

July 5th, 2026.

“Wrestling with God”

Hi everyone, my name is Kira. A few things about me, I have been coming to Southridge since I was a baby. My parents have been coming to Southridge for 20+ years, but I have also chosen to call Southridge Home. You might see me serving in Kids ministry or here in the audience Sunday mornings, and I spend most of my Thursday nights hanging out with our Jr Youth. I am a new teacher, just getting my foot in the door. And another thing about me, is that sometimes, I am a deep thinker. I like to do my research, and I like to think that I have a solid understanding of things. If you are anything like me, big questions, uncertainties, and unknowns can be especially difficult to navigate. Today, I am going to share with you how my questions and uncertainties are actually what brought me closer to God, and helped deepen my understanding of who He is.

A few years ago, I was a young person navigating challenging questions about what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and who Jesus is to me. Looking around, many people in my life seemed to have it all figured out. They seemed to confidently know all the answers to what I think are very difficult questions. I had different voices telling me who God is, each having a slightly different perspective. I had challenges figuring out what I believe about topics like Love Beyond Belief and navigating tensions between Science and Religion. After a while I became conflicted, confused, and frankly quite angry with God and frustrated with some people as well. But now, I can see that my experience is quite common. It's common to question, to feel uncertain, and to feel confused when it comes to trying to uncover who God is and who we are from all of the cultural and political noise that surrounds us. This is true, sometimes especially for young people, who are faced with the challenge of making sense of our faith in a world that seems to be becoming increasingly complex.

Not only is this a shared experience, maybe one that some of you can relate to, but for me, this experience was essential for the development of my own faith, and for a new understanding that I have about God. I feel that I wouldn't understand this learning about God that I am going to share with you, had I not experienced this season of questioning, uncertainty, and confusion. It was through my uncertainty that I feel that I now have just a little bit more of an understanding of who God is, and how He sees Us.

In about 400 AD, Philosopher and Bishop, St. Augustine wrote, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in You". My restless heart has found its rest in God, but only after bringing my uncertainties to Him. I relate to this quote in my experience of uncovering who God is to me.

One of the key learnings that helped me tremendously in my faith and that I will be sharing today is that **God wants us to wrestle with Him**. He wants us to press into Him when we are angry, confused, or conflicted. He wants us to be honest about whatever questions, doubts, or complaints we might have. Today I brought with me a copy of Gregory A. Boyd's *Benefit of the Doubt*. This was an extremely helpful resource for me. I will be referencing a chapter in the book today, titled, "Wrestling with God" that was particularly impactful.

In this chapter, Boyd discusses a story about Jacob from Genesis in the Old Testament. Jacob is the grandson of Abraham, and is known for cheating his brother Esau out of his father's blessing. Jacob is also particularly significant because his 12 sons become fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel, making Jacob the direct ancestor of the Israelites. This story that Boyd refers to is from a short section of Genesis 32, and perhaps raises more questions than it answers. The story starts in verse 22. Jacob finds himself wrestling with a man during the night. **The text says that the man sees that he could not overpower Jacob, so he "touched the**

socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man". It may be intentional that the story itself gives the reader something to wrestle with. You might be asking, how is the man able to dislodge Jacob's hip with just one touch, yet the text says that the man was unable to overpower Jacob? So, the man was simultaneously unable to overpower Jacob, and was able to dislodge Jacob's hip with one touch. Later in the text, Jacob's wrestling partner reveals to him that He is God. So another question is raised, why does the text say that the man is unable to overpower Jacob, if he is God?

One interpretation of this story is that it's being told from Jacob's perspective. Of course, God would be able to overpower Jacob any time he wanted to, if that is what He wanted to do. But God appearing to Jacob as a regular man suggests that the Lord wanted to appear to Jacob as a wrestling opponent that Jacob could conceivably defeat. The Lord wanted Jacob to think that he could have a chance in overpowering him.

In his book, Boyd compares the relationship between Jacob and the Lord to his own relationship with his five-year-old grandson. They engage in regular wrestling matches, where he pretends to be defeated by his grandson, even though Boyd would obviously win against his five-year-old grandson if he tried. Through long, hard, hugs Boyd and his grandson gradually wrestle their way into a closer relationship. Because Boyd's grandson thinks he has a chance at defeating his grandfather, he continues to engage, pressing into his grandfather and deepening their relationship. When I read this comparison, I immediately thought of my Dad wrestling with our old dog. Although he may disagree, I'm sure my dad enjoyed spending time with the dog in this way, and I am also sure their relationship grew through these fighting matches. The only difference is that I am not so confident my Dad would win against the dog every time, even if he really wanted to.

