

Time of Grace Ministry
Flawed but Blessed: How Boldly Can I Pray?
Genesis 32
August 4, 2019

Pastor Mike Novotny

Well today, I want to give you a boost in your trust. If you're a follower of Jesus, or even if you're not, I want to show you today why God is the number one person in all of the universe in whom you can put your trust. And I hope as your trust goes up your happiness, contentment, joy, and peace in life follow suit.

But to do that, I need to tell you a story from the Bible. It's a true story that happened about 4,000 years ago from one of Jesus' ancient ancestors; a man named Jacob.

If there's a high level of trust, if you know the person that you're doing life with is faithful and trustworthy and true, well, it gives you such peace and security and joy and contentment and hope for the future. In fact, if you're taking notes in your program today, I'd love for you to write this down: That you can get through almost anything with trust.

And I want you to write that down today because that is so, so, so true in the relationship that we have with God. As I look out at you today, I know so many of you say that you believe in God, so many of you identify as Christians, you trust that there is a God, that he's your Father in heaven, but I would propose to you that the true source of peace and stability and hope in the Christian life is related to the amount of trust that you have in that God. Is he a faithful God? Is he a constant God? Is he the kind of God who says things and forgets or is he a God who does exactly what he says every time in every way? The difference between a Christian who worries about tomorrow - things at work and things with finances - and a Christian who has this incredible amount of peace comes down to trust. There can be two Christians who commit the same embarrassing sin but the one who drags that around and feels less than and unworthy, who lives with guilt and shame, compared to the one who lives with joy and freedom and peace comes down to trust. Does God mean what he says? Is he a faithful, constant, trustworthy God?

Well today, I want to give you a boost in your trust. If you're a follower of Jesus or even if you're not, I want to show you today why God is the number one person in all of the universe in whom you can put your trust. And I hope as your trust goes up, your happiness, contentment, joy and peace in life follow suit. But to do that, I need to tell you a story from the Bible. It's a true story that happened about 4,000 years ago from one of Jesus' ancient ancestors; a man named Jacob. So if you have a Bible with you, a device, or you just want to follow along on the screen, let's jump into God's word in Genesis 32. It says, "That night Jacob got up and took his two wives," I'll explain that in a second, "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 we zoom into this one night in Jacob's life when he is terrified; a time when he is sending all of his flocks, all of his possessions, and all of his family across the river to stay a moment by himself. Because Jacob is about to be reunited with his twin brother, Esau, and they haven't seen each other in two decades; in 20 years. And you think that'd be a reason for

rejoicing unless you know the rest of the story. The last time they saw each other, Jacob again broke his brother Esau's trust in a major way. He actually impersonated his brother, Esau. He stole his clothes, dressed up as his brother to hustle and deceive their blind father, Isaac, to steal the blessing that belonged to Esau. Esau was so furious, he was ready to kill Jacob and Jacob had to run for his life to his Uncle Laban's house and he stayed there for 20 years and now finally, he's coming back. Like I said, Jacob wasn't the best man on earth. He actually met one woman and he kind of got hustled into marrying her sister, two sisters. Then he started sleeping around and got two other women pregnant. So he's coming with all four baby mama's, all having sons, his daughter Dina, all the flocks, and he hears a rumor. Someone comes running up breathless to tell Jacob, "Your brother Esau's coming and he's not coming alone. He's coming with 400 men."

You can imagine what Jacob's thinking: "I'm dead." He has some time to think and some time to pray. And as he's praying, the weirdest thing in the Bible happens. Let me show it to you in verse 24. It says, "So Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until daybreak." I love that passage so much. We don't know exactly what happens but we know until daybreak. So for hours and hours and hours, this totally random dude starts wrestling with Jacob. And I forgot to tell you - Jacob, at this time in his life is 97 years old. He's about to join the Smucker's club and this dude like throws him into a figure-four leg lock and body slams him and for hours, they wrestle.

Look at the next verse. It says, "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." And Jacob somehow doesn't just shriek in pain. He must realize something: Who could do something like that? Remember, he wrestled with his big, bulky brother Esau his entire childhood. Even Esau couldn't do that. Maybe, Jacob thinks, "I'm not wrestling with some guy. Maybe I'm wrestling with God?"

Look what happens next: "Then the man said, 'Let me go for it's daybreak.' But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'" I told you it was a weird story. God apparently has like a coffee appointment so he has to go, he's done with the wrestling match, he says, "let me go," and Jacob says, "I won't. I'm not going to let you go until you bless me." I mean, picture him. He can't stand and fight; his hip is dislocated. He's just holding on with one leg - is he gripping onto God's arm? Is he flat on his face? You know, God's trying to get away for his appointment, he's dragging Jacob along like, you know, like Kim used to hang onto me when I would leave after our dates in college. No, I think I got the characters backwards in that story. Well Jacob, he's holding on for dear life and he says - and this is really the key verse - he says, "I'm not going to let you go unless you bless me."

