**THE TRANSFORMATION CHOICE**

### FIVE PHASES GOD USES TO CHANGE US

**Scripture:**

Matthew 5:3-12 NRSV (3)"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (4)"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (5)"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (6)"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (7)"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. (8)"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (9)"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (10)"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11)"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (12)Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

*“Jacob heard that Laban’s sons* *were saying ‘Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all the wealth from what belonged to our father. And Jacob noticed that Laban’s attitude toward him was not what it had been.”* Gen. 31:1-2 (NIV)

*“The messengers returned to Jacob and said, ‘We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, with an army of 400 men!’ Jacob was terrified at the news.”* Gen. 32:6-7 (NLT)

”*God blesses those who realize their need for him.”* Matt. 5:3 (NLT)

*“Jacob got them safely across the brook Jabbok along with all his possessions. But Jacob stayed behind and was left all alone in the camp, and a Man came and wrestled with him until dawn. When the Man saw that he couldn't win the match, he struck Jacob's hip and knocked it out of joint at the socket.”* Gen. 32:23-25 (NLT/MSG)

“*Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning. Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God.”* Rom. 6:13 (NLT)

*“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Psalm 34:18*

*“The sun rose as Jacob left Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.”*

**Notes:**

1. ***Conflict***:A struggle with others.

*“Then Jacob prayed, ‘O God …O Lord… I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you’ve shown me… save me I pray… for I am afraid…’”* Gen. 32:9-11 (NLT)

***REALITY*** CHOICE: Realize I'm not God; I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing & my life is unmanageable”

2. ***Crisis***: I struggle with God.

 *“Before Jacob was born, he struggled with his brother; when he became a man, he even fought with God.”* Hosea 12:3 (NLT)

***HOPE*** CHOICE: Earnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to him, & that he has the power to help me recover.

3. ***Commitment***: I commit to God’s changes.

*“Then the Man said, ‘Let me go, for it is dawn.’ But Jacob panted, ‘I won’t let you go unless you bless me!’”* Gen. 32:26 (NLT)

***COMMITMENT*** CHOICE: Consciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ's care and control.

4. ***Confession***: I admit I’m the problem.

*“The man asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘JACOB’, he answered.”* Gen. 32:27 (NIV)

*Jacob =* ‘deceiver/manipulator”

***HOUSECLEANING*** CHOICE: Openly examine & confess my faults to myself, to God, & to someone I trust.

5. ***Conversion***: I get a new identity!

*“Then the Man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but ISRAEL … Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, ‘It is because I saw God face to face…’”* Gen. 32:28-30 (NIV)

*Israel =* “Prince of God”

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”* Matt. 5:6 (NIV)

***TRANSFORMATION*** CHOICE: Voluntarily submit to every change God wants to make in my life and humbly ask him to remove my character defects.

**Transcript:**

We’ve been in this series for five weeks looking at Life’s Healing Choices. They’re actually the eight beatitudes in order. Today, we’re going to look at the fifth Beatitude which is *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness sake…”*

I am not sure if any of us really know what it is to hunger physically; we live in such a rich nation, there is no reason for anybody to experience physical hunger. We have been working to meet the hunger of people for as long as I can remember. I personally have taken folks to the grocery store and helping them get the essential items. Many of us do not know what our church has done to meet the needs of people. I have filled gas tanks so they can get to work to earn the money to feed their families, but very few people know the names or faces of those we have helped.

It seems fairly easy to meet their need for physical hunger. But there are two kinds of hunger that people have. There’s a physical hunger and there’s a spiritual hunger. Today we will focus more on spiritual hunger; the hunger that we need to have in our hearts for God to change us. But I want to take you through the story of Jacob.

The story of Jacob actually illustrates all of the first five steps we’ve just been through. The four we have talked about and the one we’re going to look at today. These healing choices of life, are not just something we made up. They are found all through Scripture. They’re not just in the Beatitudes. But you can actually find them as the road to healing, the road to growth, the road to fullness, the road to recovery, the path to becoming all God wants you to be. We’re going to look at them in the life of Jacob. Turn to Genesis 31 and 32. We’re going to look at five phases that God uses to change us, this is really kind of a review of where we’ve been so far.

If God’s going to change you, here is the first phase. The first phase is Conflict. It always starts with a struggle with other people. God uses your struggles with other people to move your attention to him? If you’re going through any kind of relational conflict right now it is because God is trying to get your attention. When God wants to change you it *always* starts with conflict.

