

Dr. Gavin Adams

Church Name

SERIES: Fight or Flight

MESSAGE 1: "A Cage Match for Control"

LINK TO MY 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.

NOTE: All my commentary and suggestions are included in this document in BLUE. Also, this is NOT a manuscript. I prefer to outline most of the message while manuscripting the opening line, closing line, and transitions.

CONNECTION – We try to wrestle life to the ground.

NOTE: OPENING: We are talking about Jacob wrestling with God. To create common ground with the audience and the pending content, I used professional wrestling for my connection. Remember, we are attempting to connect the audience to us and to the message concept.

- 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.
- NOTE:** Images are more powerful than words. Consider showing pictures of these wrestlers, not just mentioning them.
- 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

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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.

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

NOTE: As you'll see in the tension, I transition from the wrestling connection to introduce the story of Jacob. The story itself contains plenty of tension, so I use these existing elements to create a need to listen to the principle of the sermon.

- 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.

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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, most parents don't choose names based on Latin or ancient meaning.

NOTE: Obviously, the following is pertinent to me. I like including personal touches throughout the message if it adds value to the journey without distraction. The point is that names mean something. This gave me a chance to further make this point and have some self-effacing fun with the crowd.

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:

"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.

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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

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,'

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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.

NOTE: FOUNDATION: I transition into the truth section when the principle of the passage next. My transition statement allowed me to signal the audience that the core teaching is pending.

- 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)

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.

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- 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.

NOTE: This is the core principle of the foundation:

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.

NOTE: I want to bring our life into the foundation when possible. In this message, I used this moment to transition from Jacob’s story to our story.

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 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?

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

NOTE: I've talked in the course about ONE POINT messages. This doesn't mean we can't have more than one scripture, but it *does* mean all our passages must point directly back to our ONE POINT.

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.

NOTE: We are always moving people to application! This message utilizes an element of "indictive" application with an "introspective" application follow-up.

- 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.

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

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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.

NOTE: For the conclusion, I wanted people to recognize that we all “hold on” to God in one way or another. We can choose to do so in fight or in faith.

- 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

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SERIES: Fight or Flight

MESSAGE 2: "Living with a Limp"

Bottom Line: Face-to-face is how we experience God's grace.

Object Lesson:

Key Idea: It can feel scary to face God. After all, we aren't exactly sure how God will respond to us. That's how Jacob felt as he was to face his brother, Esau. And Esau's response is a beautiful illustration of how God wants to respond to you.

CONNECTION – Story: Like Jacob, our real fight is more spiritual than physical or emotional.

NOTE: CONNECTION: I don't always like reviewing the previous message to begin the next message in a series. It can ruin what we are attempting to create in the first 30 seconds. However, in this case, I could review in a fun and engaging way, beginning with the slide "Jacob vs God." Setting up the message as a "fight to the finish" creates some comical tones while allowing me to review what must be understood for this message.

A. **QUICK REMINDER:** In our last episode of "Jacob vs. God..."

Jacob vs God

God shows up at Jacob's tent with some bad intentions.

It's a cage match of surrender and submission.

God is tired of him fighting against, so God shows up in his tent and the announcer proclaims, "Let's get ready to rumble!" Fighting in the heavenly corner, we have God. And in the liar, manipulator, and deceiver corner, Jacob.

Jacob's tent wrestling was a physical expression of a spiritual problem.

Jacob's entire life has been a wrestling match -- against God.

Jacob is fighting against faith.

Jacob has lived his entire life fighting against faith. Fighting for control. Fighting for his promised blessing. He's fighting against believing that God will do what he's promised to do.

B. **GOD'S PROMISE:** He's fighting because he doesn't trust God will come through. Jacob is living under a promise from God. When Jacob was born, God made a promise to his mom, Rebekah.

Genesis 25:23 (NIV)

²³The Lord said to her,

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“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.”

Jacob was to become the father of a nation. The nation that would eventually become Israel. That was God’s promise to Rebeka and to Jacob, but they just couldn’t trust God to make this happen. They both felt the need to manipulate. To control. To fight with God rather than have faith in God.

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

Sound like anyone else you know????

YOU
(and me...)

- C. **WRESTLING FOR A PROMISE:** Now, Jacob is about to come face to face with his brother, Esau. The last time they were together, Esau promised to kill Jacob the next time he saw him. That promise has haunted Jacob for 20 years, and it’s about to come to fruition.

Think about this for a moment: Jacob is looking at two promises.

The Two Promises to Jacob

God: “The older will serve the younger.”

Esau: “I’m going to kill you!”

Both can’t happen!

