

Gateway Fellowship Church

Marathon Faith

Part Four- Fight

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To have a Marathon Faith you have to choose now never to quit. My dad raised me never to quit. I think he got it from football. Being his son, he wanted me to join football and instill this mentality of never quitting. I remember he signed me up, I was in the fifth grade joining football. I remember my first practice. I remember our coach put us on the bleachers and he gives us the pep talk. You know the one? This is going to be a great season and we are going to win the Super Bowl. I think we were called the Cowboys or something.....Too soon? Too Soon? Ok! He is giving us the pep talk and he is saying the lessons you will learn here on the field you can take on with you in life. I'm so excited. I'm pumped up. I'm ready for football. Then the coach puts us on the field and he introduces me to a word that I began to hate. This word became almost like a curse word in my language. He called it "conditioning". This was on an Army base and I truly believed that my coach was acting like a former Drill Instructor. The word conditioning was "fun" for him. The word conditioning was his favorite and I know because he talked about it quite a bit. We get to practicing and we are running. Then we are doing pushups. Then we are running some more. Then we are doing sit ups. Then we are running. Then we are doing jumping jacks. Then we are running. Then we are doing all types of different running. Really fast running. Then sprints. Then we are doing long distance running. Evil. Ok, we are just doing all of this stuff and I wanted to quit. I wanted to quit badly. I went home after my first practice and I told my dad, "Dad I need to quit! I can't do this." Dad said, "Why?" I told him, "Because when I run, I can't breathe. I think I have asthma or something." He said, "Son, no, you're just out of shape." You have to choose now, never to quit. I kept playing football and the whole first week was just shorts and shirts—no pads. Then the last day of the week comes, where you put on full pads. Our coach is prepping us. He tells us that tomorrow is hitting day. We are going to get full pads and you guys are going to knock each other out and you're going to get your teeth knocked out—and all this. Everyone is like "YEAH!" And then there's me over there like, "Hello, did anybody hear that? I don't want to get my teeth knocked out. I don't want to wake up from being knocked unconscious." I wanted to quit. But I couldn't. My dad wouldn't let me. Before the practice ended, the coach said, tomorrow is full pads, but you need to come prepared for practice. You have to bring and wear your "protective athletic gear for men." I feel so uncomfortable saying this in church, but, make sure you bring your cup to practice. If you don't, then you can't play, and you can't practice. I said to myself, "AHA!"

The next day at practice the coach says, “Hey, did you bring your athletic gear?” and he is going on and on down the line asking all my team mates. They are all answering him saying Yes Coach. Then the coach gets to me and says, “Chris did you bring your protective athletic gear?” I pretended to pat myself down and said, “Aw coach I think I forgot it!” Coach says then you can’t practice, and you can’t play. In my mind I am thinking, does that mean I can get out of running too? That was just what was going through my mind. Coach says you have to sit out all practice. I’m like, Yes Lord, Saved by Grace! This was my moment to quit and still be on the team. I was watching my team mates practice and hit each other and all that other stuff. Then all of a sudden, my dad’s car pulls in. I’m like, hold on, I thought he was working?? Like, he might get fired. Dad go home. He gets out of his car and he looks at me sort of confused. More angry—but confused. He didn’t say anything to me. He went directly to the coach and asked why I wasn’t playing. Coach says, “He didn’t bring his “athletic gear” and so we can’t let him practice. In the moment, I thought my dad would have come over to me and started yelling something like, “I can’t believe you son, you want to be a quitter?” I thought he was going to give me “that talk” or I thought he was just going to spank me right there. I didn’t know. But my dad just left. I was just like, Wow! Maybe he wants me to quit. Maybe it’s ok.

Ten minutes later, my dad shows up and gets out of the car and in his hand is what I “forgot” to bring! He is walking towards me with that looks that says I am not letting you quit that easy. I said to him, “Dad, there is no bathroom! There is no where I can change.” Dad goes, I am not letting you quit that easy. As embarrassing as it was, I had to strip down in the middle of the football field and put on my athletic gear in front of everybody. It was the worst, but my dad would not let me quit.

Years later, I ended up playing football all through high school. First game of my Senior year, mid-way through, I broke my ankle and dislocated everything. Had a fracture in my shin. They are saying to me, “Hey Chris, we need to get an ambulance in to take you to the hospital now.” I told them, “there is no way. I am not quitting.” They tried to get people to take me off the field. You know that cool, heroic moment that you see in movies? I said, “I don’t want that. I am not quitting.” I Army crawled off the field since I couldn’t walk. On the sidelines they were telling me this is bad; your ankle is bad. We need to get you to the ER and into surgery ASAP. I told them, “I am not leaving until the clock hits zero.” I didn’t want to quit. To have a Marathon Faith, you have to choose now, never to quit.

