

Fil-Am Community Church

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Key Verse: Genesis 32:22-32

“OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF LOSING CONTROL”

Have you ever said these words, “Oh my God, what will I do?” “I never expected that to happen.” “I don't know what to do.”

These are things we say when we find that we have lost control. Some people have the persistent fear of losing control to the extent that they panic when an unexpected event happens. In a world that is changing so fast those who fear losing control never manage to become happy. And even when they do they become occupied by the fear of losing control.

This morning I want to talk about overcoming the fear of losing control. I want to tell you how to overcome this fear. The short answer is to turn over the control of your lives, your situation to God. But that is better said than done. We all know how difficult it is to let God and let go, right? Like when you want to pursue a career in the arts, for example, because you're good in drawing and painting, but God wants you to serve him in ministry as a pastor or preacher or missionary. And you reason out with God and say you can serve him by painting nature that declares his glory but God insists you do it his way and you go back and forth. It's a struggle. Like what Moses went through or Jeremiah. It's a struggle. It's a wrestling match.

You see, we tend to fight God for control of our lives. But this is a fight you're going to lose because your arms are too short to wrestle with God.

This morning we're going to look at the story of Jacob. Jacob's hang-up was that he was a manipulator, a swindler, so he really liked to get his own way. His name literally means "heel-grabber" because as Esau, his twin brother, was being born, he grabbed Esau's heel like he wanted to come out first. That's why his name also means "supplanter", someone who wants to get ahead of others through trickery or deception. He was always using people and he was always getting into trouble because he used people to get his own way. In short, he was a cheater.

Let's look at this passage from Genesis 32:22-32.

Jacob has a literal wrestling match with God. The story is filled with symbolism and principles for us to apply in our lives to how we change. This experience transformed his life and from this turning point he was never the same again.

This was a turning point in Jacob's life. From this simple story -- this wrestling match with God -- we can draw four principles. This morning, I'd like to share with you the four-phase process symbolized in this passage that God uses to gain control of our lives.

I. PHASE ONE: CRISIS

v. 24-25 *"So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw 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."* In v. 28 it tells us it was actually God who was wrestling with Jacob in this story.

I know that the point of wrestling is to pin a guy down until he cries "I give up! I surrender!" Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever struggled with something until you're in despair, till you realize you're in a no-win situation? Notice it says he struggled until daybreak. This is a long fight. It lasted all night. It's a no-win situation.

What are you wrestling with this week? What is the problem in your life that you're struggling with and you're getting tired? Sick and tired -- sick and tired of being sick and tired! What is the crisis in your life?

Maybe it's an internal struggle and you feel like you're being torn apart. Maybe it's a struggle in a relationship -- it's been strained, ripped.

Have you ever considered the fact that it is God behind those circumstances? Maybe God is behind that problem, crisis, difficulty, irritation. The point is this: God often uses a crisis to get our attention. It's like the only way He can get through our hard heads. He has to. God uses a crisis to get our attention.

Are you in a crisis this morning? Congratulations! God's getting ready to change you. He wants to work in your life. It's like the mother eagle. She disturbs the nest so that it becomes so uncomfortable that the little eagle has to jump out and learn to fly.

It is human nature to put off changes in ourselves! We say "One of these days..." But the day never comes.

I used to be afraid of driving. I never drove in the Philippines. First of all, we didn't have a car. Second of all, there's no need to because of the abundance of tricycles, and jeepneys, and buses, and the LRT's and MRT's. Third of all, I was just afraid to drive. I got nervous just thinking about it. Then, I went to Australia to work. No big deal. There were trains all around. And I had friends in church who gave me a ride most of the time. I was content and dreamt of staying there permanently. Until God shook my little comfortable world. After bringing me first to a missions trip in Russia and then to California where I lived for six months with my parents and sisters, God closed the door totally to Australia and I couldn't go back. Again, no big deal. My parents and sisters gave me a ride. I made an excuse whenever they asked me take driving lessons.

Then, one day, a friend from New Jersey called and encouraged me to apply for a job. I said “yes”. In short, I went thinking that the commute wouldn’t be a problem because of the trains and buses in New York and New Jersey.

I got the job but it turned out that the job location was far from the city and there were no nearby train and bus stations. I panicked. The agent even said that had she known that I didn’t have a driver’s license, she wouldn’t have introduced me to the employer. I was in deep trouble. But God had a solution, of course. The agent arranged for me to have free driving lessons and assigned me to the best driving teacher. I learned how to drive and being so thankful I even gave my driving teacher a \$100 tip! He was astonished.

How many times has God had to bring something into your life to motivate you to change? Finally a crisis came and you gave up. We never change until the pain becomes greater than the fear of change. Jacob struggles all night. Finally the pain was so bad that he finally had to do something.

God brings a crisis into your life. God loves you just the way you are. But He loves you too much to let you stay that way. If it takes a crisis -- you can count on it -- He will use it for your best.

