although the older's to serve, the younger, he's coming, and he's recognizing, he's referring to Esau as Lord, and he's the servant, your servant. I'm your unworthy servant. He's coming in humility. He might have more wealth than Esau's got, but he doesn't lord over him. He doesn't say, well, Isaac, our father, bless me.

You have to bow down to me. Remember, that was the blessing to Jacob. May nations bow down before you. May your mother's sons bow down to you. Instead, he comes and he bows down to him.

And great humility here. So, humility, he seeks atonement. He's a new man. Courage replaces cowardice. Humility replaces arrogance, and he attempts to bless Esau at this time. He's different.

[21:14] It's a different walk. He's trusting more in the Lord. It was great. I really enjoyed what Margaret did on Wednesday about sharing your favorite verse, I think it was. Actually, I was sitting at the back and my hearing was out of whack. I thought she says versions, and I think the versions of the Bible, I thought this is going to be a short conversation, this. But verses, it was very good, and I think it was Dorothy that mentioned Isaiah 26.3. I love that. You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind has stayed upon you. That got a thumbs up from me. A verse, my favorite verse changes every week. And I think it's good if you've got a verse. Don't just rely on the one verse you got 20 years ago. Get fresh verses. It's all fresh stuff now, missus. Get these fresh verses and feast on them.

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My verses will change every week. I like a verse for a day, but usually over the week there's been one verse that's really, it might be a Tuesday morning that I got it. The verse I'm feeding on just now is Isaiah 30.15. It's half a verse. In quietness and trust will be your strength.
I just love thinking on that. Quietness. John, stop fighting. Stop mouthing off and, Lord, what you're doing and what's happening. Quiet. Be quiet and trust the Lord. That's where your strength will come from. And if you don't have any strength, discover that. I'm embracing that.
Lord, help me to be quiet like a weaned child before you. Jacob is this weaned child. He's different. He's not quite the same after this encounter with God. So, he's shuffling. Secondly, he's a surprised man. Things don't turn out as he expected. He's a new walk with God and he walks into the situation trusting in the Lord. He puts himself first and he relies on him. He's not the same after this encounter. And things don't turn out as he feared. And he meets Esau and Esau just runs towards him.
Not only is Jacob changed, it appears Esau has changed from wanting to murder this guy. He now runs to him and embraces him. It's the way you greeted folk in that part of the world. He throws his arms around him, verse 4, and kisses him. And it really is quite something. Look at the words. [23:42] It's like the prodigal son running, embracing, falling on his neck, weeping, and so forth. And Esau is very gracious. And he wasn't expecting this, Jacob. He had no idea what to expect. And Esau is so gracious, he doesn't want to accept the gift. And he says, come and live with me as well.

And after so much hatred, it's one of the commentators says, this scene has to be one of the most beautiful in Scripture, where here is this free forgiveness that Esau offers to his brother who cheated him, who wronged him. And we don't know what's happened to him and why the changes come about. But it's interesting that one of the commentators says, it's like a model of divine love. So much so, no wonder that Jacob says, I have seen your face, and it's like seeing the face of God. It's as if the love of God is just pouring out on you. He never expresses it. This is completely this coming. How is this going to end with Esau? And together they will. And Jacob is very humble in all of this. And I like verse 5, Jacob's reply. When he's asked by Esau, who are these with you?
He doesn't say, up to this point, he's always referred to God as God has blessed me. He chooses his words carefully. He says, these are the children God has graciously given me. Gracious speaks of humility. It speaks of forgiveness. God has been gracious to me. He doesn't use the word bless, because that was rubbing salt in the wounds. He stole the blessing. In other words, remember, I stole your blessing. This is it here. I'm living the dream. He doesn't do this. He says, God has been gracious to me. He's forgiven me. He's given. And this is such a good way for atonement.
It's a good study to study this and see how to be made up with someone. And the two of them are reconciled. He accepts this and so forth. In other words, take this blessing. God's blessed me. Let me bless you. I stole your blessing. Let me bless you. So he's trying to do this. And God sometimes does this, doesn't he? I don't know about you. You can testify. I could bring you up here and I could say, tell me a time in your life when you were greatly afraid. How did it work out? Did God sustain you or keep you? We all have a testimony of this. Lord, I'm fearful. I'm anxious. And you look back and one of the greatest things that I've even said this to Lucille often, even over the past few weeks, I love just reminding myself of this. Hitherto has the Lord helped us. Can you, as you sit here this evening, can you say, the Lord failed me. He just failed me left, right, and center. You can never say it. He doesn't work in ways that we expect. His blessings come in different ways. But up to this point, he has always helped us. And Jacob knows this. And you know this as well. The Lord has helped you many times. And who knows what surprises wait us as a church around the corner and wait for us as individuals. I had root canal treatment just recently. That went better than expected. [27:05] I was for hugging the dentist. Well done. You did well there. That was a lot better. She did cheek to tell me. I don't know why they do this. She says, just to let you know, 70%. This might work. 70% success rate. I think, well, okay, I didn't need to know that. But okay, fair enough. And she says, oh, and sometimes because we're going in there, it's a small drill.

