



The Reality of Wrestling

Many of us desire a deeper relationship with God, but the way seems illusive. In fact, it's not only with God that we desire a deeper relationship but also with our wives, children and even our friends. But why is it so difficult?

by Dan Schaffer In my own life, I have found a universal principle to be true: *the depth of our relationships will be determined by the level of conflict that we are willing to work through.* Conflict is inevitable in lasting relationships, so resolving conflict is imperative if they are to endure. Avoiding the decision to engage and wrestle through conflict will only sentence us to weak, shallow relationships.

What about conflict with God? This principle is particularly important when it comes to our relationship with Him. Many of us would consider engagement with God at this level as forbidden or rebellious, so we avoid it. However, do these fears keep us from truly knowing God?

Over twenty-five years ago, I was forced to face this very situation. Our first son, Matthew, was coming to the end of a nine-month struggle for his life. I knew the end was near, and I had gone back to our apartment to make preparations so that we could stay at the hospital that final night. I began to wrestle with God at a level where I had never been before. I shouted and screamed that He could not take Matthew. I raged and fumed. I felt so broken that I didn't care about the consequences.

After an extended time, I was physically and spiritually spent. I realized that God desired me to wrestle towards Him rather than away from Him. I finally understood that I could not demand anything of God, but I could ask him to empty me out so that I would be free from any bitterness and anger. This allowed me to do what was necessary in the next few excruciating days. God didn't squash me or reject me. He was not threatened by my pain or anger. Instead, He led me through the most incredible year of my life to a deeper

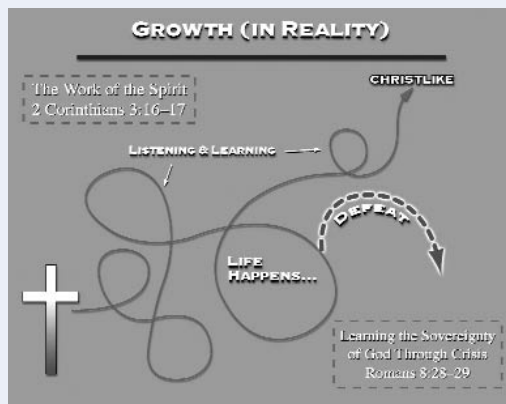
relationship with Him. I don't believe I could serve as I do today if I hadn't wrestled and found Him trustworthy and good.

A unique encounter with God is found in Genesis 32 when Jacob anticipates a deadly conflict with Esau the next day. Previously, Jacob had used trickery and deception to win over Esau, but this time Jacob is at his wit's end. A man suddenly appears and Jacob wrestles with him all night. Finally at daybreak, the man touches him, which disables him, and Jacob's eyes are opened to understand that the man is God. Jacob still holds on, however, realizing that only God's blessing will save him. God allowed the struggle and, by means of it, transformed Jacob from a manipulating deceiver to one who rules with God's character.

Are you missing the opportunity to know God at an intimate, deep level because you are unwilling or afraid to struggle towards Him? Today, will you:

1. **get desperate** and run to God rather than away from Him?
2. **get brutally honest** and tell Him the truth that He already knows?
3. **give up control** and trust Him?
4. **hang on** and live moment-by-moment through faith?

We believe the following diagram is a realistic view of the Christian life. The upper loops represent the times we are willing to wrestle with God; the lower loops, when we run from Him. The only way to fail is to opt out of this crucial process and be unwilling to engage Him. Are you willing to enter into this struggle?



The Power of a Father's Blessing

When Jim entered my office, I quickly recognized he was agitated and uncomfortable, yet extremely determined. He told me about his wife leaving with their three children, his father's imprisonment for child molestation, and his own bitterness toward the church for not believing him about his father.

But when I told Jim that I would be counseling him from the Bible, he said, "Well, I do have another option, and I really can't go along with that religion thing." So he left disappointed.

Afterwards I realized he could be suicidal. I quickly contacted him and convinced him to come in again. Following what seemed like an eternity, he arrived, but the conversation was difficult. I prayed silently, "What do I do? What do I say?" And suddenly I felt the Holy Spirit saying, "Remember the father's blessing you've prayed for teens? Pray it for him."

I mustered my courage and said, "Jim, I'm amazed that you're not angrier with your father than you are. I can't imagine how much that hurt you. God intended for us to be blessed through

our fathers, not cursed! Jim, I wonder if you would allow me to pray a father's blessing for you." To my amazement, he agreed.

