

Struggle: When Life Makes No Sense!
3rd in a series of 7

Welcome to Timberline Church and thanks for joining us this morning. This is week three of, 'How to get through what we're going through'.

Interview: This morning we are going to hear from Gordy and Wendy Eby and their son Andrew. Gordy and Wendy both work at Sight and Sound Studios, where Gordy is the Traffic Coordinator and Wendy is in retail and Andrew is in construction and works for Integrity Siding.

Questions:

- Andrew, on Monday evening, January 2, 2012, about bed time, you encountered some rather bizarre behaviors from your mother, that kind of set things in motion. Tell us what happened that night.
- When the chaplain who showed up and the doctor both gave you a hug and then eventually said... your mother might not make it... what was going through your mind at the time?
- Gordy, since it took them a day or so to figure out Wendy's prognosis... you were at home... almost in bed when you got the phone call from the doctor that the diagnosis was brain cancer.... tell us what happened to you when you got that call.
- Wendy, you were really out of it up to this point and didn't really remember what was going on, but on Wednesday January 4 around 3 PM you had surgery (picture up) and Andrew captured the incision on his cell phone. Two days after surgery you were sent home and then a week later you developed severe back pain and they discovered you had a blood clot on your lung. And this became a really confusing time because the doctors were giving you conflicting messages... but eventually you asked to be anointed...tell us why and how did that impact things?
- What is it like living in this season... waiting for the next report?
- What have you learned about God, yourself and others?

Prayer for them on their Journey:

Slide #1 Fall Goliath Fall Audio Clip – Sword

Project 86 sings...

Take up arms, all you fallen oppressed
This is insurrection rising, mobilizing defense
It's time, my brothers, beat your shovels to swords
It's time, my friends, sound the siren for war!

Fall, Goliath, fall, fall goliath
Lift the head of the giant
To celebrate our defiance
Fall Goliath, fall, fall goliath

Unite Hold the line and Strike
Raise your Claymores high
We fight for a reason to die

Project 86 understands that there is a battle going on with an enemy that never sleeps, that never gives up and never backs off.

I sat around a table last week eating pizza with a group of men and they told story after story... defining Satan's attack on them personally and on their families as well.

Satan's intent was to destroy Gordy, Wendy and Andrew...not only through a malignant brain tumor but through shock, fear and discouragement. But instead, God has given Wendy more time and the strength to complete the journey. But as you have heard for yourselves... it's been a battle!
Hang the sword up!

Slide #2 How to get through what we are going through!

Satan makes us go through what we are going through because he hates us. Week one we looked at Shock: When our world collapses. Last week we took a look at Sorrow: Healing a broken heart and this week we are moving on to stage three...

Slide #3 Struggle: When life makes no sense!

Gordy said to me...there were so many things that just didn't make sense about this... Wendy's not a smoker or a drinker or into drugs and she takes care of herself... why, why Wendy? It doesn't make sense! We all struggle in life. None of us are exempt. Life is tough because sin has broken everything in the world. Listen to how it all got started.

Genesis 3:17-19

No one has to read these verses to us, to convince us that life is a struggle, because all of us know it by experience. We toil, we sweat, and we struggle in at least three areas.

Slide #4 First, we struggle with other people...

Every relationship is broken by sin. And because nothing works perfectly we have competition, we have conflict and we have misunderstandings with others.

One of the best examples of struggles in the Bible is a guy named Jacob, the son of Isaac, the grandson of Abraham. Jacob's entire life was a struggle and it started in the womb.

Hosea 12:3 In the womb he grasped his brother's heel;

He actually struggled with his twin brother, before he was even born. Those of you that have been pregnant know the felling of the kick... image a fight?

He struggled with his brother Esau after stealing his birthright. He had ongoing struggles with his 12 sons. He struggled with his father-in-law before and after he married his daughters. He struggled with both of his wives Rachel and Leah.

Slide #5 Secondly, we struggle with ourselves.

Gordy said, I think about it every day! Our biggest battle in life is usually not with other people. Our biggest battle in life is usually within us.

We struggle with fears and flaws and temptations and insecurities and guilt and regrets and resentments and compulsions and weaknesses and addictions. I could go on and on but here is how the Apostle Paul says it.

Romans 7:15-17 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.

