

Harris Creek Baptist Church
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Jacob and Wrestling with God
Genesis 32

Harris Creek, how are we doing? I'm Drew; I'm one of the pastors here. Thank you for letting me share with you this morning.

Hey, it's been a big sports week. Anybody Olympic fans out there? I'm super into the Olympics. They just started, and then previously on Tuesday, we had the NBA finals wrap up, and The Milwaukee Bucks won their first championship in 50 years. Any Milwaukee Bucks fans all the way in Texas. Actually, anybody a Phoenix Suns fan? So sorry for you. And so, the rest of you, did you even know that it was going on, to be honest?

So, I've always been a big basketball fan. Grew up playing it. Grew up watching it. I love it. I always joke that the reason I didn't play past high school was that I never made it past six feet tall. I think it was just because I wasn't that good, but I love basketball. I want to, just for a second if I could, take us back to a simpler time of life to the year 2019. You guys remember 2019?

It was back when we were so naïve. Man, Corona was just something you could find on the beach in Mexico, and I was actually in a coed city tournament here in Waco playing basketball, and we were defending our title from the year before, so a lot is on the line our first game of the tournament.

And I'm actually going to dribble towards the basket and shoot a jump shot, and I come down and my left knee pops like a pop I have never heard before. It buckles, and I go down. I was in so much pain. I hobbled off the floor, and our team starts losing. Now I'm not going to say it was because I was out, but our team starts losing, so in my mind I'm thinking I'm going to help my team out. And so, I kind of get up on my knee, and I walk on it a little bit. I think man, I think I can go back in.

My friend Jay, he is playing guitar today, he says hey I've got a knee brace, and so I'm like great, that'll work. So, I go and put the knee brace on. And yeah, you know what's about to happen. In the second half, I again I dribble towards the basket. I go to cut on my left knee, and it was like a sniper shot me from 200 yards away. It was bad. I was down, I was done. And so, I hobble over to the sideline, and you think at the time, what I was thinking about was how much pain, I was in, but no, here's what I was thinking: my wife is going to kill me. So, after the game is over, I think we actually ended up winning that game, I said in the last service we lost. In the last service I said we lost, but I need to correct that. We went and lost the next day but.

So, I called my wife to tell her what happened. And you need to know something. When I'm injured or I'm sick, I kind of play it up a lot, right? So as a lot of us do. So, I call her and say, hey baby. I know you're going to think that I'm exaggerating but I really hurt my knee and filled

with great compassion and mercy my wife says I'm so sorry, but can you still get the milk from Walgreens. So yeah, like a good husband, I am I go to Walgreens hobbling through Walgreens with this gallon of milk, you know, to make a long story short. The next day, I went to the doctor, and it turns out, I had a torn ACL, a torn meniscus, a bone bruise, and a chipped knee cap. So, like I did all of it, and so you know I have told that story so many times, and you know why. When you're on crutches and you're hobbling around, people always ask you what do they ask you? What did you do?

People don't ask you this, when you're not moving around and that got me thinking walking with a limp always gave me an opportunity to tell my story. And the same is true in our walk with God. Our lives, our wounds, and our hurts mark who you are, so that's what we're going to talk about today. We're going to talk about how God uses our pain and brokenness for his glory and our good. We're going to be looking at the story of Jacob in Genesis chapter 32. And it's a crazy turn of events where Jacob wrestles with God, and today is all about what comes from wrestling with God. How it gives us new identity, how it gets intimacy with God, and how wrestling with God ultimately gives humility.

You know, we go through life, avoiding hardship and pain every turn this is especially true for us in America we love our comfort. You know, we read verses like Romans 5:3 which says to rejoice in our sufferings because it develops perseverance, and we think, who, in their right mind would rejoice in suffering, right?

