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*HOW TO HOLD
ON TO GOD WHEN
YOU'RE FRUSTRATED,
FED UP & FEELING FORGOTTEN*

ASHLEY MORGAN JACKSON

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *TIRED OF TRYING*

Our greatest disappointments, deepest pain, and disillusionments—things that shake us and break us and make us wonder about everything—don't have to mean all hope is lost. When we're tired of trying and tired of hoping, I love that my friend Ashley helps us see that we might be in the middle of the wrestling. And I want to wrestle well and come out renewed, even when it's painful. This book will help you with that and more. Get your copy and settle in because it's that good!

LYSA TERKEURST,

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author;
president of Proverbs 31 Ministries

If you, too, are disappointed and exhausted, feel like you are in a season of wrestling with God, and are just tired of trying, this book may be the prescription you need to release, rest, and revive your passion for life. Ashley vulnerably shares her personal journey of pain, discovery, and healing in easy-to-read pages that are saturated in God's Word and dripping with hope.

GINGER STACHE,

author of *Chasing Wonder: Small Steps
toward a Life of Big Adventures*

This is a *must-read* when life feels tiring and purpose seems elusive. This is the reminder we all need (and are desperately looking for) in the middle of the fight to keep going, wrestling, and waiting on God to do what only He can do. Like a friend, Ashley encourages

us at every turn: Showing up to the fight is not only worth it, but blessing is coming—and *I am here for it*.

HEIDI LEE ANDERSON,

author of *P.S. It's Gonna Be Good: How God's Word Answers Our Questions about Faith, Fear, and All the Things*; popular Christian content creator @heidileeanderson and @thismotherhen

Ashley Morgan Jackson allows us to peer into those moments most of us want to hide—the times when we are tired of trying and at the end of our rope. She shares her experiences so we don't feel alone in our trying loops, and she gives us practical tools to help realign our skewed perspectives. If you are tired of trying, get this book today!

MELISSA SPOELSTRA,

Bible study teacher and author of *Isaiah: Striving Less and Trusting God More*

If you are tired of trying to do things by digging in your heels and sounding like a toddler in the Target toy aisle, then you will want to read this book! I was around during Ashley's dark wrestling years when God was growing her more each day. She shares in her book how she looks back on that time with empathy and grace for herself while also seeing how that really hard time grew her inner spirit. You will want to root for her while you also identify with her raw experiences and emotions. Ashley has never had it all together (just like the rest of us), but her example will inspire you to never stop trying.

DR. LINDSAY DEIBLER,

clinical psychologist; drlindsaydeibler.com

As one who grew up in a Christian tradition where admitting any frustration or anger with God was a big no-no, I love that Ashley Morgan Jackson puts the realities of the Christian life on full

display. While brilliantly weaving in Jacob's story of wrestling with God, Ashley gives voice to the dark questions, deep fears, and life-giving truth about a God who sees and cares. Ashley will lead you to confront the hard things that are holding you back by pointing you to God's truth and teaching you to trust His loving heart.

BARB ROOSE,

speaker; author of *Surrendered: Letting Go*
and *Living Like Jesus*

I didn't know how much I needed this book until I began reading it and tears filled my eyes while going through almost every chapter. As Ashley vulnerably shares about her own process of wrestling with the Lord, she creates a safe place for you to do the same—to feel, process, wrestle, and truly have honest conversations with Him. This idea of wrestling with the Lord is biblical, and I believe it's not talked about enough in the church. God can handle your questions and your disappointments—and when you bring all of that to Him, He's not angry or impatient; He's loving, steadfast, and truly working on your behalf to turn what the enemy meant for evil into good.

LAUREN SMITH,

worship leader and songwriter, New Life Church,
Colorado Springs, CO

Tired of Trying is an answered prayer for those of us in the middle of a wrestling season. I love how, instead of running away from it, Ashley authentically shares her own story and how she breaks down the story of Jacob wrestling with God. In doing so, she invites us to shift our perspective on struggling—that God isn't doing this to us; instead He's using it to transform us. I know you'll love this book as much as I did!

LEANNA CRAWFORD,

artist/songwriter

Such an incredibly personal, heartfelt, and challenging book. Ashley unpacks the story of Jacob's wrestle in such a beautiful way that invites us into a life of embracing the wrestle rather than trying to get away from it. *Tired of Trying* is filled with practical thoughts and truths that help us change our perspective and walk into the joy and blessing that God has for us. It's easy to find yourself in her struggle but also feel the weight of "trying" begin to lift as she shares her story to find wholeness and freedom.