- D. **THE NIGHT BEFORE JACOB FIGHTS WITH ESAU...:** It’s the night before Jacob fights with his brother, Esau. Now, in Jacob’s mind, his promised destiny is in jeopardy. Jacob is going to come face to face with his brother in the morning, and Esau is most likely going to kill him. Jacob has no chance. Esau has 400 fighting men. Esau is ready and prepared.

Genesis 32:22-31 (NIV)

²²That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions.

²⁴So 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, but those plans can’t happen if Jacob keeps fighting with God.

This is where we left off Jacob’s story last week. Now, let’s continue:

²⁵When the man saw that he could not overpower him...

- Overpower: Not that God couldn’t, but God wouldn’t.
- Last week we said that:

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Like Jacob, our real fight is more spiritual than physical or emotional.

That's what's happening here. Of course, God can overpower Jacob physically, but God was NOT going to force Jacob to *spiritually surrender* in faith. It's like God was saying, "I'll allow you to follow your own will. You get to choose: Fight or faith."

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.

- God was about to change Jacob's life, but God knew one wrestling match wasn't enough for Jacob. He needed a daily reminder of God's power to make good on his promises.

E. **WALKING WITH A LIMP:** All night long Jacob wrestles with God. Not because God couldn't end the match in an instant, but because God wanted Jacob to get all the fighting out of his system so the following could begin. It's almost as if God needed Jacob to get to the end of himself to make room for God. God made a promise to Jacob, but before he could do something through Jacob, God needed to do something in Jacob.

NOTE: The following statement is core to understanding this entire narrative and how the application will be suggested. I introduced this early to get everyone thinking in the desired direction. Notice that I said after, "We're going to come back to this in a minute..."

God made a promise to Jacob,
but before God could do something through Jacob,
God needed change something in Jacob.

- He needed to make him not a "Jacob." And it took the entire night!
- We're going to come back to this in a minute, because this is true for you and God, too. God wants to do something through you, too. But first, God might need to change something in you.

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."

- This is Jacob's moment of surrender. Of submission. Of dependence.
- This is as beautiful metaphor. **IMPORTANT:** Jacob began the night holding on to fight, but now he's holding on in a new way – in faith. He's holding on for the promise. He needs that promise now more than ever! He still must face his brother, and now he's tired and injured. He doesn't stand a chance, at least on his own.

NOTE: Some recall to the previous message inserted into this message.

Whether in a fight or in faith,
we all hold on to God.

- And look how God responds:

²⁷ The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

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- Deceiver. Manipulator. Grabber of heals.

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**.”

- Jacob: Deceiver. Manipulator. Grabber of heals.
- Israel: God changed Jacob’s name to Israel. From “deceiver and manipulator” to “Israel: God rules.” By changing Jacob’s name, God changed Jacob’s character.

Jacob: “Deceiver,” “Manipulator,” and “Grabber of heals.”

Israel: “God rules.”

- And Jacob changed. **God changed his heart, then he changed his name... And that changed everything.**

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.

- Jacob didn’t receive God’s blessing until AFTER the wrestling match. Blessings follow surrender. Sometimes God needs to cripple you before he can bless you.

Jacob **walked** into the tent and **limped** out.

TRANSITION: This is a huge moment for us to consider. In Jacob’s case, wrestling with God changed the way he walked. While we may not have the pleasure of an actual physical altercation with God, we all tend to fight with God. We wrestle with faith. But when we experience God up close, it always changes us deep down.

When you **experience God up close**,
it changes you **deep down**.

Before you get all “that sounds amazing...” think about it. Experiencing God on this level isn’t all rainbows and unicorns.

Coming face to face with God may be uncomfortable, because it may require something change in you.

TENSION – Facing God accentuates our need for God.

NOTE: TENSION: Sometimes we need a lot of time and content to inject the appropriate tension. IN other messages, it is simpler. After reviewing Jacob’s story, it’s easy in the second message to remind people of this simple tension.

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- A. **FACING GOD CAN BE SCARY:** Experiencing God up close can be uncomfortable. That's why we so often **fight with God or flee from God.** Standing face to face with God is a humbling experience. Nobody faces God without being changed – nobody.
- When you wrestle with God, you quickly realize you are not God.
 - So rather than wrestle, what do we most often do? Run away.
- B. **RUNNING AWAY FROM GOD:** We'd rather run away from God than stand face to face with God, because we know that facing God will create a limp. Facing God will expose us to God. It will expose our sin. It will expose our self-dependence. It will expose our desire for control. And it will expose our weaknesses. We don't want to face God, because facing God will expose us. Facing God spotlights our need for God. It's creates a limp.

Facing God **accentuates** our need for God.

It's scary to admit you "need God" when you aren't sure if God wants you.