See mountaintop moments are what we are always chasing in Christianity, but it's the valley moments that truly define and grow us spiritually. What do we do with God when following him is not easy? If you're anything like me, I want to grow, without any hardship. If I'm honest, I want to follow Jesus, but not that heart and that's where pride can creep into our lives without hardship, we think everything is under control, under our control. And no need for God means we think that we can do it all alone, guys, this is the lesson that Jacob couldn't learn. He thought his sheer determination can make everything happen for himself if you're just saying today, we have a lot in common with Jacob. So, we're going to learn from this story today.

If you have your bibles, grab them, turn to Genesis chapter 32. We're also going to be in Chapter 33 a little bit.

So, I'm going to give you a second to turn there. As a reminder, we are in our summer BC series. We are all telling our favorite Old Testament stories. My nine-year-old, Chef, he said let's read the Old Testament tonight those stories are crazy. And he's right, there's lots of crazy stories in there. If you're unfamiliar with the Old Testament, that has stories in scripture that happened before Christ came to the earth, and as Christ followers, we know the irony in that statement is that there's never been a time before Christ. He has been always; He's always been and always will be. As we learn in Colossians and John 1. So, we're going back 2000 years before Jesus would actually physically come visit with them to the years and I give us some context for Jacob story.

As we get started, I've got a lot to cover, so buckle up if you're a note taker write fast, here we go. Jacob is the long-awaited son Isaac, who was the long-awaited son of Abraham, who was the

father of the nation of Israel. Okay, this is going to be awkward if you don't know this, let's sing this together, *“Father Abraham had many sons, and many sons had Father Abraham. I am one of them, and so are you, so let's just praise the Lord.”* We're going to stop there; we're not going to do all of it. So, Abraham is the father of all the nations, including us, and Jesus would actually eventually come from that lineage. Jacob was a twin. His name literally means supplanter or heel grabber, you may write that down. Names are a big deal in Hebrew culture. Jacob's name is actually a Hebrew idiom for deceptive behavior. He came out of the womb just after his brother Esau, and I'm assuming grabbing his heel. As we're going to see throughout his story, his birth order was a constant struggle for attention in his life.

Chapter 25 of Genesis we learned that Jacob was a mama's boy. It says that Esau was a manly man. Esau was hairy, and Jacob was smooth. Esau was a hunter, and Jacob stayed inside with his mom. So, Jacob spent the early part of his life trying to take Esau's birthright. That's a lot of that story. If you haven't read that, go back, and read it today. He desperately wanted to earn the favor of his father. Man isn't that true of all of us? This is a big deal in ancient times, to earn the favor of your father. It means that you have his birthright, his blessing, his inheritance, you have all his stuff.

So, Jacob and Rebecca came up with this plan to trick Isaac in his old age into giving Jacob his blessing and birthright that belonged to Esau, and they succeeded. So, the next 20 years, Jacob spends life on the run. He is in fear of his life from Esau. Along the way, Jacob gets a dose of his own deceptive medicine, and his uncle Laban somehow tricks him into marrying the wrong woman. And then seven years later he eventually marries the right one, Rachel. And that gets us to where we are today in Chapter 32.

As I said, 20 years after this has all happened, and Jacob has recently learned that Esau is coming with 400 men, and he's terrified. His first thought is to scheme like he's always done in verse 7. So, he devises people and possessions into two groups to just protect either one or the other, maybe he'll just attacked one. But then he remembers God's promise that he would make to him early in his life that his descendants would be like the sand of the sea which cannot be counted, it says that in verse 12. But then Jacob does what he should have done all along, he prays. Man, I love what English theologian Matthew Henry says about this. He says, “Times of fear should be times of prayer: whatever causes fear, should drive us to our knees, to our God.” Maybe a less profound way to say that phrase that I've always loved is, “if you can worry about it, you can pray about it.”

So just after this prayer is where we're going to pick up in the reading. Beginning in verse 22 of chapter 32 in Genesis. Let's read this.