You see, there's something going on here in Jacob's head. He's deceptive but Jacob is smart and he remembers something he's been hearing his whole life and his whole life, he heard that God is going to bless him. Rewind all the way back to the start of the sermon series and you'll come to Genesis 25 where God had said to Jacob's mother: Your son, your younger son, will become a great nation and his older brother will serve him. Or jump into the middle of this series, Genesis 28, where Jacob fell asleep and he saw the stairway to heaven and God was at the top and God said, "Jacob, I'm going to turn you into a great nation. Your descendants will be like the dust of

the earth." And Jacob remembered the blessing. In fact, if you'd read all of Genesis 32 just before we jump into this story, you'd find Jacob praying these words. He said to God, "Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau for I'm afraid he will come and attack me and also the mothers with their children," and here's the line, "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.'"

But God, you said. You said my descendants would be like the sand of the sea that no one could count them but I can count my kids on my fingers and toes. You didn't do what you said, God. You said that my brother Esau would serve me and he's about to kill me. God, this can't happen because you said. You promised my mother that I would become a great nation and I'm not a nation; we fit in a couple of tents. God, you said. And Jacob, with this incredible amount of trust, he holds onto God. He will not let him go, even if it seems like God is walking away. He's exhausted but he will not let God go until he does what he says. Jacob, in incredible trust, he believes that God is faithful, that God is constant, that God is true. And with great incredible faith and boldness, he says, "God, but you said."

And this is the thing that I love like so, so much about God. That because he's God, he does what he says. Do you believe that? Maybe your father on earth doesn't always do what he says but God is not a father on earth; he's our Father in heaven. And because he is all-knowing, when he makes you a promise, he knows exactly the situation when he will fulfill it. And because he is all-powerful, there's nothing that gets in the way and makes him run out of energy or his ability to keep his promise. And because he's eternal and he stands outside of time, when he says something to you today, he already sees the fulfillment of it in the future. And because God is holy, which means sinless and flawless, he can't break a promise. Like if God told you something and he didn't do it, he'd have to hand in his God-card and resign for all eternity. He's God. And so he has to do what he says.

And at the heart of this beautiful moment in Jacob's dysfunctional life, is him believing that. "God, you have to! You're God. And you said." And today, that's how I want to encourage you to pray. In fact, I'd love for you to write this down. That trusting prayers start with those same words: "But you said." God, you wrote it down in the Bible. You said. And now you have to do it.

Let me ask a personal question today: Do you ever pray like that? With that kind of boldness? I mean, desperation, like, "God, you think you're going to walk away from me but I'm going to hold onto you and you are not getting away from me. I'm not letting you go unless you bless me. Until you do what you said." You might think that's insulting to God but just the opposite. When you believe that he's God and trustworthy and true and you hold onto his promise, he is honored and he is worshipped. When you find a promise in the Scriptures, you can hold onto it for dear life knowing that God has to do it. He has no other option as God. He has to do what he said.

Let me give you just three examples of what I mean. Here's the first one on the screen. There's a trusting prayer you can pray but God, you said you would do good in bad times. When you're going through heartache and tragedy and confusion, something that's just bad in the scope of human life, you can hold onto God and say, "But God, you said." Some of you know what God

said in Romans 8:28. He said, "We know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him." So you can pray - what a crazy prayer. "God, you know what's happening right now. My relationship is messed up and I don't know if we're going to make it and I'm afraid for the kids. This is bad." "And God, my dad has cancer and it sucks and everyone wants to cheer on social media but when you're going through the chemo and you're throwing up every single hour, it is terrible." "And God, I don't know how our family's going to make it. I can't pay the bills and I'm trying to get a good job. This is bad. But you said." "And my best friend is battling depression, God, but you said!" "And my brother was abused growing up, but you said!" "And my wife has MS, God, but you said!" "And I don't want to be a widow this young but you said, God, in all things. Not some things. Not in certain things. You said in all things you are working for the good so God, you do what you said. I'm not letting you go. I'm not letting you walk away and just assuming that you're like everyone else. You're God and you have to do something. Let me meet someone amazing at a support group that I go to. Do something good. Let me die and bring my cousin to faith at my funeral. Do something good. Strip me of these idols that I think I need to be happy and let me just be content that I still have you. God, I don't know what you're going to do. I don't know when you're going to do it but you have to do something. You're God and you said."