I would think that everyone here in this room, whose heart is still beating... can identify with Paul.

Jacob struggled within when his mother put him up to stealing his brother's blessing... but he stole it anyway. Jacob knew he shouldn't cheat his uncle because he knew how it felt when his uncle cheated him... but he cheated him anyway. We struggle not just with other people but we struggle within ourselves as well.

Slide #6 Thirdly, we struggle with God.

We struggle with God all the time, whether we realize it or not. In fact most of our struggles with others and within... are rooted in the struggle that we have with God.

Why do we struggle with God? There are really two reasons: #1 we doubt his wisdom. And therefore #2 we want to be in control.

This happens all the time with our kids. I don't think my daughters have ever doubted that I love them... but when I say 'no' to certain movies and 'no' to endless texting and 'no' to smart phones and 'no' to running all over creation and 'yes' to doing the dishes and 'yes' to bringing in wood and 'yes' to taking the dog for a walk... they doubt my wisdom, not my love... but my wisdom. They doubt I know what is best for them.

This is the struggle that we have with God. When he doesn't give us what we want and what we pray for... we struggle with God because we really doubt he has our best in mind. Let's go back to Hosea.

Hosea 12:3-4 In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God. He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor.

This is the only recorded time in history when a man wrestled with God!

Let me set this story up for you. Jacob cheated his twin brother Esau out of the family inheritance and his father's blessing. So he got it all... and as a result Esau vowed to kill him and this was not an idle threat.

Esau name means 'red and hairy', and he was both! He was an experienced outdoorsman and handled weapons with great skill and Jacob was a quiet man that hung out with his mother in the tents and did the cooking. So Jacob did what any sensible guy would do when he knows he is seriously disadvantaged... he ran... and he ran for most of his life.

He ran away to another part of the country and married his cousins... Leah and Rachel, and lived there for at least fourteen years.

After a while God said... 'Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.' Going back home was no problem... Jacob like home... the problem was... Esau was back home... and Jacob doubted God's wisdom!

By this time Jacob had become very wealthy and had a huge family, including livestock and servants, so even though he doubted God's wisdom, he packed everyone up and headed home. And on the way home he found out that Esau was heading towards him with four hundred men and they were

armed and dangerous! This was not going to be a happy family reunion! Do any of you dread family reunions?

And so the stage is set for a struggle on all three fronts...with his brother, within himself and with God.

Slide #7 Genesis 32:22-31 That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants 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.

Slide #8 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

Slide #9 Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered.

Slide #10 Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

Slide #11 So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

So when he got to the Jabbok River, Jacob sent his family on ahead so they didn't get hurt and he stayed behind... all alone and ended up wrestling with God all night long.

Jacob had been running from God his entire life... maybe some of you can identify with this... and God made it clear that it was time to quit running and time for a wrestling match. Here are some interesting details about the struggle.

1. It was a no win situation. Neither could get the advantage... they were stalled in a tie.
2. God could have won... but he didn't... for some reason God chose to wrestle Jacob and chose for it to end in gridlock.
3. Wrestling is full contact and face to face and God designed this close encounter.
4. Wrestling is all about control and for the first in life Jacob couldn't run and he couldn't control the situation.
5. God asked for his name even though he already knew it. Whenever God asks a question... we need to be aware... he knows the answer.
6. The name Jacob means supplanter, manipulator, deceiver and God wanted Jacob to admit who he was.

Jacob had gone his entire life manipulating others... trying to get things to go his way... trying to control his brother... his uncle... his wives... his children. When God pushed Jacob to admit what his name was... he was saying...do you realize that you have been living up to your name... you are the problem...and the reason we are in this struggle is because you won't give up! You are a control freak and you are making a mess of things.

So Jacob finally admitted... my name is Jacob. Yes I'm a manipulator. I'm a deceiver. I'm a control freak. And then after his confession...God blessed him and gave him a new name... Israel... a name with a double meaning:

Slide #12 Israel means:

- 1) Struggles with God
- 2) Prince with God

God was saying, you use to be a deceiver and manipulator but since you struggled with God without giving up... you are now a prince... a leader... your identity has changed!

When life doesn't make any sense... God loves it when we wrestle with him... because he loves it when we stop running and we hold on to him and demand a blessing.