2. PHASE TWO IS COMMITMENT

The fact is, God does use crisis to get our attention, but even after He's gotten our attention, He doesn't solve the problem immediately. He waits for awhile. Why? God often waits to resolve a problem in our lives because He wants to see if we really mean business. Am I serious about change or is this some passing whim?

v. 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.'"* Jacob's attitude is persistence. He's determined. He's going to stick with it, fight it out. He will not quit. He's

basically saying to God, "I'm sticking with this struggle until I benefit from it! I want something good out of all of this."

The normal reaction to our weakness and problems is to run from them. Get out of the situation. Leave. Quit. God says, "Let's see how committed you are." Many people miss God's blessing because they give up too soon. The answer is right around the corner. We are great starters but we don't finish.

How many of you at some time have started a physical fitness program? I will not ask how many of you are still on it. We are great starters but we don't continue. We live in a microwave society. We want instant change -- now! If God doesn't solve it overnight, then forget it, God!

Where's the commitment? First, the crisis, then the commitment. Am I going to stick with it? Jacob said, I'm committed to this struggle and I'm not giving up until God turns this battle into a blessing. I'm not giving up!

Often we want to change and God wants to change us but it just takes time! It took you years to get into the mess you're in right now. You didn't develop all those hang-ups overnight. It took years of bad choices and bad mistakes. You didn't develop your personality overnight. You have ingrained patterns and habits and ways of reacting and ways of responding. Usually God has to remove it layer by layer. That takes commitment.

Galatians 6:9 *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."* He's saying, Hang in there! Be committed to getting God's best. There is hope. You will be able to change, but don't give up! If God could change Jacob, God can change me.

3. PHASE THREE IS CONFESSION

v. 27 *"The man asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob', he answered."*

Why did God ask his name? Because God wanted him to admit who he was. In Bible times, the name you were given was a description of your character. It was a

label. When Jacob said, "I'm a cheater" it was an act of self revelation, an act of confession. When Jacob said, "My name is Jacob" it was a reminder of all the people he had hurt, all the heartbreak he had caused, all the problems that had been the result of his hang-ups and personality. He was admitting what he was.

Question: If today you were named for your greatest character weakness, what would your name be? Temper? "My names is Temper, I can't keep a lid on it." Maybe, Lust? Unreliable? Guilty? Depressed? Worrier? Greedy? Resentful? What would be your tag?

The lesson is that I will never be able to change my weaknesses until I admit them. To who? First to yourself. Then to God. Then to at least one other significant person in your life. That's difficult. But the fact is, God won't work in my problem until I admit that I have one.

When you come to God and admit you have a problem, He's not going to be surprised. He's not shocked. He knows it. He just wants you to know it. Phase Three is to come face to face, not just with God, but with yourself. What is my name? What am I really like? Until I admit I have a problem, God can't help me.

To change we've got to stop making excuses and blaming others, "Everybody's doing it! I'm not as bad as... It's partly his/her fault." It's humbling to admit a weakness. But that's good. Because "*God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.*" (James 4:6 HCSB).

If you want to change, you can't change until you get grace. If you want grace, be humble. How do you be humble? Admit your weaknesses! I find that the people who are most honest, open and transparent about their weaknesses are the healthiest people I know. They are also the people who are changing the most in life because they've got it out in the open so they can deal with it. I'm praying that we'll be a place of unconditional acceptance. We're all struggling. No one is perfect. We all need grace.

4. PHASE FOUR IS COOPERATION

We've got to cooperate with what God wants to do in our lives. vs. 28, 30, say, *"Then the man said, `Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome...Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, `It is because I saw God face to face'"*. The moment Jacob began admitting what he was and began to cooperate with God, He began to change. He called the place Peniel which means "the face of God". Jacob came face to face with God.

All of us have to do that some day. You can run from God for the rest of your life but then you can't run any more. Why not face Him now? He wants to be your friend, not your enemy. Jesus came to save us, not to scare us. All of us eventually face God.

Sometimes we have to come face to face with ourselves first. When we do, God says, "OK, now I can get down to business in your life! We can start working on those character defects, those faults that we both want changed. Relax and cooperate with Me and I'll make those changes that we both want." God says to Jacob, *"I will bless you."*

The first thing God did for Jacob was He gave Him a new name, a new identity. He said, "Your name is no longer going to be called Jacob; it's going to be Israel." Jacob means cheater, swindler, crook. Israel has two different meanings -- a pun, a double meaning. One, "he who struggles with God" which is true. But it also means, "prince of God". This crook and God's calling him a prince of God.

God does his deepest work in our identity, in who we are and how we understand ourselves. When God wants to change you, He starts with the way you see yourself. Because that affects everything. It influences how you're going to act. You act according to the way you think you're going to act. God saw Jacob's

potential. He saw beneath that scoundrel, that manipulator, that schemer was a prince. God looked beneath those emotional hang-ups and saw something valuable -- a prince, someone He could do something great through, with, to. He changed Jacob's name and from this point on Jacob was a different person.

