

## Wrestling with God....

Think about it for a second, when was the last time you wrestled with someone or something. Maybe it was a decision, where to go, what to do. Maybe you just wrestled with a friend and you were thrown each other around some. Play fight, etc. I wrestle with Jacob and Siah a lot, most of the time it's fun, but once in a while the boys get carried away and I get hurt. They either don't pull a punch or jump on me when I'm not ready. The result, like I said, is that I get hurt. And I know what most of you are thinking, two kids can beat up Rick and he's a wimp. But the biggest reason I lose isn't because I'm necessarily a wimp but rather because I'm out of shape.

I'm not sure if you have ever wrestled or been to a real wrestling match, not like with kids or even WWE or TNA, but the real wrestling the type in H.S. and in the Olympics are some of the most intense competitions you'll ever see. Let me show you a clip...

When you wrestle there's a couple things that you have to really do well, the first is that you have to be in good shape. You need to know how to take a hit or blow, you need to be able to bend in some unusual shapes, and you need to have the stamina to go 9 minutes or so with everything you have. You have to be conditioned. The second thing you have to have is some balance. You need to be able to throw a person's weight. If a person is coming at you, you need to be able to shift their weight so that they use it against themselves. If you have ever watched this type of wrestling you'll notice that one of the first moves they do at the beginning of a match is a leg shoot, the purpose is to knock your opponent off balance so that they hit the ground. If you lack one or both of these for any amount of time chances are you'll either get hurt or you'll lose. Neither of which are ideal.

In our lives we wrestle on a regular basis, we wrestle with decisions; what to do and how to live, we wrestle with relationships; how much to invest, trust, love, sacrifice, and we even wrestle with God at times. I know it sort of sounds weird. But if you think about it, it's completely legit. I am by nature, a certain way, if I'm apart from God I live my life my own way. Unfortunately most of Rick's ways are not God's ways. So if I'm a believer that means the Holy Spirit is at work in my life and my way of doing things and God's way of doing things sort of duke it out. Scripture speaks of this in Romans...

What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can't be trusted to figure out what is best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that God's command is necessary. <sup>17-20</sup>But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best

intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time. <sup>21-23</sup>It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge. <sup>24</sup>I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question? <sup>25</sup>The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different.

Rom. 7:15-25, The Message

Has anyone ever been there, deciding one thing and then doing the complete opposite? These desires we have, they sabotage our intentions. It's as if we are wrestling with God and we want to win, we want our desire to win over God's, but at the same time we know God's way is the right one and we want to be right with Him. We go through these battles over and over again and over time it wears on us. We've done the work, we've put the time into it. We've conditioned ourselves and learned to balance; to balance ourselves and even at times we get the pin on ourselves, but never get the win. We need something else in order for us to get right with God. That's why scripture gives us the answer, it's Jesus. Jesus makes it possible for us to pin the enemy and allow God to have the win.

When was the last time you wrestled with God, when was the last time you wrestled. You worked through a decision, a choice and God came out on top. You were better because of it, but it was tough. You see each decision we make, each time I wrestle with what God calls Rick to verses what the old Rick wants to do, each time that happens and God's way wins I'm stronger because of it and the only reason that match is won, each time I grow a little bit it's because of Jesus. What he did it, who He is, and what He's doing in you and I, and each time I mess it up and the old Rick wins, Christ is there to pick me up, teach me a lesson, make things right and encourage me to keep going and get back in the ring. Scripture tells us that we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling because it's God that does the work in us (Phil. 2:12-13), all of it's for Him, through Him, and because of Him. Jesus is on your side, he doesn't want to beat you he wants to train you. Wrestle with God through life, through life's struggles, through decisions, though your walk. Wrestle and let him show you how to win over the old you.

...you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, <sup>Heb 12:6</sup> because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." <sup>Heb 12:7</sup> Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? <sup>Heb 12:8</sup> If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. <sup>Heb 12:11</sup> No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Training, wrestling, it's not supposed to be easy but painful but it produces, it produces righteousness and peace. You see your life can be characterized by peace and righteousness. When someone looks at you, what are the things that come to their mind, who do they see? Do they see the real you, do they see a person that's been trained, conditioned and balanced so that you are known by bringing peace in a world that's full of conflict, so that you are known by doing the right thing in a world that's full of people who are known for doing the wrong thing. It all starts though with getting in the ring and wrestling, are you willing?

One thing that I need to add before we close out tonight is this. This whole concept of wrestling with God, between your ways and God's ways, it's a concept that assumes something. You see in order to wrestle with God or with anybody you have to have some sort of relationship with that person. God's no different. In order to wrestle with God we have to have some sort of relationship with him. Whether it's only in an introductory state, like a lot of us have on Wed nights or whether you're relationship is deeper than a Wednesday night meeting you need to have some sort of relationship with God in order to wrestle him. If you're not wrestling with God every now and then, your ways verses his, it's possible that you don't have a relationship with Him.

#### Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. When was the last time you really wrestled with something?
  - a. What was it?
  - b. Why was it a battle?
  - c. Who won?
2. What are two things that are needed for wrestling? (balance and conditioning)
  - a. How balanced of a person are you,
    - what does that look like
  - b. How conditioned are you, are you in shape
    - Physically, emotionally, spiritually
3. Can you really wrestle someone who you don't know?
  - Some will say yes, but the thing is you have to look at the person before you recognize them.
  - The same is true with wrestling something; you have to look at in the face before you step in the ring in it.
4. Why do you think training so difficult?
5. What is your life producing?