In your walk with Jesus it is going to be difficult. In your walk with God, it is going to get tough. It should be. Anything worth fighting for is going to have moments where you feel like quitting. There will be seasons where you feel like giving up. You have to choose never to quit. Choosing never to quit is not profound. You have probably heard it a thousand times. Don’t quit. Don’t quit. Don’t quit. That’s not profound. But choosing now, making that choice now, is something profound. It’s something you can go home with today. Right now, in these next few moments if you choose now to never quit on your faith, that is when it becomes real. Here’s the reality: If you don’t choose now to never quit, you will quit later. If you don’t choose now to never quit on God, you will quit on Him later. Here’s what will happen: Situations, or troubles, or people in your life will push you to the point of wanting to quit. Guess what? If you never made that choice, you will be all in your feelings. All emotional. You will have that decision in

your mind saying, maybe I should give up. Because you never made that decision now. To have a Marathon Faith, you have to choose now, never to quit.

Today we are going to look at someone in the Bible one of the guys from Hebrews 11 that finished their race strong. Finished well. But if I can just be really honest, in his life if you read on his life, the beginning part of his race, he didn't start off well. He didn't. Turn with me to Genesis Chapter 32 and we are going to look at the life of Jacob. He didn't start his race well but there was a turning point that I am so intrigued by and that we should be so intrigued by of how he ended his race well. Let me give you some background. Jacob was actually a twin. He had a twin older brother named Esau. Now in the womb, they are about to be born and Esau was about to be first when Jacob grabs Esau by the heel. Either out of jealousy or whatever. He grabs Esau by the heel and so Jacob was born first. This sets up who he becomes. Did you know that name Jacob actually means "Manipulator"? It also means "Liar". Some of ya'll are like, man, my name is Jacob. (Laughs). This was his character. This set up who he was going to be and what he was going to do. If you know the story about Esau and Jacob, Jacob manipulated, he lied, he tricked his way to getting his brother's birth right. He tricked his way to getting blessed. He tricked and lied to get what Esau deserved. Now we have Jacob and Esau and they have this tension, but Esau is trying to make it right. He wants to see his brother. They try to reunite. But Jacob thinks Esau is trying to kill him. Let's look in Genesis 32 starting in verse 22. "And he (Jacob) arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. He took them, sent them over the brook and sent over what he had. Then Jacob was left alone. Let me tell you what's going on. Jacob thinks his brother Esau is about to kill him, he's coming after him. He's afraid and he's nervous. What does he do? Jacob goes back to his character, back to what he is used to. Jacob goes back to his nature—manipulation. So, Jacob thinks, well, let me send my possessions away. Maybe if I bribe him, and give him stuff, maybe he won't attack me. Oh, that didn't work? Let me send my family! That is pretty messed up. Maybe he will take them. But Esau wasn't having it. Jacob was left alone.

Here's a cool little thing I think we should all learn. I believe that God sometimes wants to break you down away from all the "things" that you have and all the people in your life so that He can get you alone so that you can have an encounter with Him. He wants to break you down where you are alone so that He can get your attention. So, what happens next? Verse 24 And Jacob was left alone and a Man (we know as God) wrestled with Him until the break of day. This is Jacob wrestling with God. The text would like you to believe or to think that Jacob was "That dude". Like Jacob was the best wrestler in all of the high school. Or maybe he had the best wrestling moves that he could actually fight with God. If Jacob were to come into any room today, you would hear (in announcer voice) "JACOB"!! The text would make you think that he was a strong man who wrestles God. But I would beg to differ. This is Jacob. His brother Esau was the manly one. Esau was the hunter. Esau was the hairy one. Jacob was the home maker. Jacob's whole life was never about powering his way to get what he wants, but to lie about it. This wrestling, the text would make you believe that this was a fair match. I think it is much different. Let's look in verse 25, "Now when He saw (this is God) that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him." This is how I know that even though they were wrestling, this was no match for God. As soon as God

wanted to, He touched his hip, and it was done. God could have easily just in an instant said done. And it would be done. If we look at this the wrong way and, in our interpretation, we think this was Jacob wrestling God—that's awesome. But I like to think this is the choosing of God to wrestle Jacob. That is was God's choice to be in this fight. Not Jacob's. We think, wow, Jacob wrestled all night. He had so much persistence to wrestle God all night. It wasn't so much the persistence of Jacob, but rather the hand of Mercy of God to allow Jacob to have persistence. He could've ended it just like that (finger snap).

