

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2025
SERMON SERIES PART 6: BACK TO THE BASICS
SERMON: BLESSING THE STRUGGLE WE DON'T CONTROL
SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 32:22-32
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GENESIS 32:22-32

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. 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. 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."

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

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."

29 Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."
But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

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.
32 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.

Sermon: Blessing the Struggle We Don't Control

Welcome back to Week 6 of "Back to the Basics: A Walk Through Genesis," our sermon series on the creation of the world before there was expectation, before there was precedent, before there was tradition. Over these last several weeks, we've been looking at the foundations of God's relationship with humankind—how it begins, how it gets tested, and how God keeps showing up, generation after generation.

Today we're diving into one of my favorite passages in all of Genesis: Jacob wrestling with God in Genesis 32. Last week, we looked at Jacob and his not-so-noble reputation. He is not exactly what you'd expect from someone carrying God's covenant. He deceives his father, tricks his brother, manipulates his way through life. He's always hustling, always

scheming. And yet—God chooses him. God meets him. And in this chapter, God even wrestles with him face to face.

I've always loved this passage because it speaks so directly to our personal journeys of faith. Genesis 32, as we covered in the Plaza Bible Study this week, is called a "theophany," or a manifestation of God passing a message to a human. Theophanies often demonstrate a calling by God to a person, for example, Moses and the Burning Bush is a theophany story, as is Mary's encounter with Gabriel. Yet, we who are not quite as biblically important as Moses or Mary may not necessarily identify with encounters of God talking from burning bushes or angels. The theophany from Genesis 32, however, is unique in that each of us *can* identify with it: Sooner or later, each of us finds ourselves wrestling with God—struggling with questions, carrying wounds, pushing through the night only to discover ourselves on the other side of an experience that leaves us both scarred and blessed. I wager to bet everyone in this room has had an experience of wrestling with God.

Wrestling with God is an encounter that we each have in our memories individually, which is an important aspect of this story. However, this week I'm not focusing on our individual spirituality, because Genesis isn't only or even primarily about individuals wrestling with God. The entire book of Genesis – which in Latin comes from the root "gene" meaning "birth," has the same root as the word "generations", and indeed, we see in Genesis a 52-chapter-long story of several generations wrestling with God. Adam, Cain, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph—it's a family story, and not always a happy one. It's about promises passed down, sometimes faithfully, sometimes clumsily, sometimes with deep disappointment.

Wrestling with God is an intergenerational situation in Genesis. Take Isaac, Jacob's father, for example. He thought he was passing down the covenantal blessing in a straight line. He assumed his sons would continue the legacy just as he received it from Abraham. Instead, his sons fought, deceived, and schemed. Imagine the frustration Isaac must have felt, realizing the future he pictured wasn't the future his children chose.

That frustration is alive in our churches today. Many of you know what it feels like to look at the next generation and think, *"This isn't what I hoped for. This isn't how it's supposed to look."* You see worship that feels unfamiliar, ministries that don't match what you grew up with, or maybe a whole generation that seems absent from church altogether. There's grief in that. There's frustration in that. Just like Isaac, you wonder: *"Why can't my children carry on the blessing in the way I expected?"*

And here's the hard truth: every generation wrestles with God in its own way. The way Isaac wrestled is not the same as Jacob. And the way Jacob wrestled is not the same as us. Each generation has its own unique encounter with God, shaped by the world around it.

My parents, colloquially termed the "Boomers," wrestled with a fraught world of civil rights movements and nuclear warfare threats. Their parents, known as the "Silent Generation,"

wrestled with two horrific world wars and the Great Depression. The generation before that, known as the “Industrial Generation,” wrestled with advancement in industrialization and massive changes to infrastructure and economy.

For us today, our wrestling looks very different than even one generation ago. I’m part of the “Information Generation,” also known as the “Millennials,” and our younger siblings known as “Gen Z.” We are the people who grew up in the glow of computer screens. We are the ones who could access more information before breakfast than our grandparents could in a year.

I was part of the first wave of kids who grew up with home internet. I was 11 or 12 when my parents installed it. Suddenly I could talk with strangers from an infinite array of backgrounds all over the world in AOL chatrooms, download any music I could imagine on Napster, and learn how to play basic guitar by myself in a matter of hours on YouTube. It was exhilarating and terrifying, and entirely shaped the struggle of my generation today.

You see, the Information Generations absorb more than any generation before us—facts, news, media, opinions, pain, violence, entertainment, everything—all at once. A millennial or gen z worker can accomplish over 50% more in their average workday than the generations before them because we have such efficient, easy access to information and ability to file and process it much, much quicker than ever before. It made us efficient and connected, yes. But it also made us anxious, depressed, and sometimes numb to the weight of the world.