It's scary to admit you "**need God**" when you aren't sure if God **wants you.**

So rather than walk to God, we run from God. We run because we fear the consequences of not running. **We fear coming face to face with God and allowing him to address the darkest areas of our lives.**

What is God going to do to me?

What will God think of me?

If I let my guard down – if I open my heart and my life – what will happen?

TRANSITION: This is Jacob and Esau. Jacob is terrified to face Esau because he's sinned directly against him.

IMPORTANT: The rest of Jacob's story illustrates how God will respond to you the moment you stop fighting and fleeing.

FOUDATION & APPLICATION – God wants to bless you with his acceptance and presence.

- A. **JACOB FACES ESAU:** Jacob is moments away from facing his brother. **AND he is limping into the battle!** He's injured. He's broken. He can no longer rely on himself. He can't fight. And he can't flee, either. Understandably, Jacob is terrified to face Esau. **But Jacob is no longer "Jacob the deceiver."** He's "Israel, the follower of God."

Genesis 33:1 – 12 (NIV)

¹ Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two female servants. ² He put the female servants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear.

- Jacob would have sent them ahead to see what Esau would do. But not Israel. Israel does what a person who trusts God would do.

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³ He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother.

- Bowing down is a sign of reverence. Of repentance. Of acknowledgment.

⁴ But Esau ran to meet Jacob and...

- And... slaughtered him?
- Esau is God in this story. This is a story with a much bigger meaning.
- When you stop fighting with God and fleeing from God, God is going to address you. He's going to face you. What is God going to do with you? To you?

⁴ But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept.

- Can you imagine this moment? Can you imagine the relief? The release of fear.

⁵ Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. "Who are these with you?" he asked.

Jacob answered, "They are the children God has graciously given your servant."

⁸ Esau asked, "What's the meaning of all these flocks and herds I met?"

"To find favor in your eyes, my lord," he said.

- Jacob thinks he needs to earn Esau's love and acceptance.

⁹ But Esau said, "I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself."

- Basically, Esau says, "You don't owe me anything." Your presence is all I wanted.
- Jacob is so humbled, that he begs Esau to accept his gift. Esau gives in for Jacob's sake, but it's not necessary. Then Esau says:

¹² Then Esau said, "Let us be on our way; I'll accompany you."

- B. **SUMMARY:** Jacob is us. He is you. He is me. And Esau is like God. For so many of us, we've spent our life fighting with God or running away from God for fear of facing him. "What's he going to do? Say? How will he treat me?"

Maybe you should be slightly afraid to face God. Jacob was afraid of Esau because Jacob sinned against Esau. It's logical for us to fear facing God, too.

NOTE: Because this is a narrative teaching, I combined the story and the application. This is the transition to introspective application.

What if God is chasing you to embrace you and accompany you from this moment forward?

How will God respond to us? Maybe I should just keep running away from God rather than turn around and run to God.

I don't know how you feel about God, but I do know how God feels about you: John 3:16 - 17

John 3:16-17 (NIV)

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¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

God has been pursuing you your entire life, not to pay you back, but to win you back. That's why he sent his one and only Son, Jesus.

NOTE: And now I offer inductive application.

God wants to bless you with his acceptance and presence.

God wants to bless you with his love, his grace, his acceptance, and his constant company. But God can't bless what's not broken. If you don't feel you need God, God won't force you to face him. God won't force his love on you, though.

TRANSITION: With Jacob's story and our story in mind, here is what I want to ask of you in my final message as pastor of Woodstock City Church.

INSPIRATION – What's keeping you from facing God?

NOTE: INSPIRATION: This was my final message as the lead pastor of Woodstock City Church, so my conclusion represents that emotion. For you, I'd suggest making it personal, too. Perhaps the first moment you realize God wanted to accept you and embrace you. Or another spiritually significant moment that connects directly to this content. If you've had a Jacob moment, this is a great place to include it.

- A. **WILL YOU STOP FIGHTING AND FLEEING:** Nearly 13 years ago, our family decided to move from our home to a new community for one reason: To lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus. That's all we wanted to do. And I can't think of a better way to end our time on staff at this church that we love so much than to ask you one question?

What's keeping you from facing God?

God does not want to harm you, he wants to hug you.

He does not want to eliminate you, he wants to embrace you.

He doesn't want to destroy you, he allowed his son to be destroyed so you wouldn't have to.

- B. **ENDING:** The moment you turn to God in faith, it may create a limp. Turning to God exposes our weakness. Limping limits our life. But limping with God is better than limping without God. And let's be honest, we are going to limp one way or another.

Face-to-face is how we experience God's grace.

- C. INVITATION

Gavin Adams

PRAYER