

Faith in Real Life: Stories of Hope in a Messed-Up World

Part 1: God Meets You in the Mess (Even When It's Your Fault)

Genesis 27-32

Summary: When life feels chaotic and broken, God meets you right in the middle of your mess (even when it's your fault), offering hope, grace, and a fresh start.

Main Ideas:

Every one of us has felt forgotten by God at some point.

God doesn't wait for us to clean up our mess. He meets us in it.

God shows up, not because we deserve it, but because of who he is.

True transformation takes more than a single mountaintop moment.

God comes to us right where we are, but refuses to leave us defined by our old failures.

When we wrestle with God, we discover the strength of his love.

Invitation:

Wrestle with God.

Tell him: "God, I'm wrestling with this... what do you want me to see/say/do?"

Discussion Questions:

1. When life feels chaotic or uncertain, what's your natural reaction: to try to fix it, escape it, or freeze?
2. When have you felt like God was distant or silent in your life? What did that feel like?
3. Read Genesis 32:24-31. Where in your life right now do you feel like you're "wrestling" with God... asking questions, feeling tension, or waiting for answers?
4. How might your life look different if you really believed that God meets you right where you are, not when you have it all together?
5. How can your group pray with you?

Transcript:

WE: Imagine this... you're lying awake in bed at 3 am. Worried, Angry, Anxious.

- And it feels like either God has given up on you, or he's just ignoring you.

Ever been there? I have. A LOT

If we're honest, every one of us has felt forgotten by God at some point.

Maybe you're there right now... wondering if God cares, or even if he's still listening.

So over the next six weeks, we're going to see how God interacts with people who are messy, broken, and uncertain.

- We'll look at what it means for him to meet people in the middle of their real life.

One of those stories is about Jacob.

- It's a great story because it reads less like a fairy tale and more like a soap opera.
- His choices rip his family apart and bring disaster on himself and those he loves.

If you've ever wondered, "Where is God when I've made a huge mistake?", "Has God given up on me?", or, "Does God care when I have to deal with the fallout of my own choices?" Jacob's story is for you.

Because what Jacob discovered is... **God doesn't wait for us to clean up our mess. He meets us in it.**

But before his story makes sense, we have to rewind a little bit...

GOD: Around 2000 BC, in Ancient Mesopotamia, God made a promise to Jacob's grandfather, Abraham.

Genesis 12:2-3ish (NLT) *"I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others... All the families on earth will be blessed through you."*

God starts his rescue plan for humanity with a regular guy and a regular family.

But Abraham and his wife face decades of waiting.

- They don't wait perfectly. They make huge mistakes with serious, lasting consequences
- But God keeps promising, and even though Abraham and his wife were a mess, God gives them a son, Isaac.

Fast forward... Isaac grows up, marries, and his wife becomes pregnant with twins who fight from the very beginning.

- Esau is born first
- Jacob follows, grasping his brother's heel... a little foreshadowing

"Grasping the heel" in their culture was another way of saying "grasping for advantage" or "scheming."

- Jacob lives up to his name.

His schemes weave a web of pain and division through his entire family.

Isaac loves Esau a rugged hunter

But his wife Rebekah loves Jacob... the stay-at-home cook.

And this favoritism poisons the family.

One day, Esau comes back from hunting, and he's famished.

- Jacob's home making some stew.

Jacob schemes up a deal...

- He refuses to feed his brother unless Esau gives up the firstborn's right... a privilege tied to spiritual leadership and God's promise.
- Esau, doesn't care about spiritual things like that, so he trades his future for a meal.

But Jacob's mom wants even more for him... together they scheme to deceive Isaac and steal Esau's blessing

- A public, spiritual pronouncement that determined the direction of the family for generations.

Isaac, old and blind, calls for Esau. Jacob shows up in disguise. He gets the father's blessing... and rips his family apart.

Jacob wouldn't wait on God.

- He wanted the blessing and the promise on his own terms, so he tricks his old, blind dad... trusting his own strategies and manipulation instead of trusting God.

What a jerk, right?

But how many of us have tried to get what we want from God by cutting corners, manipulating, or acting holy, instead of trusting he's enough?

We try to force God's hand to get what we want from him when we want it.

- We try to manipulate him through promises, deals, and using our good/religious deeds as leverage
- Some even try to tell God what to do... by "claiming" and "declaring" outcomes they want

And like Jacob... our grasping for control leaves a trail of damaged relationships and empty victories

When Esau finds out what happened, he threatens to kill Jacob

Rebekah panics and urges Jacob to run for his life and hide with her brother Laban, far from home.

Alone, exhausted, scared, with nothing to show for all his scheming... Jacob flees into the night.

- And when everything seems ruined, God shows up...

Genesis 28:11-16 (NLT) *At sundown he arrived at a good place to set up camp and stopped there for the night. Jacob found a stone to rest his head against and lay down to sleep. As he slept, he dreamed of a stairway that reached from the earth up to heaven. And he saw the angels of God going up and down the stairway. At the top of the stairway stood the LORD, and he said, "I am the LORD, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants. Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. What's more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you."*

What?! Why?!

- Why would God meet Jacob now?

After everything he's done, why would God reaffirm the promise?

- Jacob hasn't done anything to deserve this... just like Abraham before him.

God's mercy and care are never earned.

- God shows up, not because we deserve it, but because of who he is.

Even before God speaks, this vision shows Jacob how different God is from what people at the time, and people today, think he is.

In a world where people built towers (ziggurats) to reach distant gods, God shows that he comes down to us.

