

Dr. Gavin Adams

Church Name

SERIES: Fight or Flight

MESSAGE "A Cage Match for Control"

DATE

LINK TO SERMON: <https://vimeo.com/757738857>

Bottom Line: Only when we stop fighting *with* God can we experience the *fruit of following* God.

Object Lesson: None

Key Idea: "It would be so much easier to trust God if I didn't have so many doubts!" Maybe. Jacob was a guy living under the promises of God, but even so, he struggled to trust. Jacob's struggle led to many problems, including a cage match for control.

CONNECTION – We try to wrestle life to the ground.

- A. **WRESTLING SUBMISSION:** Anyone else get into professional wrestling as a kid (or as an adult – no shame)? WWF style?
- From about 3rd grade to 6th grade, I might have been the biggest professional wrestling fan around. It definitely wasn't fake, you never knew who would walk away the champion ... and it wasn't definitely fake.
 - There was so much to love about WWF! I loved the characters. These guys had the best outfits and names. They all made up names to create this persona. Hulk Hogan was my favorite, but there was: Rowdy Roddy Piper. Hacksaw Jim Duggan. The Ultimate Warrior. Andre the Giant. The Iron Sheik.
 - Figure-four my friends. But what I really loved was trying out their moves on my friends. There are few things in life better than putting a friend into a submission hold. I mean, that's the goal of wrestling, right? To force a submission. Each wrestler had a signature submission hold. My favorite was the figure-four leg-lock. I can tell you from personal experience that junk is *not* fake. It really hurts! If I could get a volunteer to the stage...just kidding.

TRANSITION: *Not to make professional wrestling sound like a metaphor for life, but... wrestling with life is how most of us treat life and get through life.*

We try to put **life** in a figure-four leg-lock.

We want to put anyone and anything that gets in the way into the figure-four leg-lock, hoping to force our boss, spouse, career, kids (don't do that) ... you get the point, into submission.

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TENSION – Will God give us more than we can handle?

- A. **ABRAHAM TO ISAAC TO JACOB AND ESAU:** We see this WWF lifestyle in one of the most famous names in the Bible: **Jacob**. For these two weeks, I want us to look more at his story. His backstory is pretty unbelievable and it gives way to a catalytic event that can teach us all something about ourselves and God.

The story of Jacob begins when his mom finds out she is pregnant, which seems obvious, but it's important:

Genesis 25:21-26 (NIV)

²¹ Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. ²² The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord.

²³ The Lord said to her,
"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger."

- This is highly unusual. Birth order was important. The older should receive by birthright the biggest inheritance, etc.

²⁴ When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. ²⁵ The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau.

- B. **ALL NAMES HAVE MEANING:** We don't tend to name children based on the name's meaning as much today. Fair phantom = Jennifer. All names have meaning – your name included. Let's be honest, the vast majority of parents don't choose names based on Latin or ancient meaning.

My Name: My name has a meaning, too. Gavin:

Hawk of Battle.

(Picture of a great hawk)

Also, Little Hawk (Lil' Hawk)

(Picture of Chicken Hawk cartoon or something silly and cute)

²⁶ After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.

Here's the point: Names have meaning. Your parents may not have named you based on the meaning, but choosing a name based on its meaning was very common from the beginning.

Jacob:

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“He grasps the heel.”

- But – and here’s where it gets interesting – it also a Hebrew idiom for “he deceives” or “to supplant.” Supplant means to take somebody else’s place through manipulation, deceit, and dishonesty. It means to outwit somebody through trickery.

Jacob:

“He grasps the heel.”

“He deceives, manipulates, and tricks.”

- Suddenly “lil’ falcon” isn’t sounding too bad, huh?
- C. **JACOB TRUSTS ONLY JACOB:** God made a promise to Rebekah and Jacob, saying Esau, the oldest, would serve Jacob, the youngest. That’s backward according to birth order and tradition. That is a promise from God, though. And God keeps his promises. Rebekah struggled to trust God. Which led Jacob to struggle to trust God. Jacob turns into a con artist, a liar, and a manipulator. Rather than trust God’s promise, he spends his life scheming unnecessarily to obtain this promise.

He tries to put life into a submission hold. That’s Jacob.

JACOB’S STORY: A Story of control and manipulation...

TIMELINE

Genesis 25 - 31

- Jacob tricks Esau into selling his birthright for some soup.
 - Jacob tricks Isaac by dressing like Esau and receiving his father’s blessing.
 - Esau threatens to kill Jacob, so Jacob flees to save his life.
 - Spends 20 years working for his uncle, Laban. The deceiver was being deceived.
 - Jacob decides to return to his hometown. Laban wants to kill Jacob, too.
 - Jacob is returning home knowing that his brother is probably still waiting to kill him.
- D. **GOD WILL LET YOU LEAD YOUR LIFE:** Before I tell you the rest of Jacob’s story, let’s pause for a minute, because this behavior is *not* only Jacob’s behavior.

Jacob lived a life of self-sufficiency, not dependence. Here’s the thing: if you want to control, manipulate, and live on your terms, God will allow it.

If you want to control, manipulate,
and live on your terms, God will allow it.

And he’ll allow you to find the end of yourself, too. He’ll allow the consequences. He’ll allow you to struggle.

- a. “God won’t give us more than we can handle!” 1 Opinions 1:1

“God won’t give us more than we can handle!”

– 1 Opinions 1:1

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Not true! That's bumper sticker theology. Not in the bible. God will *absolutely* allow you to experience more than you can handle to prove that you can't handle it.

God will absolutely allow you to experience more than you can handle to prove that you can't handle it.