Jacob’s entire life can be summed up in one word: conflict. This guy came out of the womb fighting with his twin brother Esau. In fact, when Esau came out of the womb, Jacob was holding on to his ankle. This earned him the nickname “Supplanter” or “Jacob” in other words, deceiver, cheater. Jacob and Esau fought in unusual ways. Jacob even cheated Esau out of his inheritance. So, Jacob and his brother were at odds with each other their entire life. As you study the life of Jacob, Jacob is always running from conflict. Conflict with his brother, with his father-in-law, his brothers-in-law, and with God. He has conflict everywhere he goes. What do you think that means? God is trying to get his attention.

In Genesis 31, Jacob is between a rock and a hard place. He has two conflicts going on. First, he’s got a conflict going on with his father-in-law, Laban. Laban actually cheated Jacob and Jacob served his father-in-law fourteen years to marry the wife he desired. In the process, Jacob not only married the wife of his choice, Rachel, but also married another of Laban’s daughters, Leah. there is bad blood between Laban and Jacob; Jacob is at odds with Laban. Jacob is also fighting with his brother who never forgave him for stealing his inheritance. Remember that Jacob’s mother heard that Esau was thinking of killing Jacob So Rebekah told Jacob to go to her brother Laban and make a life for himself there.

In Genesis 31:1-2, *“Jacob heard that Laban’s sons* [that’s his brothers-in-law] *were saying ‘Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all the wealth* [they were jealous] *from what belonged to our father.* [He’s got a conflict with his brothers-in-law.] *And Jacob noticed that Laban’s attitude toward him was not what it had been.”* Jacob gets the hint; this isn’t working out very well. He decides to take all his family and livestock, and get them out of there. By this time Jacob has eleven sons, two wives both of whom are Laban’s daughters, and a lot of flocks – sheep, goats, things like that. He gets everything gathered up and says we’re quietly leaving. You can’t quietly leave when you’ve got eleven kids, two wives and livestock He takes off. It takes Laban three days to find out, but when the father-in-law hears about it he gets angry. Why? You’re taking the grandkids! Some of you understand what I’m talking about here. You’re taking the grandkids! You can’t do that!

So Laban starts after Jacob to get him back. That’s part of the struggle, the conflict. Jacob thinks, I don’t have any place to go except go back home. home means I have to meet my brother; who I’ve been at odds with my entire life. I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’m going to send some gifts on ahead to my brother Esau. It’s going to say: “Esau, your brother is coming home!” Maybe if I send him gifts, he’ll just forget about the fact that I stole his inheritance. He sends the gifts to Esau. The messengers come back and Jacob asks, How did it go? Not so good. He took the gifts but he’s coming with an army of four hundred men! Here is what it says, *“The messengers returned to Jacob and said, ‘We went to your brother Esau and now he’s coming to meet you with an army of four hundred men.’ Jacob was terrified at the news.”* The chickens have come home to roost here! Jacob, has run from conflict his entire life. But he cannot run anymore; his father-in-law is coming after him from behind and his brother is coming to meet him from in front. He’s reaping a lifetime of choices, many of which were not good or wise choices. It’s out of his hands now. That’s stage one: conflict.

Jacob is at the end of his rope, caught between a rock and a hard place; the only thing he can do is pray, *“Oh, God! I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you’ve shown me. Save me, I pray! For I am afraid.”*  He’s scared to death of the conflict. Jacob is forced into the very first choice we’ve looked at; **the Reality Choice.** “Realize I am not God. I admit that I’m powerless to control the tendency to do the wrong thing and my life is unmanageable.” Until you reach the end of your rope, this stage in life, nothing is going to change. Until you realize you are powerless to change the conflict that you are experiencing, it isn’t going to get any better. In fact, it’s probably going to get worse, it is going to become more complicated and difficult. We are in a mess.

When you come to God like Jacob, extremely humbled, That’s called the Reality Choice. We call it the Reality Choice because the first Beatitude we looked at was Mathew 5:3, *“God blesses those who realize their need for him.”* That’s the starting point. Nothing happens until you get out of denial and realize “I cannot solve this on my own. I’m in a mess. God, I need your help!” That’s the conflict stage. Jacob goes, “I’m going to stop denying. I’m going to stop running. I’m going to admit I have a need. *“God blesses those who realize their need for him.”*

Here’s what Jacob does. He separates the caravan into two parts. Half will go one direction, and half will go another. if my brother attacks he might kill half of my family, but the other half will live. He might kill half of my flocks, but the other half will live.” It’s kind of divide and conquer. You may want to read this whole story – Genesis 31-32. He divides them all up into two groups and he sends them over the brook Jabbok, a river. But he stays on this side, by himself, to spend the night, alone.