- We don't have to work our way up to him

Every other religion is about climbing, striving, and sacrificing to impress or reach God.

- But God steps down, pursues, and builds a bridge to us.

Now, you'd think after seeing angels, hearing God's promise, Jacob would become a new man overnight.

- Nope

Pretty soon, he's back to his old self and ways.

While staying with his uncle, Laban, Jacob falls for his cousin Rachel

But Laban deceives him. (Seems to be a family trait)

- After working for 7 years to marry Rachel...
- Laban marries Jacob to Rachel's older, not as pretty, sister, Leah, first.
- After another 7 years, Laban lets Jacob marry Rachel.
- And Jacob clearly favors Rachel over Leah.

Later, Jacob tricks Laban back, taking the best of the family flocks.

- It's a broken cycle of manipulation breeding more manipulation.

See, even after meeting God, Jacob doesn't change overnight. He goes right back to his old self.

And we so do the same thing.

- We can encounter God, have this mountaintop experience.
- We maybe even promise to change
- And then, just a few days later, go back to living life our own way, following the same patterns and habits, trying to make our own things happen.

Because true transformation takes more than a single mountaintop moment.

Jacob's scheming finally catches up to him.

- Laban's family turns against him, and Jacob is forced to run for his life again.

But even in this, God warned and protected Jacob

- Not because Jacob is good, but because God is faithful to his promise
- And he needed Jacob to get the message.

As Jacob's heading back home, the fear rushes in.

- It's been years, but he's pretty sure Esau isn't the forgive-and-forget type...
- All his scheming is finally going to be the end of him.

The night before facing Esau, Jacob sends his family ahead and spends the night alone...

- He's probably afraid, vulnerable, totally exposed.

And in that moment, God comes for him again.

Genesis 32:24-31(NLT) *This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket. Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!" But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." "What is your name?" the man asked. He replied, "Jacob." "Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won." "Please tell me your name," Jacob said. "Why do you want to know my name?" the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there. Jacob named the place Peniel (which means "face of God"), for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared." The sun was rising as Jacob left Peniel, and he was limping because of the injury to his hip.*

This is weird, right?

But this is actually the turning point of Jacob's story.

- He comes face-to-face with God himself.
- Some believe this was a physical appearance of Jesus before being born to Mary (a Christophany).
- And he wrestles with him.

Have you ever spent a sleepless night wrestling with God?

- Why, God?
- Where are You?
- What am I supposed to do now?

All his life, Jacob grabbed what he wanted by trickery and scheming.

- But this struggle isn't about leverage; it's about desperation.
- He won't let go because he needs God more than anything else.
- For the first time, he clings to God as his only hope.

And God gives Jacob a new name.

- He says you're not the cheat anymore. You are Israel.
- "Israel" means "God fights" or "God prevails."
- Jacob's old identity as deceiver, manipulator... is replaced with a new identity... Israel: one who wrestled with God and survived.

Meeting God didn't just wound him physically... it transformed who he was and how he saw himself.

And his new name becomes the name of God's people... Israel

- A nation born out of wrestling and clinging to God even in weakness.

For some reason, we think wrestling with God... questioning, doubting, even crying out in anger makes God mad at us.

- But God actually invites us to wrestle with him.
- To bring our questions, hurts... everything, the good, the bad, the frustrating.
- This wrestling is refusing to run away... refusing to let go.

Just like a dad who wrestles with his kid

- Not to harm them or humiliate them
- But enjoy them, to be close to them.

This story highlights something key to understanding and knowing God.

- God comes to us right where we are, but refuses to leave us defined by our old failures.
- The wrestling leads to transformation.

When you finally wrestle with God and see both his strength and his love, everything changes.

- You realize he's been pursuing you all along.
- You can stop chasing control.
- You can stop hiding your mess.
- God meets you right there.

And he still meets us at our lowest, wrestling us down until we stop pretending and start surrendering.

- When we trust him... the one who came, died, and rose for us, he gives us a new name: Child of God.
- Not because we cleaned ourselves up, but because his love defines us now.

Maybe you've worn a name your whole life: Failure. Disappointer. Screw-up. God wants to rename you, too.

- Child of God. Chosen. Loved.
- Not because you've earned it or deserve it.
- But because he loves you.

Jesus fulfilled God's promise to bless the world. He wrestled for you, he died for you, he rose for you.

- He's ready to give you a new name... not defined by your past, but by his redeeming love.
- He wants to give you a new identity... a new way of living, secure in his love.

If you've been running or pretending or hiding, what would it look like to pause, turn, and wrestle honestly with God... and trust what he has already done for you in Jesus?

YOU: Here's my invitation this week: Wrestle with God.

Take some time on the way to work, laying in bed, in the shower...

And tell him... "God, I'm wrestling with this... what do you want me to see/say/do?"

- Maybe even write down what comes to mind.

WE: God meets us right where we are. Even right in the middle of our uncertainty, fear, and weakness.

He's not afraid of our questions, doubts, or struggles.

In fact, he loves us so much, he's willing to wrestle through our messes with us... and in the end, he saves us, not because we deserve it, but because he loves us.

Imagine living in quiet confidence that your identity is Child of God.

- A life where you don't have to chase mountaintop experience after mountaintop experience
- But every day, no matter how messy, you can trust God has you
- Where you are free to wrestle because you know it will bring you closer to your Heavenly Father.

You don't have to do it alone. You don't have to figure it all out. You don't have to pretend to be strong enough.

You can rest, trust, and enjoy the life Jesus offers.

When we wrestle with God, we discover the strength of his love.