²² That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴ So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.” But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” ²⁷ The man asked him, “What is your name?” Jacob,” he answered. ²⁸ Then the man

said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”

So, to recap, here we have Jacob he's alone with his thoughts and with the Lord, and we see in this text that Jacob wrestles with this man until daybreak. Now many commentaries will tell you that this man was an angel, and you may have seen that depicted in famous paintings out there. Other commentaries will tell you this is actually the pre incarnate Jesus Christ, I like to believe that. I think if this is Jesus, in the presence with Jacob. Either way, Jacob is in close contact with the God of the universe, then guys, this is wild right, this is, while can you imagine Jacob the next day. And he's been alone, and his friends and family are like “hey Jacob, where were you last night?” Jacob’s like, “oh no big deal, I just wrestled with Yahweh last night.” and they're like, “No way.” He's like, “Yahweh.”

This is wild, right? I like the fact that Jesus was actually in the presence of Jacob. And I love what Jacob does. In persistence, he asked for the blessing of his heavenly Father, and God grants that request, and in doing so, He changes Jacob's name to Israel, so that leads me to point one today:

1. Wrestling with God gives new identity.

As I said, names were a big deal in Hebrew culture, and they still are for us today. They say who you belong to. They say what your heritage is, what are you known for. And Jacob’s entire life thus far, he's been known as the supplanter, as the grabber of the heel. Jacob used deception to get his father's blessing, and what did it get him? It got him the moniker of Jacob, the deceiver, and it also caused him to lose fellowship with his family.

Up until this point, Jacob has been on the run. All he really wanted was Isaac's approval and blessing, but instead, he lost connection with his family for years. Jacob’s old identity is that he cheated to get ahead and now he’s a runaway. But God’s about to change that. We're going to look at verse 24 again which says this: “So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.”

The fact that he's alone here is so important. When he is finally alone, Jacob can experience the presence of God. This encounter would actually change the course of history, not only for Jacob, but for Israel, for all the rest of history. In the still and quiet of the night, the old Jacob is worn out and the new identity is wrestled from the old. And what we are going to see next is that one of the most powerful moments all in scripture. Jacob wrestles this man of God until daybreak and in verses 25 to 26 we see that Jacob again is asking for a blessing.

So, we're going to state the obvious here, no one ever wrestles with God and wins. You can write that down, no one ever wrestles with God and wins. You know I love to wrestle with my boys. I have an almost nine-year-old. I’ve got a six-year-old and an almost two-year-old.

So, there's still pretty small, and I'm not a big guy, but I still have #dadstrength right, so I can beat them in wrestling, but what do I do lots of times, I let them win. And that's what's happening here. This man is overcome by Jacob, and in they're struggling together, he puts Jacob's hip out of socket. And we are going to talk about this more in a bit. It is very important to Jacob's new identity.

Speaking of identity, we're going to look at what happens next let's look at verse 27.

“The man asked Jacob his name is.” Now does the Lord know who he is wrestling? Of course, He does. This is a rhetorical question. He's asking Jacob to identify himself. What He's really asking is who is the old Jacob. Jacob replies with his old identity, and what happens next is consistent with what God has done throughout the ages. He gives Jacob a new identity.

Let's read it in verse 28. **“Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”**

Man, this is so powerful. Don't miss this this morning. Jacob's name Israel literally means wrestles with God. This is the new name he has given him. Even today, the remnant God has reserved as his people, that we are a part of as a people that wrestles with God. That's what's so unique about our faith. We have a God who is willing to get into the mess with us. He is not a dictator. He's not a clockmaker who has set this world in motion and left and forgotten us. But He is a God who is in it with his people. Emmanuel, God with us. Jacob's newfound identity means that he will never be alone again. And this, this means that God will be with him and his people forever, an ever-present help in trouble.

And the same is true for us today. By God's grace, we can be grafted and adopted into his family. We can have a new identity. We see this promise in 2 Corinthians 5:17, it says this. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, the new has come.”

One of my greatest joys on staff here is that I get to lead the ministry that Nate mentioned earlier: Regeneration. I get to lead that ministry on Monday nights. And just a plug here, if you have ever been interested in being a part of discipleship program, or if you have ever been interested in being a mentor or have been interested in looking to see what a 12-step recovery ministry might look like, man, I want to tell your Regen is for you, it's for everybody. I've had a front row seat this last year at seeing God change people's lives. So, we'd love to invite on Monday nights at 6:30pm, and we meet every week. We would love to see you there.