We get to the next phase that happens in growth. This is stage two in Life's Healing Choices. He stays behind alone and that night while Jacob is alone he gets in a wrestling match. It’s an unusual wrestling match because it’s actually a wrestling match with God. This is the type of wrestling match that makes the WWF look staged and mild. Phase two, in the second phase you move from conflict to crisis; crisis is a struggle with God. Now I’m not just in a conflict with other people, now I’m in a wrestling match with God. If you can relate to this, it may seem difficult, but you’re moving in the right direction.

Here is what scripture says, *“Jacob got* [his family] *safely across the brook Jabbok along with all of his possessions. But Jacob stayed behind and he’s left alone in the camp. A man came and wrestled with him until dawn.*  This is a long wrestling match. He’s wrestling all night. Have you ever wrestled with God? Couldn’t sleep, your mind going a mile per minute. *He wrestled with the man all night until dawn. When the man saw that he couldn’t win the match he struck Jacob’s hip and knocked it out of joint at the socket.”*

In Hebrew this is actually a pun. The word “Jacob” in Hebrew is *jabob*; the word for wrestling in Hebrew is *jabek.* And the place that they’re at is the Jabbok river. What’s going on here? His biggest conflict is not really with his brother. His biggest conflict is not really with his father-in-law or anybody else. His biggest struggle is really with God. Which, by the way, is yours too. He’s been running all his life. God shows up and wrestles with Jacob all night long. God doesn’t mind wrestling with you. When you wrestle with God it doesn’t bother God at all. Why? Because wrestling is a contact sport. It means you’re up close and personal. God would rather have you up close and angry with him than far away, apathetic, and lost.

 “How do we know that this man that Jacob wrestled with was really God? How do we know it wasn’t some vagrant? Some hobo who showed up and wrestled him?” I’ll tell you why we know it. Scripture says so, in the book of Hosea, chapter 12, *“Before Jacob was born he struggled with his brother. And when he became a man he even fought with God.”*

You know the problems you’re having in your life right now? The crisis, the conflict, the difficulty you’re going through? That isn’t the problem. That problem you think you have; that’s the symptom. Your real struggle is with God, who is going to be God in your life? Does God have a right to tell you what to do? Does God have a right to call the shots in your life? All your life, your biggest problem is not your dad, mom, or wife or anybody else. Your real struggle is you wrestling with God. That’s why you have to move from phase one – conflict with others – to crisis – struggle with God. And you’ve got to realize it and admit it.

What is your struggle with God? Your biggest struggle are things that don’t act the way you want them to, they don’t go as fast as you want them to, so you take matters into your own hands. You don’t wait and you don’t trust God and you don’t pray and you don’t sit back you don’t think God will provide for your needs and you get in a hurry. We get in a hurry and we take matters into our own hands. That’s what Jacob has done all his life. God said I want to bless Jacob but he didn’t believe it; what does he do? He cheats his brother out of his blessing. God said I’ll take care of you. What does Jacob do? “I’m afraid my father in law is going to scam me so I’m outta here”

I want you to think right now, think of the problem that you’re facing right now. Regardless of whatever that problem is in your life it boils down to two things. Will I trust God to take care of the situation? Will I obey God and do the right thing even if it doesn’t make sense? If I don’t trust him and if I don’t obey him, then I’m struggling with God.

The root of all your conflicts in life is, you want to be in charge. You want to be God. You want to call the shots. You want to run it. The root of all your problems is you want to be in control. God says, “Ok, Let’s wrestle. You and me. Let’s see who’s really in charge here.”I love the analogy of wrestling. Because the whole purpose of wrestling is to pin the guy. To pin him down on the mat. Then they’d say, “Uncle!” How do you know when they’ve won and you have lost? “I give up.” God is waiting for you to say that too. He’ll wrestle with you as long as it takes.

