



**This Undone Life Together Podcast**  
Season 2 – Relentless

A God Who Meets You Where You Are  
May 12, 2020

*Are you aching for a love that will never leave, a presence that will push back the dark? If so, I have good news for you. God's love is relentless even when your faith isn't.*

Welcome to the *Relentless* podcast, a 15-episode podcast designed to give you a behind-the-scenes look at the stories and biblical history that make up the pages of my newest book, *Relentless: The Unshakeable Presence of a God Who Never Leaves*. My goal is simple. I want to do everything I can to help you feel less alone and, secondly, to help you discover solid evidence of God's presence in the middle of your story even if your story doesn't look like you thought it would.

Welcome back! This is episode 5. You're almost a third of the way through! Yay! Episode 5. We're talking about chapter 3, "A Ladder and a Limp: A God Who Meets You Where You Are." This is all about the story of Jacob in the Bible, one of my favorite stories. I have a son named Jacob. He kind of feels like the Bible is named after him. I try to let him know that it was actually named first, but he's 22. What are you going to do?

Today, we're talking all about looking for God's presence in the places of your limp. We'll get to that in a moment, but I have a confession to make first. Are you ready for this? It's a big confession. It's kind of embarrassing. For those of you who are familiar with the Enneagram... If you aren't, the Enneagram is one of the most accurate means of personality assessment, how

we operate, and the way we do in relationship. I spent some time learning about the Enneagram as part of my leadership development and coaching and things I do.

Anyway, I have probably taken the Enneagram test somewhere around four or five times. I keep taking it over and over again. Actually, that's probably too low of a number. It's probably more like six or seven. I told you it was a confession. Well, I haven't for a while, but originally I kept taking the test over and over and over again because I wanted different results. I was not happy with the result of the test, and every time I took it, it kept giving me the same answer.

Then, I started skewing my answers, because that's super helpful. Let's skew our answers to try to get a different result, because not having accurate information about ourselves is always so helpful. Not really! I kept taking the Enneagram test again because I wanted it to be something different, but before I tell you what my number is I'll give you a hint.

When I was growing up, if I had a day off from school, I would clean the entire house top to bottom, and sometimes I would make a multiple-course dinner for my parents, even when I was 8, 9, or 10 years old. My motive for these things was that I wanted my parents to love me more. I wanted to make them happy. I wanted to please them.

If you haven't yet guessed by just those two tiny examples, I am an Enneagram 2, the Helper. It's sad but true. Yes, I will exhaust myself trying to be loved. It's so hardwired in me, and I have done a lot of work to be a very healthy 2, and I am so much farther along than I used to be, but there was a time when everything I did, whether conscious or subconscious, I was trying to be loved.

I would work so hard to take care of people and to love people and to serve them well. I would work to the point of my own exhaustion to try to do everything I could for everybody else, because I wanted to be loved, and I thought it would be selfish to not do those things and to take care of myself.

Talk about dysfunction. We all have our little dysfunctional patterns. Well, that was one of mine. In fact, even this past week I felt it pop up, because one of my older grown sons came home, and I had a bunch of work to do, but I felt badly that I wasn't more available. He just popped home for the day to do laundry (a different story for a different episode).

He came home to do laundry, and I wanted to drop everything to take care of him, but the truth is I had work responsibilities to do, so I was caught in that tension between having a job to do, and that's okay, but also feeling like a "terrible mom" because I wasn't able to drop everything and meet his every need. I thought, "There we are! Enneagram 2 popping up again," so I had to process through that and make a really good, healthy decision that took everybody's needs into consideration and not just his. That's ongoing.

Well, the story of Jacob in the Bible is really a story of dysfunctional patterns very similar to my own. There is manipulation and deceit. There are political maneuverings and opportunism. There is lying. There is covering up. There is a mom and dad playing favorites with their kids. It's just a big, hot mess.

Behind that are some dysfunctional patterns just like my own and like yours as well, but in the whole story of Jacob, we can see just about almost every kind of family dysfunction. We see generational pain. If you look at other family stories in the Bible besides just Jacob's, you will see all kinds of abuse and neglect and lying and manipulation and abandonment and disregard and over-protectiveness and all kinds of stuff.

I actually find great comfort in the familial dysfunction in the Bible, because it helps me to see that it's somewhat the norm. We all have kind of complicated families. It's on a continuum. Some are definitely more dysfunctional than others, but we all have patterns that don't serve us well, and they end up leaving their mark on us.