- E. **BACK TO JACOB:** Jacob's entire life has been spent under a promise from God that he couldn't trust.

Fighting for control. Fighting for his promise. Fighting with others.

So Jacob does what we all tend to do when we finally realize we are out of options. In over our head. Life is out of our control. He prays. Genesis 32:9-12: For the first time, we see Jacob pray. Esau's army is approaching and he prays.

Genesis 32:9-12 (NIV)

⁹ Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, Lord, you who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,'

¹⁰ I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. ¹¹ Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children.

¹² But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'"

- a. Jacob is now trying to manipulate GOD!!! Through prayer. It's like Jacob only has one tool in his toolbelt: Manipulation.

TRANSITION: God has had it with Jacob. He desperately wants a relationship of trust with Jacob, but Jacob just can't stop fighting. And, God has a promise to keep with Jacob, but Jacob keeps fighting against the promise. So, God decides to give Jacob some of his own medicine.

FOUNDATION – It's so easy to treat God like an intruder ready for a fight than a Father asking for our faith.

- A. **WRESTLING WITH GOD:** Even after praying for God's help, Jacob can't help but manipulate the situation again! Jacob is about to face his brother who he hasn't seen in 20 years. Esau's family has grown large. He commands a huge and powerful army. And, at their last encounter, Esau told him he would kill him. For 20 years Jacob has been avoiding the inevitable, and now the time has come.

Genesis 32:22-31 (NIV)

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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.

²⁴ So Jacob was left alone...

- Every single thing he's lied and deceived and manipulated to obtain, and it's on the other side of the river. Now Jacob is alone. Tired. He needs to rest because tomorrow he will be fighting or fleeing for his life!

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.

²⁴ So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.

- In an incredible plot twist, we learn later that this "man" was actually God. Or an angel of God. Either way, God was finished with Jacob living outside of dependence. God has plans for Jacob (and us eventually through Jacob). But those plans can't happen if Jacob keeps fighting with God.
- This is such a fascinating twist in the story of Jacob. For 97 years, Jacob has been trying to manipulate, control, and submit life to his will. Now, God shows up. But Jacob hasn't spent his entire life fighting to give in now. God shows up, but Jacob doesn't know how to give in.

It's so easy to treat God like an intruder ready for a fight than a Father asking for our faith.

- These are our option, right? If we see God as an intruder, trying to control us, tell us what to do, etc., our only option is to fight for our life.

- B. **JACOB'S STORY IS OUR STORY:** You may be thinking: God isn't the problem. We all wrestle with something: a problem, an issue, or other people. It might be our past, our mistakes, or our own thoughts. We need to realize we are wrestling with a spiritual issue, not a physical issue.

Our real fight is more spiritual than physical or emotional.

You're not wrestling with your spouse or your kids. Not your boss or your work or your career. Not your financial situation or your health.

We are wrestling with God.

We are wrestling with control.

We are all fighting against faith.

We all struggle to let go and let God. We all wrestle with trust.

Jacob wanted the promises of God

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without the pain of surrender.

And guess what...

Jacob wanted the promises of God
without the pain of surrender.

And so do you.

We all want God to come through, but we struggle to trust that he will. We all want God to do our bidding, but what if he sees it differently?

Surrendering our will, our trust, and our faith to God is scary. But that's why it's called "faith."

Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

¹¹ Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

Which means there will always be an element of doubt. And that's not a bad thing.

If we had no doubts,
we'd need no faith.

Living by faith doesn't mean we extinguish all our doubt. It means we don't allow our doubt to trick us into trying to submit life to our will.

TRANSITION: Jacob struggled all his life to prevail, first with Esau, then with Laban.

Now, as he was about to reenter Canaan, he was shown that it was with God that he must "wrestle"—not with Esau or any other person or thing.

APPLICATION – Only when we stop fighting with God can we experience the fruit of following God.

A. **TREATING GOD LIKE A TENT INTRUDER:** We're going to come back and finish the story next week, but for now, there's something we all need to recognize in our own life.

Jacob struggled to trust. He learned that from his Granddad, his dad, and his mom. Faith is always the struggle. Faith is where we all put up a fight. It's so easy to treat God like an intruder ready for a fight than a Father asking for our faith.

B. **TRUST AND OBEY:** God isn't going to force you to choose faith. You can fight all you want.

Only when we stop fighting with God can we
experience the fruit of following God.

What's keeping you from surrendering in faith? To stop fighting? To walk out of the cage match? Listen, God will let you do you all you want. He'll allow you to control, manipulate, and deceive your way through life. And he'll be ready whenever you are to welcome you back with open arms – but not until you're ready.

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- C. **WITH WHAT ARE YOU WRESTLING?** With what are you wrestling? Where are you treating God like an intruder?

Where do you need more **faith**?

Where are you **struggling** with **doubt**?

TRANSITION: *God is ready and willing to wrestle with you if that's what it takes. What he really wants is your faith, not a fight. What he wants is for you to stop trying to control and manipulate and deceive and, instead: SURRENDER.*

INSPIRATION – In fight or faith, we all hold on to God.

- A. **HOLDING ON TO GOD:** Fight or faith, we will grab hold of God either way.

In fight or faith, we all **hold on** to God.

If we want to fight with God, he'll allow it. He'll get in the ring with us and allow us to fight all we want. What's interesting is that, when we surrender to God, we hold on to him, too. But in a completely different way.

We hold on to follow, not to fight.

We hold on to stay close.

We hold on to remain connected.

- B. **PICK IT UP THERE NEXT WEEK...**

PRAYER