V. 31 *"The sun rose up above him as he passed Peniel and he was limping [circle this] because of his hip."* While they were wrestling, God dislocated Jacob's hip and his thigh was damaged and as a result of this experience, the rest of Jacob's life he walked with a limp. What is so significant about that? Because it was a reminder of two very important truths that we need to be reminded of every day. This was God's way of reminding Jacob.

In the first place, your thigh is the most powerful muscle in your body. It has the most strength over any muscle in your body. When God touched Jacob He touched him at his point of greatest strength. The reminder to Jacob, constantly, as he limped the rest of his life was that Jacob was to depend on God and not his own strength. It's a principle for us to remember. I must depend on God not my own strength to work the changes. God said, "I'm going to touch you at the point of your greatest strength so you know that from now on you're not to walk in your own strength but in My strength."

Secondly, as you study Jacob's life and you look at all of his previous experiences, you find that every time Jacob got in trouble he ran. He ran away. That was his modus operandi. Whatever the situation, when he got in trouble, he split. God said, "I know how to fix that temptation. I'll just put a limp in his walk so he could never run again." Jacob had a limp the rest of his life. It was a reminder to Jacob that it is never God's will to run from a personal problem. Running away never solves a problem.

The lesson of Jacob is You don't have to stay the same! You can change. If God can change Jacob He can change anybody.

Which of these four step processes are you in right now? Which of these represents your life where you are right now?

Phase 1. Crisis. Has God been trying to get your attention? Have you been wrestling with a situation or a relationship for weeks or months or years?

It seems hopeless, a no-win situation. It may be a major crisis, a shake up, or it may just be a perpetual irritation, a frustration that you have to deal with. Maybe you feel like you're being torn apart and pulled every different direction and you've been struggling all night. Have you looked behind the circumstance to see God? God wants to push you in a new direction or make a change in you. It reminds us that we rarely change until the fear of change is exceeded by the pain. We won't change until we get desperate. Sometimes you have to hit bottom. Because until that time we make excuses, blame, rationalize.

Phase 2. Commitment. Have you made a commitment to stick with the struggle until God brings some good out of it and God turns that burden into a blessing? Right now it may seem easier just to walk away from something. But you better ask God before you make that decision. He may have something else for you. I don't know. If you're walking from a problem that's really in you, you're taking it with you. Maybe the situation looks hopeless and nothing is changed. You're discouraged and ready to quit. Be committed.

Phase 3. Confession. What is your name this morning? What weakness do you need to admit? What problem do you need to face up to and realize that the thing is destroying your life, your marriage, your career? All of us need to face the facts about ourselves. Maybe you need to say, "God, I've got a drug problem" a problem with alcohol... I'm a Christian but I'm having problems with my temper ... I love to gossip ... I'm unreliable ... I'm a worrier ... I'm depressed ... I'm vindictive. We don't change until we admit that we need to change. God knows everything about you and He still loves you very, very deeply. His love is unconditional. He

loves you. You don't have to be ashamed to talk to Him. He knows what you're like.

Phase 4. Cooperation. Take a step of faith and say, "Father, I want to cooperate with You." Ephesians 4:22-23 (GN) *"So get rid of your old self, which made you live as you used to ... and put on the new self, which is created in God's likeness."* That is good news! He's saying I don't have to stay the same. But God can change patterns in your life! Aren't you grateful for that? I don't have to be stuck with things that cause problems in my life. There can be healing of memories. There can be a change in my outlook.

Jesus said it real simple. He said, *"You must be born again."* He didn't say, you ought to be. He said *you must!* If you want to go to heaven, *"You must be born again."* This is nothing scary. It just means a new life. He's not talking about turning over a new leaf. He's talking about a new life -- get rid of your old self, put on a new self. Start over. This is what Christianity is all about. Christianity is changed lives. He wants to do it to you, that's why He brought you here today.

Being born again means to turn over your life to Jesus. In short, giving him control of your life? Why? Because he died for you on the cross. If he didn't do that, you'll forever be lost, out of control. You'll die and go straight to hell. But Jesus loves you and took all the pain on the cross so that you can live a new life. You see, the reason we want control of our lives is because of pride. We're self-centered and we're sinful. We do things that hurt ourselves, hurt others, and hurt God. We need to confess our sins to God, ask for forgiveness. And the Bible says that God will forgive because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Hebrews 9:22 says *"Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."*

And I have good news for you. If you ask forgiveness for your sins, ask Jesus in your heart, then he gives you the gift of eternal life. The reason is Jesus himself rose from the dead and lives in heaven forever and ever. So, eternal life

starts right now. It's not a pipe dream or fantasy. Eternal life begins right now when you turn your life to Jesus. The Bible says, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have, not will have, but have eternal life."*

Regardless of the phase you're at... whether you're in the middle of a crisis, or a long term frustration and you've thought you'd never be able to change it in your life and you're stuck, just turn over your life to God and let him have control of your life. That's a sure-fire way of overcoming the fear of losing control.

Let us pray...