So how do we struggle with God in a healthy way? Last week I told you about laments and we defined a lament as 'a passionate expression of grief to God'. When life doesn't make any sense and we are experiencing grief and pain... we need to learn the value of lamenting.

Slide #13 God doesn't want us just to petition him and praise him and confess to him... God also wants us to complain to him... and when we do... it is an act of worship!

This morning we want to look at a lament from Psalm 142 and we will notice a basic pattern that is typical of many of the laments in the Bible.

Slide #14 Psalm 142:1-7

I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble.

Slide #15 When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way. In the path where I walk men have hidden a snare for me. Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.

Slide #16 I cry to you, O LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me.

Slide #17 Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.

So when life doesn't make any sense and we lose a son to an accident or a brother to an overdose or our wife is diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor and our prayers aren't being answered and we don't like what is going on... how can we struggle with God and win? Let's go to our notes.

Slide #18 The Answer is... Lament!

1. Tell God what we think is unfair or painful. Wait!

Slide #19 Psalm 142:1-2 I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble.

This is what happened to Gordy when he was only moments away from going to bed and he received that fatal call from the doctor... it's cancer... he just fell down and cried out to God.

Here is the key... and we've got to get this right or it won't work.

- 1) We need to complain to God not about God! When Moses complained to God... God answered. When the Israelites complained about God... they ended up in the desert for 40 years!

2) We need to complain in faith. In other words, we need to believe that God is going to hear and help us in the big picture.

Slide #20 Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

So even in our complaints we must complain in faith.

Slide #21 The Answer is... Lament!

2. Appeal to God's nature. Wait!

Slide #22 Psalm 142:3-4 When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way. In the path where I walk men have hidden a snare for me. Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.

Wendy said that when they started describing what they needed to do to her during radiation... it about freaked her out. They needed to make a special helmet for her head and then bolt her head to the table to make sure it didn't move. So she had these 20 minute radiation treatments, lying on the table with her head bolted down into position without moving. 20 minutes is a long time and they did this to her 35 times!

You know what she did for those 20 minutes... multiplied 35 times... she prayed! Isn't that fantastic!

Wendy appealed to the fact that God did know her way and so she spent the time in prayer because she knew that he is good, kind, fair and loving.

When we complain... God I'm out of work, God I'm infertile, God no one wants to marry me, God it makes no sense that I have cancer... we need to appeal to the fact that God knows our way.

Slide #23 The Answer is... Lament!

3. Remind God of what he said. Wait!

Slide #24 Psalm 142:5-6 I cry to you, O LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me.

We need to remind God that he is our refuge.

Slide #25 Psalm 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

God absolutely loves to be reminded of his promises. Not because he forgot, but because he wants to be convinced that we know them and believe them.

This is what Jacob did. While he was fearing for his life he remembered what God had promised.

Slide #26 Genesis 32:12

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.'

Jacob was simply reminding God of what he had promised.

Slide #27 The Answer is... Lament!

4. Express our trust in God. Wait!

Slide #28 Psalm 142:7 Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.

Laments often go like this, they have this pattern... complain, complain, complain... God this isn't the way you are... do you remember what you promised... and then... oh by the way... 'Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.'

Laments end in trust.

Slide #29 Habakkuk 3:17-18 Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

Listen closely... the way we win a fight with God... is by surrendering.... because there's no way we are going to win it on our own power. The only way we are going to win it in this struggle of life is to give up control.

The most dangerous disease we can have... is the illusion that we are in control. We aren't! We are going to talk about this more next week. Here is where our story ends.

Slide #30 Genesis 32:31 The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

Jacob had a history of running. He ran from responsibility. He ran from the messes he had made. He ran from the struggles he created. He ran, ran, ran and God said, we'll fix that... no more running!

And by the way, as he limped out to meet his brother Esau, he was finished running and in a new found humility... he bowed down seven times before Esau... and here is what is amazing... Esau did the running!

Slide #31 Genesis 33:4-5 But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept.

Now that's a real family reunion!

Slide #32 Prayer & Reflection:

In what ways are you struggling with God... your finances, your job, your responsibilities?

Where have you been afraid to give up control... in your family, your dreams... your search for happiness?

How have you doubted God's wisdom... the way your body is made, the value of tithing, the call to serve others?

Prayer: O Lord my strength and my redeemer

Benediction:

Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.