And so when you're suffering, don't pray out of weakness; pray out of the promise. God, I'm waiting. I'm holding on. You've got to do something because you said. Let me give you another example. What about prayer itself? You can pray like this: But God, you said that prayer works. Do you know what God said about prayer in James 5? This is a game-changing passage. Check this out. He says, "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." I love those words. Powerful and effective. And so you can pray like this: "God, you said that when righteous people pray - and you made me righteous; I'm right with you because of faith in Jesus Christ - that every time I would talk to you in Jesus' name, it would be powerful and effective. Like, I'm not just praying as the starter pistol for dinner or just to feel better before I go to bed. I'm praying because every time I do, something is affected. And so, God, I'm praying right now for my family. And I'm praying right now for my relationship. And I'm praying for this wedding. And I'm praying against this anxiety. God, I'm praying and you say when I pray in Jesus' name, it's powerful. This is not just talking up to the skies. Something is going to happen and it might be today, it might be tomorrow, it might be in a year. I might see it, I might not, but every time I pray, it's powerful and effective because, God, you said. Come on, what better incentive is there to pray than that? That every time you talk to God, he has to do something. It's like you're wrestling with him and you're not going to let go and he has to bless you. He has no other option. How much would you pray for your kids, for our president, for our country, for your finances if you knew that every time you approach the throne of grace in Jesus' name, he has to do something? It might not be the something on the top of your list, but he has to do something because he said.

Maybe my favorite example, number three, you can pray like this: "But God, you said you'd forgive everything." Everything. Do you know what God said to you in 1 John 1? Why don't you look at this verse: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." But God, you said; you said all unrighteousness. Like, the stuff I keep thinking about, the stuff I keep doing, the stuff I'm so embarrassed of, like I don't even want to talk about with my Christian friends? God, you said all of it! Like sexual sins and

addiction and the times I don't trust you, the times I get so excited for football season and that joy is way more than the excitement I have for worshipping you, like that's messed up God but you said. You said you wouldn't give me a second chance. You said you wouldn't give me a third try. You said you would just purify me. Like I could stand before you, pure and righteous and blameless and beautiful; you said I don't have to make this up to you. That there is no penance; there's no waiting period. You don't give me a temp card to see if I'm really good enough to be in your family. You said you're faithful and you'd forgive me for everything. But I don't have to mope around today with guilt and shame. God, you said.

Can you imagine if you believe that? Like that God would look at you right now without an ounce of disappointment in his eyes because he said at the cross of Jesus, everything would be finished. And I could give you a dozen more examples. God says every time you share his word it is never in vain. Every time you do something for a small child, even a cup of cold water, you will not lose your reward in heaven. Every time you give and no one notices and no one prays, your Father sees what's done in secret and he will reward you. Every time you open up the Bible at home and you feel like you don't even get it, I didn't get much out of that service, God says, "No, no, no. My word never comes back empty." Every time we find a promise, we point a finger at his face and say, "No, no, no, God. You said."

I love what Martin Luther said about this topic. He said, "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance but laying hold of his willingness." Unlike that unjust judge in Jesus' story, this isn't God saying "Fine! If you're going to pray 100 times, I'll give it to you." He says, "No, God is willing." He wants you to come in faith believing that he's actually God; a holy, faithful, trustworthy God and to hold onto him in prayer.

Now brothers and sisters, do you know why you can do that? Do you know why you can pray just so boldly without being embarrassed, without being afraid? Because our God changed your name. Let me show you the last verses from our story today from Genesis 32. "The man," who we found out is God, "asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob,' he answered. And 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, 'I think with a smile, 'Why do you ask my name?' And 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. He was limping because of his hip." Jacob limps away with a grin on his face because God changed his name. His old name was Jacob, the heel grabber, the deceiver, the sinner, but God changed it to Israel; a Hebrew name which means wrestles with God. Here's a man who holds onto God, who trusts God - he doesn't just believe in God - he grips him for dear life for hours, even if his faith is burning, he's not going to let him go until he blessed him. God, after all of Jacob's sin, he changes his name.

Which is the same thing he's done for you. Some of you here at our church might recognize these; some of the best research I've done in my entire Christian life. A few years ago, I went through the entire New Testament with two highlighters and I wanted to see the names that God would call people like me and you; people who believe in Jesus. And there were quite a few examples when God was pretty honest about our struggles and our sins and God would call us a name like "weak" or Jesus would say to his disciples, "Well, you of little faith," or the apostle

Paul would say, "What a wretched man I am." In fact, I found 70 different times when God was pretty honest about our sinfulness.

But you know what else I found? That. I found 612 names that God calls you because of Jesus. Six hundred and twelve name changes from sinners into saints. From those who disappoint God to the people that he delights in. I found names like "righteous," "made right with God," "invited to the Lamb's feast in heaven." You're a "new creation" or "new man." I found this, like he said to Mary, "you are highly favored. You found grace with God." "You are those that the Lord loves." "You are like a bride beautifully dressed." "God's like the husband at the end of the aisle grinning over this woman he delights in." And name after name after name, 612; for every one time God would call you a sinner, nine times he would call you a saint.

