

Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

READ Genesis 32.

How much space do you allow your faith to have in your life? In every community there are believers, non-believers, and fence-sitters.

Jacob now has eleven children, two wives, and extensive wealth. He has struggled to gain it—his employer, a.k.a., father-in-law Laban has been less than fair but God has been with Jacob and blessed him. He could have stayed there in Haran. Life was good there. But, there was this promise, *“I am going to bring you back to this land.”*

One night in prayer a clear message came to him to return. His wives agreed to go with him. So once again he donned his backpack and set out on the road bound for the promised land.

You remember him then—he was a fence sitter. He followed his mother’s lead. But his twenty years in Haran grew him up.

Jacob is a believer; he is not indifferent to his faith. He follows the best he can. But he has an unresolved problem—he’s got baggage. He has a broken relationship with Esau. Do you have baggage from the past? Something wrong or regret, or something that has been done to you that sort of blocks you from God?

How is he going to be a believer and live into his faith? Might not returning home be risky to his very life? But he felt compelled to follow God’s voice. He would have to deal with this problem.

Jacob sends some of his employees (servants) ahead of him to tell Esau he is returning home. They brought back the message that Esau was coming to meet Jacob with some 400 men.

This causes Jacob great fear and distress. Has he jeopardized his whole family to follow this call of faith? Is this the most foolish decision he has ever made? So he planned. He divided his people and flocks into the two camps so that if one group was attacked then the other group could escape. Then, he sent the gifts ahead to his brother to pacify him.

And he prayed. He said, “Lord, you told me to go back and I would prosper. When I came here I had only a staff. Now I have two camps. I am not worthy for you to have done all this. Please deliver me from my brother, for I am afraid of him; he may come and kill us all. Yet you said ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea.’” (v. 9-12)

So Jacob planned and prayed.

Do you plan and pray? Or do you just make your plans. James says,
“Look here, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.” How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? . . . What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that" (4:13-15).

Just plans are not enough.

James also says, “What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?” (2:14)

So Jacob did both. He prayed and took action. And that's where we have the struggle to deal with being a believer, a non-believer, or a fence-sitter. The man or woman of God prays and takes action.

Mel Gibson had felt the burden of making *The Passion of Christ* for about ten years but resisted the idea, for he understood the liability. But finally he called Jim Caviezel and asked him to play Jesus. The next day he called back and tried to talk him out of it saying, “You may never work in this town again and they will dig up stuff about me and I've done plenty of wrong and I don't want to be responsible for the demise of your career.”

But he realized God had gotten him into this plan. He didn't want to be a fence-sitter.

Jim hung up the phone but then pondered the fact that everyone wants resurrection but not suffering. Can you have only the blessing without suffering? Some pay with their own blood in order for us to sing the Star Spangled Banner. Why should he not risk suffering for doing this job? So he decided to accept the offer.

From the beginning it was difficult. The movie couldn't be authentic if it was staged in a controlled set; it would have to be realistic. It was birthed in pain and as he began working, the struggle immediately threw him on his face in prayer before God. The whole experience was very much a wrestling with God.

For one, he almost immediately experienced a separated shoulder which caused him excruciating pain. He was mad because he felt God was letting the devil take control. He was accidentally hit by the whip once during the scourging and received a 14” gash. He got double pneumonia and went from 210 pounds to 168 pounds. On the last shot of the day he was struck by lightning while on the cross, his shoulder came out of socket, and he couldn't breathe well. On the cross, his body was blue. Something was wrong with his heart and the doctor said he could die. Jim said to God, “You can take me here if you need to.”

He summed it up, “If you want to be a Christian, you're in for it.”

Jacob was coming home because of God, because he was living into his faith, and growing into the promise. It had been hard. He had caused suffering and he had suffered. Now he felt his life was literally threatened. He is no longer a nominal believer.

So he did the best he could to protect his family and then he wrestled all night long, to the point of excruciating physical pain, but he did not give up. Some have speculated he wrestled with the devil, thinking *why would God or God's agent put him through that?*

But there are some other wrestlings in the Bible. Moses wrestled with God on the way back to fight Pharaoh. Paul wrestled in a way, when he was blinded for three days after his vision that converted him.

Jesus told a story of a woman who had a grievance with a judge. She “wrestled” with him—not physically, but went to him again and again to demand an answer. Jesus describes this as our experience in prayer. Struggling with God for the answer we want; wrestling for the blessing. Jesus said, *live into your faith. Don't sit on the fence.*

Another example was the Gentile woman from Tyre who went to Jesus because her daughter was possessed. Jesus ignored her. The disciples wanted him to send her away. She said, *Oh no—I'll even eat the crumbs but I'm not going away without help.* She knew crumbs from Jesus were better than anything in the world. So she wrestled for them.

Jim Caviezel felt like he was wrestling with the devil because going up the hill to the cross he heard a voice, “You’re a dead man.” But he replied, “Good, I’ll go to heaven.” And he continued to do the very best he could to let the world see what Jesus went through. It was like a very difficult wrestling match.

Sometimes Christians say, I don’t have to go through hardship or pain. Jesus did that for me, so I don’t have to. And so they try to stay safe. But we must ask, then why did Peter and James and all the others suffer for him? Safe faith will never change an unbeliever into a believer. Safe faith is fence-sitting and results in indifference.

We often want to see the promises and blessings only. But we get a chance to lay it all down for Jesus. Jacob was given the chance to do that. He was willing to take injury to hang onto the blessing. He picked up the cross, so to speak. His willingness was rewarded by God.

God said, “You have struggled with God and humans and prevailed.” The blessing was vast. Jacob became Israel, a whole new identity.

Essentially God said, “You are no longer a worm but you are the beloved. I have made you new and you are a great blessing.” He gained the promise. It was no longer just his father’s or grandfather’s. Now it was his.

Jacob pressed forward to live the promise, fighting through the struggle. He was wounded for it. He limped. But then he received a whole new identity and the blessing born only of faith.

Are you stuck in safe faith? Move into active faith. There will be fights and struggles but the blessings will far outweigh them as God fights—for you.

AMEN