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Speaker: Pastor Jeff Poush
Bible passage or verse: Genesis 32:22-31
Title of Sermon: Moment of Truth

Gen. 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, 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.

This is a wrestling story. How many wrestling families do we have out in the crowd? Maybe you did a little wrassling in your day -- maybe you have had a child that was a wrassler and you'd go to those tournaments. I wasn't. I was not a wrestler. I was a baseball player. Wrestling made me way too tired. I like a sport where you can run a little bit, and stop and rest, and then run a little bit, and stop and rest. Wrestling's a tough sport! I had a couple buddies in high school -- they're twins -- state champions. One of them went on to wrestle in the Army. He was unbelievably gifted -- they were both gifted wrestlers. And I kind of made it my goal in life -- I wanted to pin those guys so bad! They were five-foot-nothin', they wrestled at 123 pounds, and I was -- more. I was taller, I was bigger than these guys, and I thought, "You know what? I can do this! I'm an athlete!" So I'd sneak up on 'em, bum-rush 'em, tackle 'em, and I'd get them down, and I'd have the upper hand for about two seconds, and the next thing I'd know, I'd have an arm, you know, behind my back, and their chin was on my spine, and sometimes their finger was in my cheek -- and I would find myself weeping. When I was able to overcome the physical pain -- if I was able to overcome that, it was the exhaustion that would take place, and I was out. Tapping out. Weeping. I'm not kidding -- I cried, often. These guys were tough! I was so much bigger than them. I thought I could take 'em. Wrestling is an intense, up-close, in-your-face, personal, exhausting, painful sport! And I did pull it off. They don't accept that I did pin them. I did, before graduation, our senior year, I pinned both of them, and they refused to accept it, because they were both in sleeping bags, asleep -- but their shoulders were flat on the ground! So -- I don't make the rules.

Wrestling's a tough sport. It's a personal sport. It's exhausting and it's painful. And Jacob, our main character today, wrestles with God. And he was destined to be a wrestler from birth. Some of you may know the story of Jacob. Jacob's father Isaac -- we know Abraham had a son Isaac. He was the one who he took to offer up on the alter until God stopped him. Isaac has these sons -- Jacob and Esau. And as the story goes, they were wresting in the womb. So, from the very beginning, Jacob was destined to be a wrestler. And he wanted to get out first. He wanted to be the first-born child, and unfortunately, he was behind Esau. Esau got to be the first brother that entered the world, but the text tells us Jacob had him by the heel, trying to pull him back in so he could get out first. You see, in this culture, the firstborn son gets a double portion of the inheritance of the father. And Isaac was a wealthy man. Jacob wanted to be the firstborn. He wanted all of the privileges and the rights and the blessings that came from being the firstborn, and he knew he wasn't gonna make it out first. So he's grabbing his brother Esau's heel. The name "Jacob" means "heel-grabber." He was grabbing his brother's heel, they were wrestling in the womb. And as the boys grew up, you could see that Esau had a special relationship with his father. They were both manly men. They liked to hunt and kill stuff and gut stuff, and -- things I don't like to do. I'm

more like Jacob. Jacob was kind of a homebody. He liked to stay home. He had a special relationship with his mom. And over time, Jacob's desire to supplant and overcome his brother Esau grew stronger and stronger. What started out as a wrestling match in the womb ultimately turned into a devious plot for Jacob to wrestle that inheritance away from his brother.

