

- I am starting a new mini-series of teaching entitled: “Never waste a good crisis”
  - The word crisis has been used frequently throughout the current pandemic situation. It is a health crisis, which is creating an economic crisis, including a travel crisis, which is connected to a world crisis.
  - It got me thinking, because crisis is a common experience. And whether it is this pandemic, or any other of a multitude of crises, we all have to deal with them.
  - Can a crisis be good?
  - At a larger level (like this coronavirus) a crisis is simply a time of instability or danger.
  - At a personal level a crisis is an emotional or circumstantial upheaval in my life.
  - The current coronavirus crisis matters for most people because it creates personal crisis. Fear, worry, anxiety, change, boredom all come into play.
- It is not that the experience of any crisis is good. Events like a pandemic, death, sickness, loss of a job, a failing grade, missing prom, ending a relationship, starting one can all be moments of crisis.
  - What happens during those times is a huge deal. They are the shaping moments of life. They can shape us positively or negatively.
  - The good news is that we get to choose how we respond to any particular crisis. And the results of that response can be oh so good.
  - This is more important than you might think, because **Every crisis is an invitation to go deeper.**
  - Every crisis is a chance to move in a positive direction. It is not always easy. It is often time-consuming. It is rarely straight-forward. But it is possible. And it doesn’t happen by accident.
  - So for the next four weeks, I am going to look at four things to help us never waste a good crisis. Whether it is this pandemic we are in, or whether it is something else you are having to deal with, or whether it is something that has not happened yet.
  - We don’t need to waste it.
  - The need to wrestle with God.
  - The thoughts we think.
  - Living the long game.
  - Healthy community.
  - It has nothing to do with your personality style, your maturity, relationship status, or anything else. Every crisis, whether it is this current crisis or something else, is an invitation from God to dig in. To go deeper.
- To do this today we are going to examine the story of Jacob. You might be familiar with Jacob. He was the son of Isaac, the grandson of Abraham. He was considered one of the patriarchs of the Jewish nation.
  - His story is found in the book of Genesis. His name meant “deceiver” or “grasper.” Those names describe Jacob’s life. He was the younger brother to Esau but was his mother’s favorite. He manipulated and schemed to get ahead, often at his older brother’s expense. One time he went too far. He tricked his father out of a blessing that was supposed to go to his older brother.
- 27:41 Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”*
- Jacob, with the help of his mother, fled to a relative’s place far away. For the next 20 years he worked, manipulated and schemed. He ended up a rich man, with multiple wives, 11 children, and many servants. But his uncle Laban was trying to take advantage of him, so he resolved to leave and go back to his home country.

- There was one problem. That's still where Esau lived. Jacob decided to test the waters. *Genesis 32:3 Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. 4 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 have remained there till now. 5 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.' "*
- Let's put this ugliness behind us. After all, it's been 20 years. *6 When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, "We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."*
- Gulp! This was the worst of all of Jacob's fears coming true.
- Trouble was ahead. A crisis. The kind that can uproot your life. Change you. Kill you. *7 In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well.*
- He sets his plan to send bits of his wealth in staggered times, and each time they were to be delivered to Esau as a gift from his brother. Probably to hope to soften him up. *32:22 That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions.*
- He then separates his kids, wives and family up, so that they could not all be in the same place to be killed or taken. When it's all done, he sends everyone ahead of him. He has done all he can do.
- It is hard to catch the depth of what Jacob is wrestling with. His past decisions are coming back to haunt him. He is leaving what he knew but it looks like a bleak future.
- But he cannot sleep. And then something odd happens. *24 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 25 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. 26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." 27 The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. 28 Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome." 29 Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. 30 So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." 31 The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.*
- What is this all about? It is the oddest kind of story. No details are given, but the fight was real and physical.
- **It was a crisis that brought an invitation by God to go deeper.** In a moment of life changing crisis, a mysterious man comes and fights Jacob, and as the sun rises, Jacob sees it is God himself and it utterly and completely changes him.
- The purpose of this entire story is about Jacob's change in identity. It illustrates several things that will help us in our own crisis.

## I. God is a God who will wrestle with us.

- What kind of God is willing to be wrestled? What kind of God allows himself to be grappled with such that in the end he names an entire people group after that struggle?
- This is so important. It's what differentiates what we believe with every other religious system out there.
- What kind of God is willing to be wrestled? A God of relationship who knows us intimately and wants us to know him intimately as well.