In this chapter, I talk a lot about Jacob, because he was the youngest of twins. I have a set of twins myself. The youngest of the twins, his brother Esau, was born first, but Jacob wanted to have the rights of the firstborn. His mom chose Jacob as her favorite, and Esau was the favorite of the dad. Talk about a hot mess. Imagine going to parent-teacher conferences with them. No, thank you. I'd rather have my toenails plucked out.

It's a big mess. Jacob gets kind of full of himself. He wants the firstborn blessing. He lies and deceives his father in order to get it and then makes his brother mad, and he has to run away. Later in his story, we see that repeating pattern of manipulation and deceit. Then, we find this moment when Jacob meets God, and it's this crazy story of Jacob coming to a place of experiencing the presence of God.

In one story in particular, he sleeps next to a river at night by himself, and the first dream he has is of a ladder reaching from heaven to earth. It's this bizarre dream where he sees angels ascending and descending on this ladder reaching from heaven to earth. The next story...this is the one that really has impacted me...is an angel of the Lord (God himself in a sense) wrestles with Jacob all night long, and Jacob just hangs on to him with bulldog determination. He's not going to let him go.

When morning comes, this angel of the Lord wants to leave, and Jacob says, "Don't leave! I'm not going to let you leave until you bless me." The angel does so, but he also twists Jacob's hip so that he has this wrench in his hip and he walks with a limp. It's so interesting to me. I don't understand all of the dynamics of this particular story, but a couple of things stand out.

First, Jacob is desperate for God. He's desperate for God. He just hangs on to him, like I said, like a bulldog. He's so desperate for God, and even though he has the firstborn blessing and he has more money than he knows what to do with and he's doing very well with multiple wives...

I think that sounds kind of crazy, but he has in all intents and purposes this good life. Yet, he's missing something, so he hangs on to God. He wrestles with God all night and hangs on to him. In the process of that hanging on and wrestling with his faith and wrestling with God, he gets his hip wrenched and walks with a limp for the rest of his life as far as we know.

I sit there and think, "How much like all of us that is!" Right? We want so much to believe in God. We want so much to hang on to God and to hang on to our faith, but the wrestling match we engage in from now until the moment we die is a little bit messy, and it leaves us with a limp. It messes with us.

Yet, there is beauty in the hanging on to God and beauty in the wrestling, and I'm learning there is even beauty in the limp. All of those things are evidence of God's presence if we develop the eyes to see them. Now, the limp looks different in all of us. We all have different limps.

A couple of ways this shows up... We'll talk more about this in a later episode, because we're going to talk about attachment styles and stuff like that, which is coming up in a later chapter, but the ways we show our limp... Some of us show our limp by insecurity and neediness and clingy or manipulative behaviors. Jacob certainly had a lot of that.

Others of us show our limp (our brokenness or the thing that has wrenched us) in withdrawal and detachment and isolation and this kind of detachment from humanity and others or like a refusal to enter in and engage. Others of us show our limp through defensiveness, anger, revenge, or retaliation (this kind of hyper-intensity, that we are just angry all of the time).

All of those things can be difficult to deal with in other people. Right? We want everybody else to give us a whole lot of grace for our limp, but we don't like people who walk with a limp. They're kind of annoying when they're clingy and needy or when they're angry and vengeful and manipulative or deceitful or detached or withdrawn. We don't really like that.

When you start to look at it this way, all of these evidences of a limp are ways that we are wrestling through life and wrestling to find meaning and purpose and, maybe, God in the middle of that. This is my question for you today. *What is your limp?* What is your limp? More than ever before, I have had to accept the fact that I'm going to walk with a limp for the rest of my life.

First of all, my physical challenges are inescapable. Even doing these podcasts, I'm finding myself spitting. I'm drooling and spitting. I'm having a hard time swallowing and talking at times. My speech, my broken body, and my scars... For those of you watching the video, you can see the scars on my neck that are evidence of the brokenness of my body. What's on the outside is very much what is on the inside of my body as well.

More than the physical evidences of my limp are the internal, the things other people may not see, and for my whole life I've dealt with chronic insecurity and a deep-seated fear of being left alone. This fear of being abandoned and being unloved has been a driving motive in my life. As I talked about earlier with my Enneagram 2, I have to constantly ask myself, "Am I doing this service or am I helping this person or am I doing this thing because I'm trying to be loved or am I doing it because I love them?" I'm having to work to get really healthy about that.

This has been a limp and is a limp in my life that I carry around with me, but like Jacob, I'm learning to see God's face in my pain. In the story of Jacob, he names that place where he wrestled with God by the river when God blesses him and when he gets that wrench in his hip. It's in Genesis 32. I'll read this whole section.