And that's why we pray boldly because we're not just weak people of little faith to God. Because of the blood of Jesus Christ and the cross of Jesus Christ and the empty tomb of Jesus Christ, this is what we are. And all these things that we would look in the mirror and we would not say about ourselves, because of Jesus, it's absolutely true. And if you're the person that God has chosen, the one that he loves, if you are a sheep of the Good Shepherd, if you are a child of the one true King, why would God not listen to you when you pray?

You see, friends, you can pray like Ed did. Ed was a man who had a wife who had a terrible struggle with anxiety and fear. Often, Ed's wife would just stay up in her bed in the middle of the night worrying about the next day: What if and what about and what's going to happen? And sometimes the fear was so bad that after hours, she knew of nothing else other than to wake her husband up and ask him to pray. And that's exactly what Ed would do. Like a godly husband, he would pray over his wife; asking for peace and a good night sleep.

One night, as Ed was praying for his wife, all these Scriptures started to pop into his mind and he started to pray things like this: "God, you're faithful. We know that you are the God who goes before us into tomorrow. You're the God who stands behind us in yesterday. You're the God of angel armies. You command the heavenly hosts but you're the God who will never leave our side like the most faithful friend. God, you have crushed our enemy. The lies of the devil can't keep us up tonight." He prayed and he prayed and soon after, Ed called up his friend Chris and he said, "Chris? I think I've come up with an idea for a song." And Ed and his friend Chris Tomlin - maybe you've heard of him? They wrote a song that would become famous worldwide. The song would be called, "Whom Shall I Fear?" And do you know the lyrics? "I know who goes before me and I know who stands behind. God of angel armies is always by my side." And the great line in the bridge, "God, I'm holding onto your promises." Like Jacob, I'm not going to let you go because you're faithful. You are faithful. You're faithful.

So brothers and sisters, today, don't just believe in God. Trust in him. Hold onto him. Even if it's been hours or years or decades, point a finger in your Father's face and say, "I'm not going to let you go because God, you said."

Let's pray.

God, you're God. You can do anything at any time and in any way. And you're a God who knows about everything we're going through right now; all the burdens we carried into this church, all the sins that we just can't leave in the past, you know and you're a holy God. You're the God of angel armies and you could not be a Father in heaven if there was a speck of sin in your heart. And so, God, we pray that you'd open the eyes of our heart to see you, to know that you're God and that if you say it, you have to do it.

I pray, God, today over every sickness represented in this room; every sin and every bit of guilt and shame. I pray over every worry, every fear, every bit of anxiety that keeps us up at night and robs us of peaceful sleep. I pray, God, that you would do something because you said you would. And I pray, God, that every time we see ourselves in the mirror we would be honest to say that we are still sinners. But because of Jesus, we are so much more. You have changed our name. You have redefined us at the cross of Jesus Christ and because of that we can live with peace and joy.

God, you're faithful. You're faithful. God, you are faithful and so we hold onto you today. You have to because, Father, you said. We pray this all, Jesus, in your beautiful name and all God's people who believed in the faithfulness of God join their voices and they said Amen.



TIME OF GRACE®

Flawed but Blessed: How Boldly Can I Pray?

Study Notes

Summary

In the strangest scene of Jacob's story, God appears and wrestles with him for hours. Despite God's superior strength, "Jake the Snake" refuses to loosen his python grip until God blesses him. After decades of grabbing on to sin, Jacob finally grabs on to God. In the same way, we grip God in prayer, holding on to his promises until he blesses us.

- You can get through anything with _____.
- **Genesis 32:22-26:** 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."
- **Genesis 32:11,12:** 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.'"
- Trusting prayers start, " _____!"
- Three Trusting Prayers:
 1. "But you said you'd do _____ in bad times." **Romans 8:28:** We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.
 2. "But you said prayer _____." **James 5:16:** The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.
 3. "But you said you'd _____ everything." **1 John 1:9:** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
- "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance but laying hold of his willingness.—
Martin Luther

Genesis 32:27-31: 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.

Points to Ponder

1. Consider your current practice of prayer. How could today’s message encourage you to talk more regularly and boldly with your Father in heaven?
2. Did Pastor Mike’s research about the “names” for Christians in the New Testament surprise you? Why or why not? How could they affect your prayer life?
3. **Challenge:** Spend three minutes praying one of the three “trusting prayers” mentioned in the message, including situations from your personal life. Hold God to his promises.

Homework for Next Week

Read Matthew 7:1-6.

*“Some people think God does not like to be troubled with our constant coming and asking.
The way to trouble God is not to come at all.”
—D. L. Moody*