But one of the things that we learn in Regen over and over is that our that our identity is not in the things of this world. If your identity is in anything other than that of Christ, it is a false idol. This is something we all struggle with right. You're not your Enneagram number. You're not an alcoholic. You're not who your parents are. You're not defined by your mental health or the job you have. You're a Christian. You're a little Christ, a child of the living God. Guys, this is not a Jesus and situation. This is a Jesus and nothing else situation. That's how we have to live our lives. It's not a Jesus and situation; it's a Jesus and nothing else.

Christ gives us a new identity through him, and anything you place your trust in other than Jesus will leave you empty and unsatisfied. And guys, this is something we say a lot up here, and it's not just preacher talk, it is the truth. Just ask Jacob. He thought getting his inheritance would satisfy him, and instead, it put him on the run for 20 years. Even worse, it made him feel distant and far away from the one true and living God. And that leads me to my second point today:

2. *Wrestling with God gives intimacy.*

Alright. We are going to jump back into the text here. In chapter 32 verse 29, it says this.

29 Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. 30 So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." 31 The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

A recap again. We are back to the narrative of Jacob wrestling until daybreak. Jacob wants to know who he has been wrestling, and then the man asked Jacob another question that he already knows the answer to. He says, "Why do you ask my name?" He then blesses Jacob out of persistence, and Jacob names the place Peniel which literally translates the face of God. You can write that in your notes: Peniel translates face of God.

As this encounter ends, we get this important detail that Jacob limps away. This would actually be the closest encounter we have in the Old Testament with God. Moses, if you remember, saw a glimpse of God in the burning bush and only saw his back. But this is on a whole other level. The nearness of God in this moment was life changing for Jacob. He literally sees the face of God. So, let's remember God is so holy that humans cannot be in his presence, so in the New Testament we find out that the veil has been torn and that Jesus has given us a way to the Father. In the Old Testament, the only way they could be in God's presence is if they followed all these very strict guidelines. So that meant that only the priests were in God's presence, if they were in the oldest of holiness and did everything exactly right and yet here, we see that God is very present with Jacob. And he lives to talk about it.

Guys, this is not the first time that Jacob has been in God's presence. If you flip back in your bibles a couple of chapters to Genesis 28. Jacob has a dream where he sees angels ascending and descending on a ladder and God's at the top of this ladder. It's at the top of this ladder where God tells them I'm going to make your descendants numerous. I love that when Jacob says, when he awakens from this dream, in verse 16 of Chapter 28, **"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it."**

Man, can anybody out there can relate to that? Surely the Lord is here, and I wasn't aware of it. Now how many times in my life has this been true that I've been so busy, so concerned with me, that I missed out on God's presence. And I know that many of you have probably felt fall from God at times. I want you to know that's only because you were far from Him. James says this in James 4:8 **"Draw near to God and he will draw near to you."**

You know God's nearness has never been more present in my life than about 10 years ago. It was 10 years ago that my wife Paige and I tried to start having kids, and, like many of you may have experienced, we experienced heartbreaking infertility. And in that infertility, we actually lost four babies, miscarried four babies, and still to this day I get teared up talking about it. It was also though a time in my life where I experienced the nearness of God. He was so close to us and so near to us. And that's what's true about anytime you go through something is you experience God's nearness. And here's what I learned in that situation. I realized that it was me that desired control. As it is with infertility, you have zero control.