DONNA LASIT,

lead pastor, The Pearl Church,
Denver, CO

Ashley Morgan Jackson is one of the most incredibly brave, courageous, and compassionate souls I know. In her book, *Tired of Trying*, she not only made me feel like I had a friend sitting right beside me, but she was also that friend we all need—the one who says, "Come on, I love you enough to not let you stay in this place." She writes with deep authenticity and grace. This is a must-have resource for every woman who is desperately trying to follow after Jesus but feels like it's one big wrestling match.

NICKI KOZIARZ,

bestselling author and speaker,
Proverbs 31 Ministries

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Tired of Trying: How to Hold On to God When You're Frustrated, Fed Up, and Feeling Forgotten

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This book is dedicated to Jesus, the one my soul loves, who has been with me from my first breath, who has stayed with me through every struggle, and who refused to let me go until He blessed me. You are worth it all. We did it, Lord. I love you so much.

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AN INVITATION TO THE WRESTLE

Once you've wrestled, everything else in life is easy.

DAN GABLE,

Olympic gold medal wrestler and coach

ROLLING OVER ONTO MY SIDE, I picked up my phone from the nightstand. I checked my social media first thing every morning like it was an uncontrollable impulse, but now even the thought of doing so felt like it was raising my blood pressure. I knew what waited for me there—other people enjoying their lives while I cried about mine. I put the phone back on the nightstand and dragged my exhausted body out of bed to attend to my baby son, whom I was sure I was unfit to parent.

As I crossed the room and passed the full-length mirror, I caught a glimpse of myself sporting three-day unwashed hair and the mismatched pajamas I had dug out of the bottom dresser drawer the night before. I wished I hadn't seen that discouraging sight—more proof of the disappointment I believed I was. I paused, slowly inhaling and then exhaling with a long sigh. Sighing was one of the only things that lightened the pressure I always felt in my chest. But the relief lasted only for a moment, so I found myself sighing often. Hot tears filled my eyes, and I immediately tried to blink them back.

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I couldn't be starting that so early today. *Press on, Ashley. Push through, even if no one knows or cares.* In fact, I was convinced that no one did care and that everyone I knew was sick of me. I understood how they felt because I was sick of me too.

I walked down the hall to my son's room, picked him up, and carried him to the living room. After setting him on a blanket on the floor, I plopped down on the couch behind him and rubbed my temples while staring at the carpet. *Am I going to feel like this forever?* My heart was racing wildly, as if I had just finished a brisk jog, but I couldn't remember the last time I had run. Who had the time to care about exercise? Forget the time; just, who cared—period?

Not me.

I told myself I didn't care about anything, but the truth was, I did care—a lot. Maybe not about running, but I cared deeply, obsessively, about other things. I cared what everyone thought of me, even strangers. I cared about whether I mattered, why I felt so rejected, and why my mind felt like it was broken. Most of all, I cared about why God seemed to have left me to deal with all of this alone.

My mind felt like an enemy. *How do I get away from an enemy I carry around with me at all times?* I was battling depression and anxiety, both of which were squeezing the life out of me. There were days I sobbed on the kitchen floor as my husband crouched next to me, beside himself with worry and concern. I had panic attacks that happened at the most inconvenient and inappropriate times, including one time when we went to the mall. I had to run out because I couldn't handle all the people and the pressure to keep it together. As we quickly made our way out of the parking lot, I had to roll down the car window to get some air because I couldn't breathe. Tears streamed down my face and humiliation rushed through my body. I felt like everyone knew I was as broken and weird as I had become.

I felt ashamed of myself because I thought I was an embarrassment to my family.

As time went by, I began to realize that this wasn't just a passing case of baby blues. The hard days that had turned into hard weeks and then hard months had changed me into someone I no longer recognized. This was not who I had been. The girl I had been was adventurous and confident. She loved the Lord with all her heart and was ready to go to the ends of the earth for Him. I had spent years becoming that girl, and that was who I still wanted to be. That was the identity in which I found my validation, the identity in which I felt safe and secure. I didn't know who this new girl was, but I hated her. My carefully crafted image had crumbled to pieces.

If I'm being honest, I felt let down by God, like He hadn't held up His end of the bargain. I wanted Him to get me back to the girl I once was. I wanted Him to help me become the strong version of myself that was respected and much easier to love. Why wasn't He doing what I so desperately wanted Him to do? I wrestled between feeling like God had hurt my feelings and knowing that wasn't possible. An ache shot through me as I wondered how I could feel so betrayed by a God I loved so much.

All the prayers I had prayed, all the Bible verses I had memorized, all the "good things" I knew to do now exhausted me. I felt like a hamster on a wheel—I was running hard but getting nowhere and starting to resent it. I was frustrated and tired of trying.