This is the second step, the second choice where we have to “give up”. Notice, *“He came and wrestled him until dawn. The man saw that he couldn’t win the match.”*  I know this is kind of obvious but if you wrestle with God, you’re not going to win. The fight is fixed. You’re not going to win. If you ever get in a no-win situation, God’s behind it. He says; let’s see who’s really in charge here. You think you’re the master of your fate?

God loves you just the way you are. But he loves you too much to let you stay that way. o he’s going to take you to the mat. He’s going to wrestle with you. He’s going to move you from conflict, struggle with others, to crisis, struggle with God. The fact is, we rarely change until our pain exceeds the fear of change. What keeps you from changing is your fear of what will happen if you do change. If you give everything to God. What will happen? Will I become some fanatic? Will I walk around wearing polyester and a beehive hairdo! If I’m really sold out to God, will I become a kook? A religious nut case? God says I love you, but I love you too much to leave you that way. I’m going to wrestle you. When the pain exceeds your fear you’re going to give up.

That prepares you for the second step. We looked at this in week two. Week two is the Hope Choice. “Earnestly believe that God exists and that I matter to him and that he has the power to help me.” Now, once you’ve gone through these two steps you come to phase three. Phase three in the process is what God uses to change you. In phase three I finally cry uncle: commitment I commit to God’s will. I commit to God’s changes. I hang on and I hold on and I don’t give up and I say I am going to go with God’s plan if it kills me. God, I’m going your way because I want you to help me change. I want you to bless my life.

Notice the next verse, *“Then the man* [that’s God] *said ‘Let me go, for it is dawn.’* [They’d been wrestling all night. Instead of *Dancing with* *the Stars,* he’s wrestling with God.] *But Jacob panted* [he’s out of breath], *‘I won’t let you go unless you bless me.’”* That’s phase three – commitment. Ok, God, I’m serious about this change. You’ve got to help me. I want your blessing in my life. He says, “God, I won’t let go until you bless me!” Hear the passion in that? God loves passionate praying. That’s commitment.

Jacob is moved to step three. The Commitment Choice. “Consciously choose to commit all my life and my will to Christ’s care and control.” Nothing is going to happen in your life until you get to step three. Notice the verse says *“Let me go, for it is dawn.”* They had been wrestling for hours. God could have overpowered him, just like that! Why is God letting this thing go on? Ever thought about this? Why doesn’t he just give it to you the first time you ask for it? Why is there always a delay to your prayers? Why is there always a struggle? Why does God let it go on? God could have ended it. He could have said, it’s over. But he wrestles with him. He limits himself and wrestles with Jacob until dawn.

He lets the struggle go on. Why doesn’t God answer your prayers immediately? There’s a couple of reasons. One, he wants to know if you’re really serious. There’s a difference between a desire and a whim. If you don’t care about praying about it more than once it’s a whim. God wants to see if you really mean business.

The second reason God waits is He is not a vending machine. A vending machine will give you things that can harm you, that can kill you. God is not a vending machine; God doesn’t serve you; you serve him. If God answered every prayer instantly you would be the most self-centered person.

Here’s the real reason why God lets the struggle go on when you need help in this area. You didn’t get into the mess instantly; it took years to get as messed up as you are. You didn’t just make one bad choice. You made a lot of bad choices. God has to peel the onion, one layer at a time. You got into the problem over a long time you’re not going to get out of it that fast.

If you’re serious about letting God change your life in the Commitment Phase, You’ve got to hold on and don’t give up until God blesses you. You don’t just say, God save my marriage, pray it once, then give up and get divorced. Many people – *most people* miss God’s best because they give up too soon. Stay with phase three, Commitment. I commit to God changing me. I’m not letting go until you bless me.

Recovery is a process. Healing is a process. It’s not a one-time event. Growth is a process. It’s not a one-time event. The Bible says this in the Commitment Phase.  *“Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness to be used for sinning. Instead, you give yourself completely to God.* [That’s the Commitment Phase.] *Since you’ve been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God.”*

That takes us to the next phase. Phase four. Phase one: conflict with others. Phase two: crisis with God. Phase three: commitment to change. Phase four: **confession**; I admit I am the problem. This is the breakthrough step. Phase four – confession.