And I know many of you listening today have gone through or are currently going through similar things in your life. It may not be infertility. It may be the loss of a loved one, a health crisis, or an abusive relationship. The list can go on, but I want to tell you today in these moments of wrestling with God, we all have two choices, I found this to be true. We can run away from the Father, or we can run to Him. The choice is ours. In any of these situations, I found this verse to be so comforting: Psalm 34:18, **"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."**

Guys don't miss this. We have a God who gets into the mess with us. That is who He is. That's what He promises us. I love this Donald Miller quote. He says this about God's intimacy. He says, "Real love stories don't have dictators, they have participants. Love is an ever-changing, complicated, choose-your-own-adventure narrative that offers the world but guarantees nothing. Would you climb a mountain or sail an ocean, you're rewarded for staying in control? Perhaps that's the reason true intimacy is so frightening. It's the one thing we all want and must give up control to get."

So, ultimately, to gain intimacy with God it's about us giving up control. Like it's about Jacob's life, my life, our lives that God is asking us to surrender. It's the humbling of oneself to realize we can't do anything without the Father.

Alright, we're going to dive back into the text once more. Now in Chapter 3. If you will turn there, beginning in verse 1 chapter 33. **"Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his 400 men; so, he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two female servants. He put the female servants and their children in front, Leah, and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother. But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept."** So here we have the climax of Jacob and Esau's story. Remember that Jacob has just wrestled with God, and he's limping away from that encounter towards Esau. But still, in Jacob fashion, we have that old remnant of his identity. I love that it preserves that he sent his least favorite people first, and then he sent Joseph and Rachel last, and then he himself goes to see Esau.

But what happens next, guys, is a beautiful reconciliation. Jacob now in humility bows down seven times to Esau, and then Esau runs towards Jacob as they embrace each other. The text says they wept together, which leads me to my final point:

3. Wrestling with God gives humility.

I can't help but think today of a story in the New Testament, which is very similar to this one, and that's the story of the prodigal son. And in that story, you have this runaway, who comes limping homeward to his father, and his father runs to embrace him. It so similar to what is happening here with Esau. The way that Esau embraces Jacob is such a beautiful picture of God's grace. It's what God does. He takes broken people and makes them fully restored. He welcomes them back in no matter what they've done, and that is good news. And what did it take for that to happen? Humility.

With Jacob's newfound identity and his close encounter with the living God, he has a limp, and he finally has the humility to reconcile with his brother. And he has to take ownership of the ways that he's wronged Esau.

A note on reconciliation here that I would love for us to notice, the great Watchman Nee, the 20th century evangelists in China said it this way, "Those whom we have wrong will always represent God to us. When we meet them, it is though we're meeting God in judgment." And so, Jacob faces judgment with Esau and instead of wrath or condemnation, what does he find? He finds grace and mercy.

And so, it is with our God. Jacob's entire life up until this point has been pretty much a disaster. And yet, in this moment when he faces his sinful past, he is fully restored. Fully restored to his brother and to God. If we had kept reading down in verse 10 in chapter 33 you again would see Jacob saying that he has seen the face of God, this time portrayed in his brother Esau.

It has been said that only in the Christian life does surrender bring victory, only in the Christian life does surrender bring victory. And this is the great irony of our faith. In wrestling with God, winning actually looks like us losing. It tells us in scripture this, it tells us in Luke 17:33, **"Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it."**

Guys, this is the upside-down nature of the gospel. As I said before, our greatest struggle in life is control. You know I could be convinced that control is the root cause of most of our sin. And I'm going to ask you today, what is it that God wants you to surrender control of? What is it that He wants you to loosen your grasp on? You know many of you may have a broken relationship, just like Jacob and Esau. And you may have had someone that has wounded you. And you may have to go to that person that has wounded you, and you're going to have to be just like Esau and say, "Hey, I forgive you." And in humility do that, and you may be the one that wounded someone, and so in humility, like Jacob, you're going to have to go to them, say, "Hey, I'm sorry, will you forgive me?" And mend that relationship in humility. Or for some of you may be here today, and you may just be running from God, you may have spent the last 20 years like Jacob, running from your past. I want to tell you today, you can't, you can't outrun God. God wants to give you a new identity. And it may take you walking with a limp for you to finally realize that you cannot outrun Him. I want us all to hear this hard truth today. This is a hard truth, but I believe it to be true. God may just leave you limping toward heaven so you're not running toward hell. Guys, this might just be the most merciful thing that he can do.