Choose now never to quit. It continues in verse 26, and He said, "Let me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" When I first read this, and I have read it multiple times, my first thought was that was a pretty arrogant thing for Jacob to say. Like, Hey God, I am not letting go until you give me what I want. Out of context, that is what it sounds like. But as we look at the context of what is going on, Jacob has nothing. He has no possessions to bribe God with. He has nothing to offer. He has no one to bank on. Matter of fact, he is trying to manipulate, and he can't. He can't manipulate God. Now he is at this point where he is saying God I am not letting you go until you bless me. It wasn't a sign of his arrogance. It was a sign of his desperation. To the point where Jacob is holding on for dear life and is saying "God I can't let go. I need you. I have nothing left. I need you!" He had such a desperation to encounter God. Yes, he was persistent. But God was allowing him to be persistent.

Here's a reality: Persistence is not built in a one-hour service. Persistence isn't built in one small group. Persistence is not built in one prayer. It's a constant wrestling with God. It's a desperation. We see the desperation. Then we think well maybe through his desperation God is going to grant him whatever like He is a genie or something. No. God doesn't say, this is your desperation, you want to be blessed, here you go! No!

This is how God responds, and I love it, verse 27—So He said to him (God said to him), "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed." You have to choose now, never to quit.

I am reading this text and I am thinking to myself, if this wasn't a "real fight" or a match for God, then I ask the question that maybe you are asking. What was the purpose then? What was the purpose of this wrestling? The purpose was not that God was allowing Jacob to wrestle with Him so that God would change. God was allowing it so that Jacob could change. He changed him from Jacob to Israel. From manipulator to struggled with God. From liar, cheater, deceiver, to prevailed with God. Key words being "with God". He went from being someone who tried to do it on his own, with his own might, his own will; to now, trusting in God, prevailing with Him, wrestling Him. I truly believe that God wants to change you in the wrestling match. He wants to change you. Your name was liar. Your name was deceiver. Your name was sinner. Your name was drunkard. Your name was selfish. Your name was depressed. Your name was lonely. Your name was whatever you're dealing with. God wants to take that fight, that wrestling match and wants to change your name to redeemed. He wants to change your name to

healer. He wants to change you to joyful. He wants to change you to loving. He wants to change who you are so that He is glorified. But you have to fight and not quit. The reality is that yes, God wants to change your identity, but He also wants to change your character and it comes with a cost. See Jacob, when he was changed, he was injured. It caused him some pain. It hurt. When you wrestle with God, it very well may bring some pain and hurt. When we repent of our sins, it might hurt. It should hurt. Repentance isn't easy. It's not something we flippantly say. It's not a changing of our language, but it's a changing of our minds and our hearts. That should hurt if we are living selfishly for ourselves. It should hurt. Fighting isn't easy. That's why I believe our fight has to come out of a desperation. Desperate for God's presence. Desperate for Him to transform us. Desperate for His Word and for time with Him. Desperate to worship Him. Desperate so that your friends or your family members will come to know Him. Desperate that He would be the center of your marriage. Desperate that He would be the center of your family. Desperate that He would be the center of your school. Desperate that He would be the center of your work. Desperation for God.

I ran into this desperation in II Chronicles 7:14. See God lays out how desperate we need to be. He says, "If my people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." God shows us the desperation we need to have. You know how he says it? He says if my people are so desperate. If my people were so desperate to get rid of their selfishness and their pride... If my people were so desperate to pray to Me, to talk to Me, to learn more about Me; if My people were so desperate to seek My face and only My face; if My people were so desperate to get rid of their sins, to turn away—then, I will do the miraculous. Here is a question I want you to ask yourself that I ask myself quite a bit because it is a reality check. When was the last time you were desperate for God? If it's been a while, I'm just going to hit you with this: the enemy of desperation is selfishness. I admit I don't want to be desperate for God because I want my own way. I don't want to be desperate for God to move in my friends or in whatever, because I have my own agenda. When was the last time you were desperate for Him? You have to choose now, never to quit. Never to go back. Never to stay complacent. I just have to say this because it has been bothering me. I feel like we get to the point in our Christian walk that we say yes Jesus I want you, and then we stop. But our salvation is the starting line. The more we spend time with God, the more we see His mission and the lost people. We should desperately want Him more. We should not be complacent. We need to choose now, never to quit.

This is how I will end. We are in the series Marathon Faith and I understand the scripture, the text for this book in Hebrews 12. "Run the race with endurance", that is where we get Marathon Faith. God wants to take it a step further, if you're ready. He says this in I Corinthians 9:24—it's Paul writing. "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it." Don't quit. Make a commitment to God where you obtain it. Keep persevering. Keep pushing through in a way that you may obtain it. "And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore, I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus, I fight: not as one who beats the air. Choose now, never to quit. It's going to come with a cost. It cost Jacob some pain. Matter of fact, that pain changed

the way he walked. Will you allow Jesus to change your walk with Him? It might be a little painful. Are you willing to walk with a limp so that He can transform your life?

Prayer

KDD

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