

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Wrestling with God to Reconcile with God”
(Part I of “Our Ministry of Reconciliation”)
February 1, 2025

Scripture

Genesis 32:22-32
2 Corinthians 5:18-21

Core Idea and purpose

Core theological ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- None. This is the first sermon in the series

Core theological idea: We encourage people to wrestle with God so they can come to Jesus and be reconciled with God

Challenge/purpose: To exhort the congregants to encourage people to wrestle with God.

The Sermon

When I was a high school wrestler, I came to the realization that wrestling is one of the toughest sports ever created! It is certainly tougher than football. Football players don't have to maintain their weight, and they don't have the stamina to last 9 minutes in a wrestling match. To be a wrestling champion, you must have it all: skill, stamina, physical strength, agility, and determination. Yes, there are few sports tougher than wrestling.

What's really cool about wrestling is that it is a great metaphor for the struggle of getting to know something. When we struggle to know algebra, we are wrestling with algebra. When we struggle to know science, we are wrestling with science. When we struggle to know Spanish, we are wrestling with Spanish. When we struggle to know the Bible, we are wrestling with the Bible. (It's very good to wrestle with the Bible.) **Most importantly**, when we struggle to know God, we are wrestling with God. There are times when we all need to wrestle with God.

Jacob needed to wrestle with God. According to Genesis, chapters 25-32, Jacob was a manipulative, conniving, deceitful, and selfish man. His conniving character put him in danger. He did things to cause his brother, Esau, to want to kill him! So, Jacob fled far away to Haran and lived with his relatives. After many years in Haran, God called Jacob home. Jacob, however, was scared. He didn't know if his brother Esau still wanted to kill him.

The problem, however, wasn't with Esau and his possible desire to kill Jacob. The problem was with Jacob and his conniving heart. Jacob did not yet have a heart changing relationship with God. The Lord, however, knew that if they

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wrestled each other, they would get to know each other and that would change Jacob's heart. So, God started a wrestling match with Jacob.

One night, while heading home, Jacob sent his two wives, two female servants, and eleven children, across the stream – leaving him alone for the night. A mysterious man appeared and wrestled with Jacob all night. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint.

The mysterious man then said, “Let me go, for the day has broken.”

But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

To which the mysterious man replied, “What is your name?”

Jacob answered, “I am Jacob”

Then the mysterious man said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.”

Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him.

So, Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.”

Jacob's wrestling match with God led to his reconciliation with God.

- By wrestling with God Jacob began to know God and gain wisdom.
 - That's why Jacob knew enough to insist on a blessing.
- When the mysterious man dislocated his hip, Jacob realized that he needed to surrender to the loving authority of God.
 - God and only God is sovereign.
- This reconciliation with God was complete when Jacob's heart began to change.
 - This is what the name change is all about.
 - The mysterious man changed Jacob's name to Israel which, in Hebrew, means wrestle with God.
 - In the Bible, whenever God changes a person's name, it signifies that that person has changed and started the process to become a better person.
 - Jacob, who is now called Israel, is no longer the manipulative, conniving, deceitful, and selfish man he used to be.

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We are all like Jacob. From time to time, we all need to wrestle with God. When bad, horrible things happen to us, we want to confront God about it. When bad people seem to do well and good people suffer, we want to confront God about it. When we watch the news and it seems as if the world is falling apart, we want to confront God about it. There is a need within us to wrestle with God and God is always up for a wrestling match.

So, how do we wrestle with God? A mysterious man never visited me in the middle of the night to challenge me to an all-night wrestling match. So, how do we wrestle with God? We do so by questioning or even arguing with God.

The Prophet Habakkuk is one of the best examples of how we can wrestle with God through questioning and argument. Habakkuk begins by complaining to God (1:1-4). If you are frustrated with life, it's ok to complain to God. God then responds to the complaint (1:5-11). Evidently, Habakkuk didn't like God's response because he complains about God's response (1:12-17). In the next verse, 2:1, Habakkuk waits for God's 2nd response. Finally, God patiently gives the 2nd response. To which Habakkuk gives praise to God. It's interesting, Habakkuk gives praise to God even though he cannot yet see God's deliverance. He says, “Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.” This is praising God in advance. When we wrestle with God, we will eventually recognize God's sovereignty and goodness and our hearts will change. I invite you to read this book for yourself. It will take less than thirty minutes; it's only 3 chapters long. As you read it, pay attention to how Habakkuk wrestles with God.

As we've seen with both Jacob and Habakkuk, wrestling with God brings about reconciliation with God.

Now, think about this, in God's infinite wisdom and love, God decided to reconcile the world with himself through Jesus Christ. And, as followers of Christ, God calls us to be ministers of reconciliation. Consider 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us...” So, when we wrestle with God, we will ultimately come to Jesus and find reconciliation with God.

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If we are ministers of reconciliation, then we should encourage people to wrestle with God so they can come to Jesus and be reconciled with God. Let me say this again: We should encourage people to wrestle with God so they can come to Jesus and be reconciled with God.

If you know people who doubt God, encourage them to wrestle with God. If they’re asking why God allows bad things to happen to good people, let them know you do not have all the answers and then offer to study Job, Habakkuk or some of the Psalms with them. If they’re questioning God’s goodness, offer to study the Gospels with them. Let them ask the questions and encourage them to wrestle with God until they receive an answer.