**"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. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.**

**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.**

**Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.' But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' The man asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob,' he answered. 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.'"**

Verse 30: **"So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.'"** What is so meaningful to me personally about that story of Jacob is that after that long night of wrestling with God what Jacob didn't remember was the wrestling or the limp. He remembered the face of God.

What he chose to memorialize and what he chose to focus on was that in the middle of all of that difficulty, the hardship, the questions, the wrestling, and the pain, he chose to focus on the face of God. Through my experience and through my story, I am learning to find the face of God in my pain.

For example, I am learning and I am seeing over and over again how my limp connects me with other limpers, for lack of a better way to say it. For example, I heard from a mom who gave birth to a child who was born with a cleft lip and palate. She said seeing how I show up and speak in spite of my functional disabilities and my speech disabilities gives her hope for her child. I would never have had the opportunity to connect with this person and with their limp if I didn't have a limp of my own.

I meet people all of the time who have difficulty with speech or swallowing or eating who feel like they're not alone because I share my story. I meet people who connect with me and my

limp of fear, constantly living not knowing how long I have left. That limp of mine connects with the limp of others.

I also see how my own brokenness connects with my children and their struggle. The fact that I don't have it all together gives my young children who are dealing with their own hard stories permission to not always have it all together. I am hopeful and I hear this from my grown children as well that my ability to acknowledge that I still have things to learn and my ability to apologize and take ownership of ways that I haven't always been healthy is also helping them to see how they can do the same themselves.

I also see how my limp makes me vastly more aware of my dependence on God. I cannot do this life alone. I have no ability to be utterly self-sufficient and independent, and the fact that I live with this broken body and broken spirit at times reminds me of my absolute utter dependence on God, but it also reminds me of my dependence on others.

We need each other, and my awareness of my own needs helps me to create space for the needs of others, too, but I also see how my limp makes me long for heaven. Just like Jacob saw the face of God through his long, dark night of wrestling, I am seeing evidence of God's presence in how my limp makes me long for heaven.

I am no longer so infatuated with this life that I don't have time to consider the one to come. My suffering and pain and difficulty are almost like God's whisper in my ear saying, "Don't forget! The best is yet to come. This is not all there is. There is more ahead, Michele. Don't put all your eggs in this earthly basket. I have something far better to come."

All of these ways that my limp is blessing me are evidence of God's presence here. Just like Jacob memorialized God's presence in the long, dark night of his wrestling with God, it's now

your turn to do the same. You and I can find Altar Stones when God meets us exactly where we are. There is an Altar Stone there. When God chooses to show up when we sleep next to a river at dark and we wrestle with him till morning, God meets us in that place. We need to memorialize it, because sometimes we forget that God actually meets us in the place of pain.

Henri Nouwen said, "Ultimately mourning means facing what wounds us in the presence of One who can heal." I just love that so much. Now, I want you to look for God's presence in your limp. This is your third Altar Stone. I want you to think of the ways that you are broken in this life.

Maybe nobody else sees it. Maybe it's just a tendency you have, kind of like my tendency to exhaust myself taking care of my family because I'm trying to make sure they still love me. I'm much healthier than I was, but I still slip into that pattern so easily. Maybe your limp is something like that, but maybe it's something more significant.

Maybe it's an abuse you've suffered that has marked you. Maybe it's a physical challenge or a physical flaw. Maybe it's a fear you deal with. Maybe it's chronic depression. Whatever it is, I want you to wrestle with God in it. I want you to look for the face of God in the place of your pain.

I want you to allow God to show you himself there. I want you to allow God to meet you as you've wrestled with him through the dark. God meets you there, and your limp isn't the beginning of your disqualification; it's your first step toward healing. It's your first step toward learning to see God's face in the place of your pain.

Today, all I want you to do is to sit somewhere for five minutes, close your eyes, and simply say, "God, I'm yours. Open my eyes. Help me to see your presence in the place of my pain."

Help me to see what you might be doing or accomplishing in my limp. Rather than see my limp as a place of disqualification from you, help me to see my limp as a place where you are seen more clearly than anywhere else." Five minutes. Ask him to meet you there.

Thank you, friends, for joining me today. Life is so much sweeter when we don't have to do it alone. Even better, we have a God who will never leave us. He said, "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you." It's a promise, and I believe him. Now, that's something worth living for.

*Are you aching for a love that will never leave, a presence that will push back the dark? If so, I have good news for you. God's love is relentless even when your faith isn't, and the circumstances you fear might drown your faith could become the stones giving testimony to it. Join me, and let's find evidence of him together.*