The sudden flood of access to information was beautiful, as we were able to increase exponentially in competence, adaptability, and empathy for a whole world that we didn’t previously have instant access to. However, it also came with its own challenges. I’ll never forget sitting in front of my computer having been released from my 7th grade classroom early, logged into AOL Instant Messenger on our dial up internet, while on the TV across the room live footage from Columbine was playing (and was the reason we were all sent home early that day). The very same year I first logged onto the internet was also the year school shootings became part of our cultural vocabulary. That was just the beginning.

You probably have seen what happened around Charlie Kirk—the terrible shooting and, more specifically, the engravings the shooter carved into his gun. I know the engravings are a weird thing to focus on, but it struck me because it looks like the shooter specifically wanted to use the attention he got from this event to specifically *make fun of older people*. Words like “OWO” and “LMAO”—internet slang, designed for one purpose: to confuse older people when they were read aloud. And sure enough, the governor of Utah stumbled through them on live TV. To younger people, it was instantly recognizable slang. To older people, it was gibberish.

Think about that: a horrifying act of violence turned into a generational joke. A shooter so steeped in internet culture that he used a mass shooting to make a point about the divide

between those who grew up online and those who didn't. That's not just sick—it's devastating. It shows how deep our fractures run, how far the mockery has gone. It reminded me so very much of Jacob tricking an aging Isaac out of his blessing.

And yet, the culmination of Jacob's story in Genesis 32 finally provides some justice to all of Jacob's deception and manipulation. Jacob didn't receive God's blessing by outsmarting his father or mocking his brother. He didn't get it by hustling or scheming or showing off his cleverness. He got it by wrestling. By staying with God all night long, even when it left him limping. He walked away wounded, yes—but also renamed, renewed, and blessed.

That's the picture I think we need today. Like Isaac, we have older generations that meant to pass down the American Dream of prosperity, freedom, and innovation to their children, and instead find those children still living in their basements, using internet slang as an excuse for murder. Isaac wanted to hand the blessing down in a straight line, in the way he thought it should be. But God allowed the blessing to get tangled, distorted, and redirected. But God doesn't just let Jacob slide through all of it – He wrestles him and disables him into a new way of being. And in that wrestling, Jacob discovered something Isaac could not give him: a direct, personal encounter with God.

So what does that mean for us? It means our task is not to script out how the next generation should carry the blessing. It's not to impose our expectations of what faith should look like. It's clear based on those engravings at the very least that the Information Generations very purposefully feel disconnected from the blessings the previous generations tried to offer and perhaps failed at. We have generations living in two different worlds – before the internet and after, and that's just the way it always will be no matter how different we wish it was.

So, instead of trying to make a blessing of inheritance happen in the way that we *thought it should*, perhaps we should let go, trusting that God will step in to do the wrestling with this generation if we only allow the space for Him to do so. Our task is to walk beside them as they wrestle, to give them space to struggle, to remind them that God is with them in the fight.

Generational differences are real. The Silent Generation wrestled with world wars and depression. Boomers wrestled with civil rights and nuclear threats. Millennials and Gen Z wrestle with the internet, with violence in schools, with climate anxiety, with information overload. Each generation wrestles with God in the world it inherits. And just like Isaac, we may not always recognize the shape that wrestling takes, or the way the blessing emerges.

But here's the call for us as a church: instead of holding on tightly to what we think it should look like, let's hold on tightly to one another. Instead of saying, "This isn't the blessing I expected," let's say, "I trust that God will bless you in your wrestling." Instead of correcting or controlling, let's offer encouragement and presence. Because God's blessing is not

something we pass on perfectly—it's something God gives directly, often in the struggle itself.

The limp is real. The wounds of our age are real—the scars of violence, the anxiety of cultural change, the grief of churches that don't look the way they used to. But the blessing is real too. God is still in this. God is still renaming us, reshaping us, binding us together across generations. Genesis is not simply a story about individuals and their relationships with God, but more importantly, about generations and their progression in God's story through the changes, messiness, distorted blessings and everything in between.

The older generations have a blessing to give, even if it doesn't look like what they thought it would. And the younger generations have wrestling to do that will result in their calling known to God. And we will do this together, even and especially when it's confusing or disappointing, just like those first generations in Genesis. There is no script – only God walking with us through every season that we encounter. So whether you're someone who still remembers paper memos, or someone who's never known life without a smartphone, the call is the same: don't let go of God. Don't let go of one another. And especially, don't let go of the younger generation in their wrestling. Trust that God is with them, just as God was with Jacob—scarred, limping, but also renamed, renewed, and blessed.

Amen.