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- I. When I was a high school wrestler, I came to the realization that wrestling is one of the toughest sports ever created!
 - A. It is certainly tougher than football.
 - Football players don't have to watch what they eat to make weight,
 - and they don't have the stamina to last 9 minutes in a wrestling match.
 - B. To be a wrestling champion, you must have it all: skill, stamina, physical strength, agility, and determination.
 - C. Yes, there are few sports tougher than wrestling.
- II. What's really cool about wrestling is that it is a great metaphor for the struggle of getting to know something.
 - A. When we struggle to know algebra, we are wrestling with algebra.
 - B. When we struggle to know science, we are wrestling with science.
 - C. When we struggle to know Spanish, we are wrestling with Spanish.
 - D. When we struggle to know the Bible, we are wrestling with the Bible. (It's very good to wrestle with the Bible.)
 - E. Most importantly, when we struggle to know God, we are wrestling with God.
 - There are times when we all need to wrestle with God.
- III. Jacob needed to wrestle with God.
 - A. According to Genesis, chapters 25-32, Jacob was a manipulative, conniving, deceitful, and selfish man.
 - B. His conniving character put him in danger.
 - His brother, Esau, wanted to kill him!
 - So, Jacob fled far away to Haran and lived with his relatives.
 - C. After many years in Haran, God called Jacob to return home.
 - Jacob, however, was scared.

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- He didn't know if his brother Esau still wanted to kill him.

D. The problem, however, wasn't with Esau and his possible desire to kill Jacob.

- The problem was with Jacob and his conniving heart.
- Jacob did not yet have a heart changing relationship with God.
- The Lord, however, knew that if they wrestled each other, they would get to know each other and that would change Jacob's heart.
- So, God started a wrestling match with Jacob.

IV. Jacob's wrestling match with God

A. One night, while heading home, Jacob sent his two wives, two female servants, and eleven children, across the stream – leaving him alone for the night.

- A mysterious man appeared and wrestled with Jacob all night.
- When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint.
- The mysterious man then said, “Let me go, for the day has broken.”
- But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”
- To which the mysterious man replied, “What is your name?”
- Jacob answered, “I am Jacob”
- Then the mysterious man said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.”
- Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him.
- So, Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.”

B. Jacob's wrestling match with God led to his reconciliation with God.

- By wrestling with God Jacob began to know God and gain wisdom.

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- That's why Jacob knew enough to insist on a blessing.
- When the mysterious man dislocated his hip, Jacob realized that he needed to surrender to the loving authority of God.
 - God and only God is sovereign.
- This reconciliation with God was complete when Jacob's heart began to change.
 - This is what name change is all about.
 - The mysterious man changed Jacob's name to Israel which, in Hebrew, means wrestle with God.
 - In the Bible, whenever God changes a person's name, it signifies that that person has changed and became a better person.
 - Jacob, who is now called Israel, is no longer the manipulative, conniving, deceitful, and selfish man he used to be.

V. We are all like Jacob.

A. From time to time, we all need to wrestle with God.

- When bad, horrible things happen to us, we want to confront God about it.
- When bad people seem to do well, we want to confront God about it.
- When we watch the news and it seems as if the world is falling apart, we want to confront God about it.
- There is a need within us to wrestle with God and God is always up for a wrestling match.

B. So, how do we wrestle with God?

- A mysterious man never visited me in the middle of the night to challenge me to an all-night wrestling match.

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- So, how do we wrestle with God? We do so by questioning or even arguing with God.

VI. The Prophet Habakkuk is one of the best examples of how we can wrestle with God by questioning and arguing with God.

- A. Habakkuk begins by complaining to God (1:1-4).
 - If you are frustrated with life, it's ok to complain to God.
- B. God then God responds to the complaint (1:5-11).
- C. Evidently, Habakkuk didn't like God's response because he complains about God's response (1:12-17).
- D. In the next verse, 2:1, Habakkuk waits for God's 2nd response.
- E. God patiently gives the 2nd response.
- F. To which Habakkuk gives praise to God.
 - It's interesting, Habakkuk gives praise to God even though he cannot yet see God's deliverance.
 - He says, “Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.”
 - This is praising God in advance.
- G. Wrestling with God results in a recognition of God's sovereignty and goodness and in a changed heart.
- H. I invite you to read this book for yourself.
 - It will take less than thirty minutes; it's only 3 chapters long.
 - As you read it, pay attention to how Habakkuk wrestles with God.

VII. As we've seen with both Jacob and Habakkuk, wrestling with God brings about reconciliation with God. They were both reconciled with God by the time they stopped wrestling with God.

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- A. Now, think about this, in God's infinite wisdom and love, God decided to reconcile the world with himself through Jesus Christ.
- B. And, as followers of Christ, God calls us to be ministers of reconciliation.
 - Consider 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us...”
- C. So, when we wrestle with God, we will ultimately come to Jesus and find reconciliation with God.
- D. If we are ministers of reconciliation, then we should encourage people to wrestle with God so they can come to Jesus and be reconciled with God.
- E. Let me say this again: We should encourage people to wrestle with God so they can come to Jesus and be reconciled with God.
 - If you know people who doubt God, encourage them to wrestle with God.
 - If they're asking why God allows bad things to happen to good people, let them know you do not have all the answers and then offer to study Job, Habakkuk or some of the Psalms with them.
 - If they're questioning God's goodness, offer to study the Gospels with them.
 - Let them ask the questions and encourage them to wrestle with God until they receive an answer.