I rolled my chair a bit closer and asked, "May we clasp hands as I pray?" Again, he agreed, and I recognized that God was indeed at work. I asked, "Is it okay if I place my other hand on your shoulder as I pray?" Again, Jim said yes.

But there was one more thing. The effect of the father's blessing can be greater when praying directly into the recipient's eyes. Would this be God's intent here? One last time I asked Jim's permission. Oh, the power of our God! In just moments, tears began to stream down his face; and just minutes after the prayer, he prayed to receive Christ into his life.

God has given us the tools to reconnect lost generations with Him—in praying a father's blessing on them.

By Larry Marrs (Stanberry, MO), attendee of the first Facilitator Training, August 2003

Ministry Prayer & Praise:

- God's grace and wisdom are needed as we continue to compile and edit the Building Brother's book. Prayer is needed in continuing to seek finances and the appropriate avenue for it to be published.
- We need continued guidance to respond appropriately to the exploding interest in the Spanish-speaking Latin culture nationally and internationally.
- Pray that we will be able to move forward where venues are opening up in the United Methodist Church, the Church of God (Seventh Day), Germany, and other international areas.

Personal Prayer & Praise:

- Dan and Jan need strength and energy to support aging parents and the issues that arise along with this.
- Dan and Carla need prayer in 2005 for Carla's health and personal finances so they can continue in ministry.
- Ken and Bonnie need enough income for the family so that Ken can continue in ministry full time and Bonnie can quit her job. This would allow her to stay home with Micah full time.
- Rick and Gretchen need prayer in 2005 that God will continue the personal healing in their lives.

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▶ Ministry Update

▶ *Germany BB Leaders' U.S. Trip*

We recently had an incredible time interacting with and developing deeper relationships with 10 Building Brothers leaders from Germany and Hungary! Our visitors obtained a broader view of what God is doing and gained clarification of each man's personal calling. They also spent this time connecting with churches and ministries in this area. One man specifically shared with us that his calling to be a spiritual father was now clear and that he will be committed to that calling for the rest of his life.

▶ *Germany in 2005*

In four trips over the next year, Dan will be teaching our four-phase process across both northern and southern Germany. We have found that their struggles with the issue of men in the church are similar to ours, only more intense. Your prayers are needed:

- This will enable the German leaders to teach and lead the men of their country in 2006.
- Pray for Rhiner Osteloh and his team as they set the groundwork for the first training in March of 2005.
- The translation of our training material into German and Hungarian is complete! Pray that the \$15,000 needed to publish each translation will be provided so that the teams can move forward.

▶ *Denver, Colorado*

January 15, the team will be presenting Phase IV Training at Grace Chapel. Phase III Training was a powerful time of discovery and interaction that highlighted the purpose of building men and unified all around a common purpose. They developed a purpose statement that defined and communicated a pathway to take men from immaturity to maturity and spiritual fatherhood. Continue your prayers for them as they soon move into the second year of training with a desire to deeply impact the other men in their church community.

February, the team will be presenting Phase II Training at Epiphany Episcopal Church. There are about 12 men who have committed to the year-long process. Continue to pray for this training and the interaction of the men in their small groups. This is a unique opportunity to make inroads into this denomination.

▶ *Church of God (Seventh Day) Denomination*

The opportunity to share with the leaders of this denomination provided a unique time of teaching, sharing, and forging the foundation of a complementary relationship serving this denomination in the United States and abroad. Here is what Whaid Rose, president of the denomination, had to say: "I am grateful that Building Brothers was among the ministries featured at our recent conference for denominational leaders. Its principles and concepts were not only well presented by Dan Schaffer but were well received by our leaders, as evidenced by the positive feedback we continue to receive about the training, the desire to take this material to local congregations, and the high level of interest in the upcoming Facilitator Training. It is my goal and prayer that these principles will be engaged in all of our local churches and that, ultimately, they will be shared with our international family of churches. I am excited about the seeds that have been sown in the Church of God (Seventh Day) through this effort and look forward to the fruit that will come from it, to the glory of God!"

▶ *Facilitator Training*

February 22-24, the Building Brothers team will host an in-depth training of the four-phase process in Denver. We strongly encourage pastors and church leaders to attend this three-day, extensive interaction time so that they can facilitate the process in their churches and communities. We have seen this training deeply impact the lives of the leaders who have attended. Because it is difficult for pastors and leaders to commit to three days, please pray that many will set aside this time as a priority.

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