- *“One does not need a relationship to submit to the authority of another; one merely accepts what comes and does what he’s told. However, to have the freedom to question, challenge, cry, appeal, wonder and grapple implies and assumes that there is something significant happening relationally.”* (John Stumbo, In the Midst: Treasures from the Dark)
- We are invited to have a significant and genuine relationship with the living God.
- Do you notice that God instigated this fight? He came to Jacob.
- If we are not waste a crisis in our lives, we must know that we can wrestle with problems and issues during that time because God is using that crisis to uncover deep things of our hearts that normal life simply does get to.
- Jacob was used to scheming, plotting, using his smarts and abilities to move his life forward, and now he is faced with a situation with his brother he cannot control and a man whom he is wrestling with that he cannot overcome.
- Our reactions during times of crisis begin to reveal what is going on deep under the surface.
- God is a God who wants us to grapple with him, to express ourselves, to admit our feelings and frustrations honestly to him.
- Our faith comes out of the freedom, even the necessity, or wrestling with real issues and facing life honestly and openly. So don’t be afraid to wrestle. There is value and reason in the fight itself.
- Word of warning though. Like a hiker getting a good view by getting near the edge of a cliff, you can take this one step to far.
- It is easy to slip from questioning to accusing. Honest wrestling can turn to bitter attacking. Our rightful confusion about His ways can erode to inappropriate conclusions about His character.
- When wrestling with God in crisis, evaluate your circumstances in light of his character rather than evaluating his character in light of your circumstances.
- As you wrestle with God in crisis, remember two things. 1) He exists; and 2) He rewards those who diligently seek him.

## **II. Crisis is often required to get from where we are to the Promised Land.**

- The names and geography of this story are lost on us. There is Hebrew word play in the story that helps the original readers see what we miss.
- Jacob is at a creek that leads into the river which borders the Promised Land. He is at the threshold of what God had promised to his father and his grandfather. God had promised it directly to Jacob earlier in his life.
- He cannot go back to what he had with his uncle, it was no longer healthy. But to get where God had promised, he had to face his brother and he had to face his God.
- It is not coincidence that the wrestling match lasted until daybreak – the darkness symbolized Jacob’s situation. He was faced with fear and uncertainty. Jacob was faced with someone he could not defeat.
- I wonder if the same thing is not true for us?
- Before we enter the land of Promise, maybe God has to put us down on the mat.
- What is interesting is that God picked this fight. He started it.
- Perhaps on a journey to a new life, a wrestling match is essential. Before the new comes, something old must die.
- So in the midst of this pandemic, or whatever crisis you are facing, the question is this: “What needs to die in yme to let something new come?”
- **Every crisis is an invitation to go deeper.**

- When we become more honest, we have better conversations with God. As our conversations deepen, so does our faith.
- Faith born in wrestling matches grows roots reaching down for deeper sources of nourishment.

### III. Let God change you.

- God uses crisis to give us an invitation to go deeper. Don't waste this time
- I see three things that happen at the climax of the story.

#### A. Jacob is wounded.

- As daybreak approaches, God reaches out and touches his hip and wounds him. He is physically hurt. He has been wounded.
- The wound changes the game. It's no longer about winning. It's about surviving. It causes him to cling desperately to God.
- Almost every crisis wounds. Our problem is that our culture where comfort is king, we see hardship as the worst kind of evil. This can discourage us when we are wounded and suffering. The greatest good is for us to get comfortable again.
- But perhaps your suffering is not all bad. Maybe there is more to this suffering than just trying to get out of it as quickly as possible.

#### B. Jacob pleads for a blessing.

- When he is wounded, rather than give up, as Jacob realized who he was wrestling, he becomes even more tenacious. He pleads for a blessing. He will not let go.
- He did not understand it all, but he was not going to let God go until God responded to him.
- As you are going through crisis, you are free to plead for his blessing. Don't let go. Cling to him.
- I am going to persevere in this until I learn every last thing God is saying to me in this.
- I love that kind of tenacity. That kind of struggle with God is a holy struggle.

#### C. God gives Jacob a new identity

- God's response to Jacob's plea is to give him a new name.
- He changes his name from deceiver and grasper to "God fights" or "One who struggles with God."
- Don't underestimate this. Names are related to nature, so the new name to Jacob was a huge deal. Jacob's new name defined an entire nation. "God fights". They could contend and wrestle with God and God would fight for them.
- Jacob is not who he was. He is different. He has encountered God in crisis and it has changed him.
- Jacob comes out of the wrestling match to face his brother with two things:
  - One, a new name. A new sense of identity. A new confidence.
  - Two, a limp. It is humbling and slows him down.
- He now has a bold humility, a confident brokenness.
- For the Christ-follower, there is no place for the slump-shouldered, head down, "woe-is-me" false humility foot shuffler. At the same time, an arrogant swagger is equally inappropriate. We are to have a stride of confidence yet humility.
- My friends, **every crisis is an invitation to go deeper.**
- A crisis that doesn't change you in some way is a waste of a good crisis.

- Take confidence that God is a God who will wrestle with you. He wants you to know him through the struggles of crisis.
- Faith is not a blind submission. Deep spirituality and deep questions are not necessarily in conflict.
- So pay attention. Ask the questions.
- What am I feeling? Why am I feeling this way? What am I craving? What am I not getting? What do I think would make this all better? Why is that important?
- What needs to die in me to make room for the what is next? How is he preparing me for the next season? How does he fundamentally want to change me or reveal himself?
- Notice one more thing though. Jacob never got an answer to the only question he asks.
- In his crisis, Jacob walks away with a blessing, not an answer. Interesting!
- We are not guaranteed answers to all our questions. We are guaranteed his presence.
- **Every crisis is an invitation to go deeper.**
- So let's not waste a good crisis. Whether it's the pandemic or something else, let's be people who are willing to wrestle with God, knowing that he is good, that he will draw near, and that the fight might be necessary to get to the Promised Land.