In the confession phase, “I admit. I openly confess and examine my faults to God.” Notice how it happened in Jacob’s life. He’s wrestling with God *“Then the man* [that’s God] *asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘ Jacob’ he answered.”* What an unusual strange request. They’re wrestling all night. It’s the middle of the night. God obviously knows Jacob’s name. But he says, “What is your name?” Whenever God asks you a question it’s never for his benefit. He knows the answer. Like when he asked Moses, *“What’s in your hand?”* He already knew. He wanted Moses to know what’s in his hand. So when he asked Jacob, *“What’s your name?”* God obviously already knew his name.

The reason he asks this is he wanted Jacob to admit what he was. In ancient times names were chosen for their meaning, not for how nice they sounded. They could be named after a profession like a Baker, or a Carpenter, or a Smith. Or you could be named after a relative, Johnson, Jackson, Davis, things like that. But most often parents named their kids based on their character. It became your label. When somebody told you their name, they were telling you what kind of person they were.

Jacob’s name means “deceiver.” And *boy!*  Did he live up to his name? His entire life he lied out of this situation, lied in that situation, one conflict after another He was a deceiver, a manipulator. When God asks his name; He’s saying Jacob; I want you to own up to who you are. I’m broken. I am a manipulator. I am a liar. I am… you can fill in the blank.

All his life he had lived up to his name. He deceived his dad, he deceived his father-in-law, I wonder if you were named after your biggest character flaw what your name would be? You probably should be glad we name people for sound rather than their character. But in those days your name was your label.

When Jacob says, “I am Jacob,” he’s saying I’m willing to take a step of confession – the Housecleaning Step. “Openly examine and confess my faults to myself [I’ve got to be honest to me], and to God, [I’m honest to God] and someone I trust. [I’m honest with somebody else.]” It’s an act of confession. It’s self-revelation. He’s owning up to his conniving ways, Here’s the cool thing. When Jacob says, “I am Manipulator,” God is not shocked. Remember God knows who he is. God already knows everything bad about you. Even stuff you don’t know about yourself. And he still loves you. If God loved Jacob who was such a manipulator, then maybe God could love me.

Lasting change starts with humility, brokenness, and honesty. When I stop making excuses and I stop blaming and I stop rationalizing. When I am honest to God and honest with myself and honest with another person. We demonstrate our brokenness, when I just say, God I admit it. *I am the problem.*

*“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”*  That’s why we havePhase Five in God’s changing you: Conversion**.** In **conversion** I get a new identity. God picks up the pieces and replaces the pieces with peace. I move from conflict with others to crisis with God to commitment that I’m going to change and trust God with those changes. Then, the confession that I am the problem. God says, Ok now comes the conversion. You’re going to get a brand new identity.

I love God’s response to Jacob’s brokenness and confession *“Then the man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob*. [I’m changing it! We’re getting a conversion here.] *Your name will be Israel.* [Ever heard that one? This is the guy the nation of Israel is named after! This is the guy. The scoundrel, the crook, the deceiver.] *Your name will no longer be Jacob. It’s going to be Israel.”* Jacob has twelve sons and they became the twelve tribes of Israel. *“Then he blessed him there. Jacob called the place Peniel saying, ‘It is because I saw the face of God.’”* I saw God face to face…What happens in phase five in your life? When you get to the conversion phase?

First thing, Jacob gets a new identity. God says, “You’ve been called manipulator, schemer, cheater. But you know what? Beneath all that Jacob, I see in you a prince. And I’m going to rename you Israel.” Which means prince of God. Everybody else saw Jacob for what he was; but God saw Israel for who he is. Beneath all your sins and all your hang-ups, He sees a prince or a princess. When God does his deepest work in you, he does his deepest work in your identity. In who you are. He changes your identity; how you see yourself. Why? Because the way you see yourself affects everything else in your life. You act the way you see yourself. You need an identity change. lasting change happens when you change your self-perception.

God says people see you like that; but I see you like this. He did it all the time. He did it to Peter. Peter, you’re a rock. Gideon, you’re a mighty man of valor. Sons of thunder, my beloved disciples. He changed names all through Scripture. He gave them new identities. You finish this sentence and I’ll tell your old identity. “It’s just like me to be…” God says that’s what you’ve been all your life, but if you go through these steps of recovery, these steps of growth, these steps of healing, So Jacob gets a new identity in conversion.  *“Therefore, if any man be in Christ he is a new creature. The old is passed away. The new has come.”*

The second thing, it says, *“And he blessed him.”* You get blessed. That leads us to this week’s beatitude. *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.”* “I’m not letting go of you until you bless me, God!” That’s what it means to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Exactly what Jacob did. I’m not letting go. I’m not settling for second best. I want your blessing on my life. This is the Transformation Choice. “Voluntarily submit to every change that God wants to make in my life. [He’s going to change my identity. He’s going to bless me.] And humbly ask him to remove my character defects.”

