

DEFINITION**STRUGGLE****/'STRƏGƏL/**

Make one's way with difficulty.

SCRIPTURE**Genesis 32:22-32**

"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. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 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. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. 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 said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

BIG IDEA

There isn't a single one of us alive who isn't acquainted with struggle, trouble, and tribulation. In fact, Jesus promises us in John 16:33 that we WILL have trouble. Unexpected difficulty, untimely loss and long-lasting suffering seem synonymous with being alive. Some struggles can afflict us our entire lives. Sometimes, through no fault of our own, we struggle from a genetic defect or a dysfunctional family, and sometimes our struggle is the consequence of poor decisions or ungodly behavior. Either way, whether self-inflicted or not, the struggle is real!

A great example of a life of struggle can be found in the story of Jacob. Talk about a dysfunctional family! He was in conflict before he was even born, jostling with his twin brother, Esau, like two nations at war in their mother's womb. Even as Rebekah delivered the babies, Jacob was grasping at Esau's heel. The name Jacob means "supplanter," which means one who seizes, circumvents, or usurps especially by force or treachery. He certainly lived up to his name.

Jacob struggled with his identity, and because he felt like he had to be somebody else, he vied for position and was willing to go to any length to get what he wanted, despite the cost. Jacob was marked as a deceiver, liar, and cheat and cunningly convinced his older brother to give up his birthright. Deception came with a price though, and Jacob was forced to flee from his furious brother. He spent over twenty years away from his homeland; hard, grueling years marked with struggle, toil, and trickery. Yet despite Jacob's deep internal struggles, God never left him. Along his journey the Lord was always present, ordering Jacob's steps, and revealing himself as the true God.

Upon returning home, Jacob heard that his brother Esau was coming with a band of 400 men to meet him. The sins of Jacob's past were catching up to him, and he was greatly distressed by the thought of having to come face to face with all his mistakes and being confronted by those he hurt. Even though he knew God was with him, he couldn't escape having to make reparation for his past wrongdoings. Being forgiven of our past doesn't mean we get to escape the consequences of our actions. We will reap what we sow and are accountable for every word we speak. But God promises he will be with us no matter what troubles we encounter in this world, ordering our steps and strengthening us, for he has overcome the world.

CONVERSATION

Do you see any similarities between your life and Jacobs? Examples: Struggling with competition, family dysfunction, shame of past mistakes, fighting situations or people in the flesh. List your struggles here.

WEEK 4

MARKED BY STRUGGLE



Have you found yourself running from your past mistakes or decisions and not confronting or dealing with them in a healthy manner? If yes, how do you think God wants you to handle them?

Schedule time this week to spend time alone with God. Just as Jacob wrestled with and was transformed by God, cry out with a fresh hunger and desperation to encounter God in a transforming and real way.

TAKE AWAY

Jacob got desperate to encounter God and no longer wanted to be marked by the labels of his past. The same fighter spirit that triggered Jacob to struggle for position and prominence is the very spirit that provoked him to a place of desperation for a touch from God. The night he wrestled with God at Peniel became a turning point for Jacob. He held onto God and said "I am not going to let go until you bless me!" Whether our lives have been marked by internal or external struggle, whether our hardships are self-inflicted or by no fault of our own, let our desperation be what drives us to encounter the living God. Let this be our Peniel moment. May we be so utterly transformed that we would even notice changes to your physical body. Let us stop struggling AGAINST flesh and blood, and start to fight FOR your destiny.