This story about Jacob wrestling with God becomes increasingly more odd as it continues. Jacob and God wrestle through the night, and at daybreak, the Lord asks Jacob to let go of him. Why does God need to leave in the morning? We don't know. However, this next part is where we need to pay attention. Jacob replies, "I will not let you go until you bless me". The Lord asks Jacob, "what is your name?" and Jacob replies, "Jacob". The Lord then says in verse 28, **"Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome"**. So, Jacob has been rewarded, because he has struggled with God and has overcome, as the Lord says. The story indicates that this name change is the blessing that Jacob had been asking and wrestling for. This name change, or this blessing, is not because Jacob has actually overpowered God in any way. Jacob had not "overcome" the Lord by being physically stronger or wrestling with more force. But instead, according to God, Jacob had, "overcome", or succeeded because he had the boldness to wrestle with God and not let Him go until he received his blessing.

Now the naming of Jacob is significant, as the Lord is revealing that Jacob and his descendants- the Israelites, would have the distinctive characteristic of being willing to struggle with God and others. Part of the identity of God's chosen people is that they would have the boldness to wrestle with God.

So here, we have learned about Jacob, and how his willingness to wrestle God is what pleases Him. Job is another well-known example of an individual who is willing to wrestle with God. Job is not a descendent of Jacob, however his willingness to question and complain to God honestly and sincerely is ultimately what pleases God in the end. In the book of Job, Job is unknowingly caught in the middle of spiritual warfare, leading to a lot of suffering. We see Job taking an honest and open stance in his conversations with God. In chapter 13 Job says, **"But I desire to speak with the Almighty and to argue my case with God"**. Now, what Job says

here is how I felt in my own season of uncertainty. Job insists on making his case and arguing with God. Job is not sitting back and watching his suffering happen. He is taking a position on what is happening to him, and seeking to take it up with the one and only God. Job has the boldness to bring God his complaints.

Throughout the book, Job's complaints become more and more harsh. Job develops the mistaken view that God is the cause of his suffering. For example in Job 30:21-22, he says to the Lord, **"You turn on me ruthlessly; with the might of your hand you attack me. You snatch me up and drive me before the wind; you toss me about in the storm."** Job takes on the view that God is the direct cause of his suffering. We know that Job is incorrect. God is not responsible for his suffering. However in chapter 42, God says Job is right. God is not talking about the way that Job identifies God as the cause of his suffering. But God says Job is right because Job is speaking honestly. God is pleased with the way that Job has brought his authentic complaints to Him.

Before I move on, I want to talk about Jesus. Jacob and Job are two imperfect people from the Old Testament, who bring their full selves, authentically before God. But Jesus, the One who demonstrated perfect faith, also stood before God authentically. As Jesus is on the cross, experiencing separation from the Father as he bore the sin of the world, Jesus cries out, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** (Matthew 27:46). Now I am no theologian, so maybe we can talk about the nuances of what this means and what this looks like theologically another day. Jesus on the cross had been God's plan from the very beginning, but Jesus, in his bewilderment, in his immeasurable suffering and loneliness, questions God, asking "why". Jesus, in this moment, takes on our sin and shame, freeing us forever. But he also shows us what perfect faith looks like, which is first and foremost authentic.

So, Jacob wrestling with God, Job voicing his complaints to God, and Jesus questioning God when this had been the plan all along, all show us that faith is grounded in authenticity that is unwilling to conceal our questions, doubts and complaints.

Why was this learning so important for me and my faith? Well there are two reasons. First, I was relieved. I felt seen and understood. I had comfort knowing that faith is about not understanding everything and trusting God in the midst of it. I had permission to ask questions if I was unsure about something. I had permission to say, "I don't know the answer". And Second, I learned that this is the point of following Jesus and living out a life of faith. Where we are weak, He is strong. Where we have blindspots, He sees all. God does not ask us to come to Him when we get it all figured out. He asks us to come to Him right now, just as we are. Boyd writes that "until a relationship is real, it can never be truly transforming" (108). When I began to exercise an authentic faith is when I began to understand God's truly loving nature, and experience more fully, the loving union that God has with me.

My hope is that this can be an encouragement to you, if you are or if you have been in a season of uncertainty when it comes to your own faith. Your difficult questions are not too much for God to handle, and in fact, your difficult questions might be what helps you experience more fully the loving character of God. Moving forwards, I hope that we can all practice bringing our full and honest selves to God.