Thank God I’m not what I used to be. Thank God, I’m not what I’m going to be. God isn’t finished with me; I’m getting better. And you are too. I’m not what I used to be. I’m just not. But I’m not what I’m going to be either! That is the transformation process.

How do you know when you’ve made it to Phase Five? In the Conversion step when God gives you a new name, he gives you a reminder to carry the rest of your life; to remind you to trust him. You remember that when God and Jacob are wrestling, the Bible says that God dislocated Jacob’s hip. He pulled it out of the socket. *“The sun rose as Jacob left Peniel and he was limping because of his hip.”*

What is the significance of his limp? After you have had a genuine encounter with God, you’re going to have a limp. What is the significance of this limp? Three things. One, for his entire life Jacob had run from conflict. He’d run from his brother, his dad, his wife, his father-in-law. He’d run from God. God said, “We’ll fix that. No more running. I’m just going to touch your hip so you will limp the rest of your life. You’re not running any more. You’ll never solve a problem by running from it.” So he touches his hip. He gives him a limp.

Second, it was a daily reminder to trust God. He touched him on his thigh. Your thigh muscle is the biggest and strongest muscle in your body. God touched Jacob at the point of his greatest strength. And said, You’re no longer going to rely on self-strength any more. You’re going to rely on me. I’m going to touch you at the point of your greatest strength. You’re going to remember that you’ve got to depend on me for strength. He could no longer stand on his own power.

The third meaning of a limp, is that Jacob emerged both stronger and weaker. He was weaker because he couldn’t walk on his own power any more. And he was stronger because God said you’re going to walk in my power. You’ll never walk the same again. You’ve got a new identity.

God’s giants, men and women that God has used in life have always walked with a limp. There may be an emotional limp, a physical limp, a mental limp, a relational limp. But there’s going to be something in your life that keeps you remembering it’s about God not about you. Paul said it like this: *“To keep me from becoming conceited I was given a thorn in the flesh* [a limp] *to torment me. Three times I pleaded with God to take it away from me. But he said, ‘My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I boast about my weaknesses so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”* The reason why you can’t boast about your weakness in small group is because you’re not at Stage Five yet. You’re still trying to hide your weaknesses. But to get to five, the change, the blessing, the new identity you’ve got to admit it.

As we close, I’m going to ask a couple of questions. I want you to think about this in your mind. Are you experiencing any conflict right now? Congratulations. God’s trying to get your attention. In what area are you struggling with God? You know the right thing to do but you just keep ignoring it. You keep fighting with God over it. You’re afraid to trust him. Friend, there’s no way you’re going to win, give in to God’s control; go to the mat.

Where have you felt like giving up? as a pastor and as a friend who loves you – hold on. Say to God, I am not letting go until you bless me. When are you going to face the truth about you? When are you going to stop blaming other people for the problems you’ve caused? When are you going to stop pretending that you’re not the problem? That it’s not an addiction. That you don’t have a problem. It’s just the pink elephant in the middle of the room but nobody’s going to admit it.

When are you going to share your struggle with a friend? Will you let Christ give you a new identity? Underneath every in Jacob, God sees a prince. He sees in you a princess, a prince. He sees what God meant for you to be. Yeah, you’ve been Jacob. But now you’re going to be Israel – prince of God.

Follow me in this prayer in your mind: “Dear God, I admit I’m like Jacob. I’ve been struggling with you and I’ve been fighting with other people. I’ve got conflicts and stress in my life. I don’t want to get stuck at Stage One in conflict with others. I certainly don’t want to get stuck at Stage Two, a struggle with you, a crisis.

So today, I’m taking these next steps – commitment. I commit myself to you, Jesus Christ, one hundred percent. I open my life to you. Jesus Christ come in and take over my life. Every area. I admit that I’m the problem. I’m not only going to admit it to you and to myself I’m going to admit it to somebody else. The thing that I’ve held on to I’m going to share it with somebody so that they can pray with me and become my accountability partner.

I want you to change my identity. If I have to walk with a limp the rest of my life, so be it. I will glory in my weakness because it shows your greatness. I pray this in your name. Amen.