One day he and his mom devised a plan to get that inheritance. Esau was out doing what manly men do. He was out hunting. Jacob was home, doing what he and his mother did, and they were cooking some stew. And they came up with a plan. Esau comes back, he walks in the door and says, "I'm so hungry, I'm gonna die if I don't get me some food!" That's the message version. He walks in, he says, "I am so hungry I am starving to death!" And it was in that moment, Jacob said, "I got an idea, Bro -- how about if we make a trade? I've got this delicious bowl of stew. I'll trade you for your inheritance. Sound like a good trade?" The genius that Esau was, he thought, "Hey, I'm gonna die anyway if I don't get any food -- what good's that inheritance gonna do? Trade ya. I'll take that stew. You can have my inheritance." Jacob got over on his brother. He had devised a way to supplant Esau from what was rightfully his. He saw an opportunity, and he took it. And this is such an important back story to our text today, because even though Esau was the more skilled hunter, we see Jacob's ability to set a trap and ambush his prey. You see, not only does the name "Jacob" mean "heel-grabber," it also can be defined as "swindler" or "deceiver." See, Jacob was determined from the womb to get what he wanted, and he was willing to do whatever it took to get it. So, needless to say, this created some tension for the boys over the years, and that tension grew and grew, and these boys were at odds and unreconciled for many years.

So, we pick up the text today -- Jacob has left home, he has gotten married, and he ultimately reaches the point where he's wrestling with his conscience and he's wrestling with his decisions, and he comes to the point where he wants to go back home. He wants to make it right with Esau. It's been 20 years, and understandably, Jacob's a little bit nervous about the way Esau is going to respond to him. So, the night before he's about to reunite with his brother, the text tells us that he sends everyone across the river. He sends his wives and his servants and his sons, and all of his possessions across the river, and he stays on his side of the river alone. And the text doesn't tell us why. The text doesn't tell us why Jacob did this. Maybe he was just overcome with anxiety and stress, and he just wanted to spend the night alone so he could collect his thoughts. That's a reasonable option. Maybe he was having second thoughts, and he let his flesh overcome him, and maybe he was gonna try to devise a plan to once again get over on his brother. We have no idea why he chose to stay alone and send everyone across the river -- but what we do know is, in the middle of the night, Jacob got ambushed. Just like I used to sneak up on my buddies from behind when they weren't expecting it, Jacob got ambushed in the middle in the night because he was alone. He was vulnerable, he was isolated, he was away from anything that would have brought him any protection or any comfort, and God enters the scene. Because wrestling is an individual sport. It's just you and your opponent, locked close, engaged in battle. And typically, when I talk about being alone, as I was thinking about this -- every time I talk about being alone, I talk about it as if it's a bad thing. Because being alone, you're vulnerable, right? You're susceptible to danger. You don't have anyone there to protect you. And you know, if you've ever watched an episode of the Discovery channel, and you're learning about how lions, you know, attack their prey -- what's the gazelle that always gets picked off? It's not the gazelle that's in the safety of the flock, right? It's the dodohead off on their own, messing around, that gets tagged by the lion.

There's danger in being alone, right? There's a down side to being alone, and being vulnerable, and being susceptible to danger. Oh yes, there's definitely safety in the protection of community, but you know what? There's an upside to being alone. There's an upside to being vulnerable. You see, God needed to get Jacob alone so they could do some business. Jacob needed to be stripped from all of those things that distracted him. This was a closed-room meeting. God needed to meet Jacob alone so they could do business. So, they locked up. There was nobody there for Jacob to lean on. There was nobody there for Jacob to ask for help. There was nothing that he could rely on. He couldn't rely on his

wealth, or his cunning, or even his ability to talk himself out of a problem. It was just him and God. And when you are alone with God, you can engage more intensely. See, there's an upside to being alone. You have focus. I can actually remember the very first time my parents left me home alone. That's a big deal for a kid, right? When I'm big enough to be left home alone. I can remember the first time I was left home alone -- and I'll tell you what -- my senses were heightened. I heard things that weren't there. I saw things that weren't there! Literally -- I've never told anyone this before -- I literally sat on the kitchen floor with my back to the sink with a knife! I was terrified! I was all alone. But guess what? All of my senses were a lot keener and a lot more intense, weren't they? That's what God needed with Jacob. "Jacob, I need to do some business with you! There's no mother here to scheme with! There's no brother for you to swindle! There's no wealth for you to lean back on."