So, in summary, wrestling with God gives you a new identity, it gives intimacy with God, and it gives humility. It's true for Jacob. And it's true for us. You know I used to tell people that I had a

boring testimony. Has anybody else ever said that? And what I meant by that was I grew up in a Christian home, you know, I was shown the ways of Jesus early and often, and at eight years old, I made, I really do believe I made a genuine trust in Jesus and placed my faith in Him. But I had a pretty easy life, you know, and I didn't have a lot to tell. Unlike most pastor's kids who get the rap of being the rebel, I was the pastor's kid that stayed on the straight and narrow. I actually leaned more towards that of a Pharisee, and as is true of most Pharisees, I knew a lot in my head, had a lot of head knowledge and I lacked depth and intimacy with God in my heart. And guys, I thought that my life didn't tell a good story. So, I began to pray that I would tell a better story. Let me tell you, that's a dangerous thing to pray. So, the infertility that we went through, the miscarriages. And most recently in 2019, yeah 2019 was a hard year for us, we had a failed adoption. And I no longer say that I have a boring testimony. You know I would be lying to you if I told you that I didn't still have hurts in my life from that season. God is not safe, but He is good. And I have wrestled, but the intimacy that I lacked at one time is there now, and so this is what I want to leave you with today.

I don't know what this cane represents in your life. It can be anything. All of you have unique stories of God wrestling with you, of getting in the mess with you. And it is my prayer today that He would use those things for you to tell a better story. As we say all the time around here, I pray that He would make your mess your message. It's what he did with Jacob. And man, can't you just imagine Jacob going through the rest of his life limping towards everyone and them seeing him and saying, "Hey Jacob." Just like the people did with me on crutches. "Hey Jacob. What'd you do?" And Jacob got to tell them, "No, look what God did!" He took a man who didn't get a lot right in his life and He made him a hero of our faith. That's what God does.

If you go into the New Testament in the book of Hebrews, we have a list of these heroes of our faith and Jacob is included in there. I love this verse: Hebrews 11:21 that has been preserved for us. Let's read it together. It says this, **"By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff."** Man, I love that scripture gives us this detail. Jacob worships, as he leaned on top of his staff. You know what it reminds me of, it reminds me of Job, who, after he had lost everything, literally everything, what does he say? "You give and take away but blessed be the name of the Lord." And hey, we have the same choice when we wrestle with God. Will we leave the faith when it gets hard? Will we press in and worship Him, no matter what, no matter what? You know, I tend to think, this is conjecture, but I tend to think Jacob today in Heaven is still walking around one of these (canes). You know, I know that we're going to have resurrected bodies, that Christ is going to make everyone perfect, and have perfect bodies. I don't know what that looks like, but I know that it's going to be true. But I tend to think that this (cane) is more like a trophy than a wound. It tells the story of a new identity. It tells a story of the gospel. And let's remind ourselves today what the Gospel is, that the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, who also has wounds, let's remember, wounds that we gave him, and what does scripture say? "And yet by those wounds, we are healed." It is through this that we find our new identity, through Jesus Christ. Not deceiver. Not runaway. Not sex addict. Not control freak. Not adulterer or people pleaser. But child of the Living God. Let me pray that we would lean into that identity today.

Jesus, I am so, so grateful that You save me from myself. And I thank you for the hard times, because they have led me closer to you, and so I pray that the people listening today, the ears

that hear this would hear that God, you love them with an everlasting love. Your love is never changing. You'll always be close to them, so I pray for those who are struggling with you right now, God, those who are wrestling with You. That God, they would lean into You. And God, for those who have wrestled with You in times past, maybe they've strayed from You, maybe they decide I'm not into this, this is too hard, I pray that they press back in. And God I know that You meet us, just like Esau did with grace and mercy and forgiveness. So, I pray that today that we would see Your face. And Jesus that as we see your face, You would give us all a new identity. God that we would lean into that new identity, and we would worship You with all that we have. In Jesus' name. Amen.