Sometimes that breaks off in there. If that happens, I'll let you know. I goes, just don't bother saying anything. I'd just rather not know. But with this black picture before she started, with this drill breaking in my tooth, as she's drilling the nerve out, oh, great, thanks. You did well. And life is like that. They don't always go as badly as we expect. We need to trust God. His ways are perfect. And that's how God works. So he was surprised. And God often surprises us when we shuffle, when we walk differently with him. Thirdly, he was also still struggling. His wrestling match didn't

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obliterate him. He's still anxious about Esau. Can he really trust him? He doesn't really know. Let me accompany you. No, don't worry. He's even still planning and scheming. He's still finding it difficult to fully trust. Here's the map. So instead of going down in the blue line to Seir, he decides to go 90 degrees. He's going west. And he decides to go to Succoth and then ultimately on to Shechem. And we don't know why he did this. Maybe he's beginning. I really trust Esau. I'm not too sure. Also, God had told him to go back home. And that is more in that direction. It's possibly that. We simply don't know why. I remember reading this as a young Christian thinking, wow, why did he not follow? And there's his brother saying, come with me. We'll stay. I'm coming. I'll be right behind you. And he goes somewhere else. He's still struggling. You and I will be the same.
I remember as a young Christian when you discovered that sin is not obliterated when you become a Christian and thinking, Lord, forgive me. Watch me. I'm going to be better this time only to fall flat on your face again and constantly amazed at the amount of times you keep sinning and keep coming back. We will struggle. We were saying this this morning. We will struggle between here and the grave. It will always be the case. There'll be times we'll know God's grace, great surprising events, great blessing when we didn't deserve it or expect it. But other times will we still struggle? And Jacob is still struggling. Fourthly, it wins well. He's a spiritual man.
[29:44] He's still a spiritual man. Although for whatever reason he does what he does, he's still a spiritual man. And here we see verse 18. Jacob came from Paddan Aram. He arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped there within the site of the city. He buys a plot of ground there. But then in verse 20, he sets up an altar. And this is significant, this altar. This is a very significant altar for Jacob because this is the first time where Jacob really, where God really becomes his God wholeheartedly. So, he calls this altar El Elohe Israel. And this, up to this point, he's often said, he's often referred to the Lord as the God of my father Isaac up until this time. He's my father's God.

His name is now Israel. It was changed to Israel. And this altar is called God, the God of Israel, the God of Jacob. It is his. Now he's really worshiping. He's really praising the Lord. He's walking with God. And he will walk, he will limp with God for the rest of his days. So, in this account of reconciliation, it's a high point in Genesis, God has been good to Jacob as always. Things have turned out better than he did. He's been changed. Esau has been changed, surprising the whole thing, and yet he's still struggling. But he's a new man. He's a new man with a new walk with God. And that's what God always wants. It would be good if it finished here, wouldn't it? If the life of Jacob finished at the end of chapter 33, but if you know 34, Shechem is going to prove to be a complete disaster to choose to live there. And his daughter will be raped and his sons will go on a murdering spree. He's not out of the woods. And life can sometimes do this and we can get ourself into trouble. And we'll look at that next time and see how the Lord works in his life and looks after him and protects him during even the most horrendous things. Let's stand and we'll sing our closing song. Grace unmeasured, boundless, free. Oh, the grace of God is worth singing about and praising.
He is a gracious God to you and to me every single day, not just when we were saved, but every day of our life. Let's stand and sing. This is a track of evs for how the Lord works in the Lord ruth One from us. Peace and Revelation.
You can skip this part. There are many now. Let's pick this year in the Harry Potter town. Favorite sounds of truth. I'm confident. la' Damit amiss einer such an chant do to you. Let's find out. Let's stand and feel through all the scratched with your box and let's hang out through them all the deeper transformation of the side. I So I can see here in this manner, I need to pl■■■■ based on profit transmission of the glass tills, where we can hear these classical worms. I'm comfortable just seeing your senses. Yeah.
[32:48] é ■■ of what? I can see that when we're Gmail and after this verse. Why?

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