Wrestling is an individual sport, and there is an upside to being alone and being vulnerable. Because he was able to engage more intensely with God, and we see an unbelievable transformation take place. Wrestling's hard work, and transformation is always hard work! God never told a person that "If you become a Christian, your life will be easy" ever! That's nowhere in this. "Your life will be easy if you rely on me." No. When you get shaped and you get molded, transformation is hard work! Just like wrestling is hard work. So, it's just God and Jacob. They're locked in this intense wrestling match. Jacob was used to getting the upper hand all the time, because Jacob was an ambitious man, and he was used to getting what he wanted. The text tells us that they wrestled all night long. Do you know how long wrestling matches are? Pretty sure they're three minutes. And that's an exhausting three minutes. They went at it all night! This was an intense battle. Until you get to verse 25, and this incredible thing happens. Verse 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." What does God do? He knocks Jacob's hip out of socket! He dislocates Jacob's hip, and that seems like a really weird thing to do, doesn't it? I mean, isn't God supposed to be the good guy? Gods supposed to be nice to people! And God busts his hip? What in the world is God up to? See, God breaks Jacob's hip not to wound him. He wasn't trying to hurt Jacob. He dislocates his hip to humble him.

See, brokenness is a gift from God. It's not punishment. He didn't break his hip because he was mad at him! He dislocated his hip because He wanted to reshape Jacob. See, sometimes brokenness can actually be a gift. It can be a blessing from God -- not punishment. For a wrestler, I contacted a highly trained professional to ensure that this statement is actually correct. If you lose your legs -- if your legs are out from under you, and you're just exhausted, you've got no strength left in your legs -- you are done as a wrestler. That's where all your leverage is! That's where all your power is! So, God goes right to the area that Jacob needed in this wrestling match, and He knocks it out of socket. Now Jacob's in trouble. Jacob had no more leverage, and God now is able to start working on Jacob. Oh, Jacob was vulnerable before because he was alone -- now Jacob is vulnerable because he's broken. Brokenness can be a blessing because it changes what you rely on. If anyone's ever broken a bone -- if you've broken an ankle -- what do you rely on? Your crutches, right? You break a tooth, who do you rely on? Your dentist! You turn 40, and your eyes get broken -- what do you rely on? Those readers, right? When we're broken, it changes what we rely on. It shows us where we have been founding our strength and our comfort. Jacob had no leverage. He had no strength, he had no power, and God did this for Jacob as a favor because He needed to do some serious business with Jacob. Jacob didn't have any of his own strength yet, and what we start to see is a character change.

Verse 26 -- Jacob says, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." What a beautiful picture. Jacob had no strength, he had no leverage -- his legs were gone from underneath him. And rather than straining against God, his opponent -- it says that he clung to Him, and said, "I am not going to let go." Exactly what Jonathan said about that young man in his youth group. That he was going through a trial, and he clung to Jesus. That's exactly what Jacob does here. What a beautiful picture. You see, brokenness is a really good thing, right? Because when you're broken, you've got to rely on the only person who can give you strength and regain your legs, and that is that firm foundation of Christ. And there's sometimes

when you're going through a storm and you're going through a battle, and you feel like you're done, and you want to tap out, and you want to wave the white flag -- and you're just done! You're exhausted. You're miserable. And in those moments when you feel broken, it can actually be a blessing, because it changes what you focus on. When everything else is gone, those things that have given you stability -- your title, your family, your checkbook -- all those things, when they go away, they give us an opportunity to cling to God, and that is exactly what Jacob does.

See, Jacob didn't just need a hip replacement. He needed a complete character overhaul. When God breaks you -- when God brings you to that place of saying, "Hey, I've pressed into your life, and you didn't get the message the first time, and you didn't get the message the second time, and now I need to really push hard." When God breaks you, when He brings you to that place of being broken, He doesn't ever leave you in that place. He remakes you. When God brings you to a place of brokenness, He always remakes you. God didn't take out Jacob's hip to hurt him -- He did it to help him.