For five years, God brought me through what I can only describe as a wrestling season. I didn't want to be there, I never signed up for it, and I resented every moment of it. And yet, there I was. And I had a choice to make—I could either hold on to God when I was full of fear, frustrated with how it was all going, and fed up with things that wouldn't change, or I could let the growing resentment I felt toward

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Him put down bitter roots in my heart. I also had questions to face. Could God handle what was really in my heart? Could I be honest with Him about the pain and frustration I felt? Did my inability to get myself together or have enough faith make me offensive to Him? Would He reject me?

I said I trusted God, but the truth was I trusted Him to do things my way, in my time. That changed during my wrestling season when God asked me to trust Him moment by moment and choice by

**I said I trusted God,
but the truth was
I trusted Him to do
things my way, in my
time.**

choice, with no guarantees about what the outcome might be. He asked me to bring all my pains, all my fears, and all my doubts so we could grapple with them together. He asked me to voice my belief that He was letting me down, and to struggle through it with Him. I did not have to pretend I

was strong or perform for His love and acceptance. I didn't have to hide that I thought my circumstances were unfair and that I was struggling. The choice was inevitable: Would I dare to run *to* Him with my wounds and questions or would I run *from* Him and let my heart grow calloused?

YOU'RE INVITED

Maybe you've had feelings like these too. You might even admit that you're a little mad at God right now. If so, you are not alone. I know your pain all too well—the pain of wondering why God is letting it hurt. I know how lonely that place can be.

In case you need the reminder, it is absolutely okay that you feel “over it” and like your pain has stolen the best of who you are. I'm sorry you've been hurting so deeply and for so long. I know you expected to handle this better, to be stronger when everything came

crashing down; but it's okay that you're feeling weak and unsure. You're not superwoman; you're just a girl who is hurting deeply and who needs her Savior. You are not an inconvenience to God, and He is not annoyed when you feel fearful, fed up, and forgotten.

When we reach the place where the only choice is to run to God or run from Him, God invites us to hold on to Him even tighter—to wrestle with Him. It's an invitation God first gave to the biblical character Jacob. When Jacob was in the most painful and difficult season of his life, he pleaded with God for rescue. Instead of rushing in to save him, God's answer to Jacob's prayer was to invite him to a wrestle.

We may be invited to wrestle when we are grappling with a loss, a struggle, or feeling stuck.

Wrestling might be the choice we have to make when we face the death of a dream, buckle under the weight of a long-carried grief, or feel overlooked and left behind. Or we may have to hold on to God in the face of something we never saw coming—a crisis that became a constant burden and is now our daily life, an unexpected broken heart, or a wait that never seems to end.

The kind of wrestle that God invites us to is not easy or quick. It requires us to continue to bring our hearts to God as we navigate the painful chasm between how life was supposed to be and how it is. But this wrestling has a purpose. God never requires anything from us that is not for our good, for the outworking of His Kingdom, and for the glory of His name.

We may know the following promise well, but it's especially important to remember it when we're wrestling: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). When we

You are not an inconvenience to God, and He is not annoyed when you feel fearful, fed up, and forgotten.

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enter a wrestling season, we just have to keep holding on to see Him do that work.

What does it look like to keep holding on? Jacob's story shows us. Although he was tired of trying, Jacob was also determined to receive a blessing from the one who met him in his struggle. Scripture describes Jacob's wrestle in just six verses:

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."

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

GENESIS 32:24-29, NIV

After a long, dark night of struggling with God and holding on to Him, Jacob emerged with a limp but also with a new identity, a new future, and God's promised blessing. Jacob's struggle with God had a purpose; it was a transformation process God designed for Jacob's good.

There are many lessons we can learn from Jacob as we enter into our own seasons of wrestling, including how to let go of who we

thought we were and how life was supposed to go according to our plan. As Jacob did, we, too, can make the hard choices to engage God, to learn through our struggles with God, and to experience the freedom and blessing that come from surrendering to God's way.

So what about you? No matter how unstable your faith may feel, no matter how tired you might be from trying things that have left you feeling empty, know today that your story is far from over. God doesn't invite you to wrestle because you are bad or because He is mean, but because He wants to show you things and give you things that will bless you—things you can't see or receive any other way. And that is what I pray this book will reveal to you.

Like Jacob, when we are in our deepest pain, we can choose to hang on to our good and capable God as we boldly cry out for help. As we wrestle, we learn how to let go of our need to perform for God and discover how to let Him love us just as we are—fears, frustrations, and all. The Lord can do more with our honest pleas for help than our forced performances. Sometimes the best prayers we can pray are the simple ones: "This hurts. I'm scared. Please help."