God's primary concern is never your comfort. It isn't. God's primary concern is your transformation. You see, when Jacob was alone, getting ready to go to bed -- all by himself -- God didn't come up to him and say, "Here, Jakey-boy, here's a blankie. Let me fluff your pillow for you. Here are some muffins for you, so when you wake up in the morning you can fill up your tum-tum." God wasn't concerned about making Jacob comfortable -- He was concerned about making Jacob better. And what Jacob needed was a wrestling match. What Jacob needed was to be engaged with God, because he hadn't been for a long time! He was engaged with his own pride. He was engaged with his own cunning and conniving and scheming and swindling -- he wasn't engaged with God. See, God wasn't interested in his comfort. He was interested in his transformation. Jacob needed a wrestling match! He needed some face-to-face contact so that he and God could do some business. You see, God will always press in to the life of His child because He loves us. From the very beginning, God has been pressing into human history. From the Garden of Eden, God moved toward Adam and Eve. He spoke to the nation of Israel through prophets. He came to earth, became incarnate. He left His spirit. He gave us this beautiful creation. God has always been moving toward us relationally. He wants to engage. And the God of the Bible -- He never lets go of us, either. He will never let go of us. Even in those moments where He needs to break us, where He needs to remove those things that give us comfort, even in those moments He's not doing it to be mean. Sometimes things need to be removed. We need to be in moments of solitude and be alone so that God can truly engage us. God wasn't being mean -- He wasn't trying to hurt Jacob. He was trying to help Jacob. So, after a long night of hand-to-hand combat, God knocks Jacob's hip out of socket, and He does that to get him to a vulnerable spot so that he might be a lump of clay in the Master Potter's hand so that God could reshape him. When God breaks you, He's always faithful to remake you.

And I love this next part of the story. What happens next is so unique. Jacob is exhausted. He's at the end of himself. His hip is dislocated, and God said -- "What's your name?" Kind of a weird question. God didn't ask him that because He was curious. Says, "Jacob" -- doesn't say "Jacob" -- that would've ruined it. He says, "What's your name?" Remember what happened last time Jacob was asked what his name was? Remember that inheritance that he wrestled away from Esau? Well, that was only the first part of the master plan. You see, Esau had the right to give away his inheritance. He was the rightful owner of the inheritance. He could do whatever he wanted with it! So he gave it away. But Esau had no authority to give what only Isaac was authorized to give, and that was his blessing. You see, Jacob knew that he only had half of what he needed. He had the inheritance, he needed the blessing. So again, he set a trap to deceive his own father -- 137-year-old man. Blind. Esau's out hunting again. Jacob saw his opportunity. Esau was a very hairy man. So, Jacob went, and he got some goatskin, covered his arms, walked into Isaac's room. Says, "Hey, Dad -- would you give me your blessing?" Isaac's like, "You don't sound right. Who is that? Tell me your name, Son." Jacob says, "It's Esau." He lied. He lied. He swindled, he tricked, he deceived his own father. The last time Jacob was asked for his name, he lied. He deceived his own father to get a blessing that was not rightfully his. Oh, he got the blessing, but he didn't deserve it. Now God gives him another chance.

"What's your name?" And this is Jacob's moment of truth. Was he gonna lie again? Was he gonna tell some tall tale? Was he gonna defend himself and his bad behavior? Or was he finally going to get honest? Exhausted. Alone. Broken. Now he's called out. "What's your name?" And in that moment, Jacob had to say, "I'm a deceiver. I'm a swindler. I'm a conniver, I'm a usurper of power. I've got some character flaws, God." All the conniving and the running were now over, and I believe that at this moment, the most difficult battle that Jacob had was no longer the physical battle -- it was the spiritual battle going on in his soul. "I've got to come to terms with who I am and with how I've been living." Jacob was having an identity crisis. He had been running for years. Shame had caused him to hide from God and to hide from his family for decades, because that's what shame does. Shame causes us to hide. Shame is a tool that the devil uses to get us to run and to cover ourselves. Just like Jacob covered himself with the goatskins -- it's exactly what Adam and Eve did in the garden, after they sinned -- the first thing they did was cover themselves, because they were naked and they were ashamed.

Shame causes us to hide, and in this moment, God is moving toward Jacob and saying, "Don't hide from me! Be honest with me, please. You're not kiddin' anybody. I already know everything! Running's going to get you nowhere except miserable. I want you just to be honest with me. And let's set aside your shame, and let's be honest." This was Jacob's moment of truth. If shame causes us to hide, guilt causes us to move toward God. Godly sorrow leads to repentance. Sorrow and guilt are good things. So many times, as my kids were growing up -- not so much anymore, but when they were little, and they would be being disciplined, and they would cry -- I used to say to them all the time, "I am so glad you're crying!" They'd be like, "Dad, you're weird. What do you mean -- you're glad I'm sad?" "Yeah, kinda. I'm kinda glad that you're showing remorse. That's a really good thing!" Because godly sorrow leads to repentance, and repentance leads to reconciliation. Shame causes us to run away. Guilt and sorrow and confession -- "I'm Jacob! I've been doing it wrong, God! And I'm finally broken, I can finally be honest with you for the first time," and God's like, "Atta boy! Way to go!" You know what God does? "I'm gonna rename ya. I'm not gonna have you carry that name around anymore. I'm gonna give you a new name. Your new name is Israel." See, when God breaks you, He's always faithful to remake you, right? And when we're honest, when we see ourselves accurately, God's grace begins to reshape us supernaturally. God says, you don't have to carry that name around anymore. I'm gonna give you a new one -- it means Israel -- "one who persists with God." One who struggles with God.

See, God always gives grace to humble people, and he opposes proud people. Do you not see that in this text? God opposed Jacob because he needed to be wrestled with. He needed to be broken down so that his pride could be addressed. He opposed Jacob, and he gave grace to Israel. When he finally got humble, God says, "I'm gonna change your life." Wrestling is an up-close, intense, personal sport, and what is more personal than your own name? Not much. He changes his name, and then He does something -- I love this next part. At the very end, verse 31 says, "The son rose above him as he passed Peniel. And he was limping because of his hip." God gave Jacob a physical reminder of this epic life-changing encounter. For the rest of his life, when he walked into a town, people would look at him and go, "Hey -- there's the guy who walks funny. That's Israel. That's the guy who wrestled with God!" You see, limps tell stories, don't they? That limp was a physical reminder of God's transforming work in his life. For the rest of his life, Jacob would know and he would remember this moment where God invaded his personal space, engaged with him, transformed him, and changed his life forever. See, in that moment, Jacob learned that there's victory in surrender. There's power in weakness. And there is blessing to be found in brokenness.

Jacob's limp would serve as a permanent reminder to himself and to everyone who saw him that he was a changed man. What does your limp look like? Do you have one? Do you walk funny? When you walk into a room, can people see that you have engaged with God? Is the fruit of the spirit evident in your world? Can people tell that you're a follower of Christ by the way you love one another? See, these are physical marks that the Scriptures tell us -- we all should have a limp! We should all walk funny, because every day we get opportunities to live as a testimony of what God has done in our lives. And that's what

Jacob got to do. Every day he had opportunities to tell people about “why I walk funny. I got this limp because I was broken before God and He changed me.” And it's never too late to do what Jacob did. Jacob needed to move toward Esau and reconcile with him. Jacob needed to do business with God so that he could have his pride broken and have his life changed. It's never too late to do the right thing. Today could be the day that you choose to move toward your Esau. Today could be the day that you choose to let God get close to you, and rather than having your shame or your apathy or the busyness of your life or the size of your family -- anything that's a barrier between you and God -- if that needs to be stripped away so that you can be alone and you can do some hand-to-hand combat with God, today could be the very day that you have your moment of truth. And God just might touch you. God just might do a transforming work in your life like he did for Jacob. Because when you get close to God, He will touch your life and you will never be the same again. Jacob left his encounter with God with a noticeable limp, so let's celebrate the limp, because the limp tells a story. It tells the world that we've been changed by the living God. It shows the world that we've been deeply touched and we've been given a new name, and for you and I, that new name is “Son” or “Daughter.” If you let God get close, He'll touch your life, and you will never be the same again.

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