This is your invitation to the wrestle—the choice to face God in your greatest fears, pains, and unanswered questions.

HOW TO READ *TIRED OF TRYING*

Tired of Trying includes practical and spiritual guidance to help you wrestle well. The chapters explore the hard choices we must make, the struggles we must face, and the blessings we can expect when we accept God's invitation to the wrestle. Throughout, I will be sharing my own wrestle and we will also gain insights from the story of Jacob, the first human being to wrestle with God and come through blessed like never before.

To help you get the most out of each chapter, I've included

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reflection questions at the back of the book. Because the wrestle is a journey of self-discovery, you may also find it helpful to jot down notes in a journal as you read or to write your thoughts in the margins. If you begin to recall previous hardships and seasons of wrestling with God, use your journal to reflect on how God was faithful to you in the past and how you grew or changed as a result. This may be a source of encouragement to you as you wrestle with God again now. I also encourage you to consider inviting a trusted friend or small group to read with you. Wrestling together is easier than wrestling alone.

Similar to an actual wrestling match that has three rounds, *Tired of Trying* is laid out in three parts. In Part 1: Hard Choices, we start where we are and not where we wish we were. That requires clarifying what is exhausting you spiritually when you are tired from all your trying. We will learn why making hard choices is essential to wrestling well.

In Part 2: Struggling with God, we consider both the good and the hard of holding on to God with all we have. You'll discover why God invites you to wrestle, the good He is working on your behalf as you hold on, the old identities you need to let go of, and the beautiful importance of holding on to Him until you receive a blessing.

In Part 3: The Blessings of Being Broken, we explore how the choice to wrestle forever changes us and how we can learn to trust Him in new and bold ways. The most beautiful thing of all happens on the other side of the wrestle—we receive a blessing we could never have experienced without it. God invites us to wrestle so He can do in us what cannot be done in any other way. Then we have the opportunity to leave a legacy by passing that blessing on to others.

My hope and prayer is that you will accept this invitation to wrestle even though you are so tired of trying. I believe you've got

some fight left in you, and this is how I know—because you picked up this book. You are not done, and God is not done with you. Jesus died so you could have every spiritual blessing He has for you; don't settle for less.

The psalmist wrote, “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (Psalm 23:4, NIV). That's a promise you can claim as your own.

Let's walk through your darkest valley together and let God do what He has come to do.

PART 1

HARD CHOICES

WHEN YOU'RE FRUSTRATED

Anger and frustration are the result of you not being authentic somewhere in your life or with someone in your life. Being fake about anything creates a block inside of you. Life can't work for you if you don't show up as you.

JASON MRAZ,
guitarist, singer, and songwriter

I WAS SITTING IN THE FRONT PASSENGER SEAT, and my husband was driving. Drowning in anxiety, I dug my nails into my forearm as firmly as I could, scratching myself repeatedly. I wanted to feel anything other than what I was feeling inside. When the scratching didn't bring relief, I began punching myself in the leg as hard as I could. My husband noticed and grabbed my hand to stop me. Sitting behind us in the backseat were my two-year-old son and my parents. I both did and didn't want them to see what I was doing.

My frustration demanded to be expressed. I was furious with myself for being so broken, so weak, so unfaithful to God, so impossible to love. I was desperate to be loved in spite of it all, but I wondered if it was even possible to be loved when I had nothing to offer. The torment of not knowing had led to this moment, which had been a long time coming. This was not the way my life was supposed to be, and this was

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not how I was supposed to feel. I had tried everything I could think of to fix myself—prayer, listening to sermons, memorizing Bible verses, and serving more at church. I was convinced I was only worth hating, and my response to that pain was crying all the time. Inside, I was screaming at the top of my lungs, but no one could hear me. It was like being encased in a glass box; people could see me, but they just looked at me blankly, not understanding what I was trying to communicate.

My mental chatter was nonstop. *Don't be so needy. No one likes a needy person, Ashley. Just fix yourself, just be strong, just read more books, or better yet, read more of the Bible. Just do it! Hurry up! Your brokenness is such an inconvenience.*

I had been trying hard not to be depressed, trying hard not to have anxiety attacks, and trying hardest of all to escape this torment that was in my mind. I had been trying hard for the past two years, and I was desperate for relief, for answers, and for rescue. I was being chased by all the emotions rushing through me, and I needed somewhere to hide from it all. My mind screamed, *Do something! Anything! Stop being such a stupid, difficult human being. You are useless, you are alone, and you deserve pain!* I wasn't sure how much longer I could tolerate the internal screams, each one cutting like a knife. I didn't want the screams to be true, but I was terrified they were.

I was desperate to be saved, and I wanted my family to save me. They did try to help in their own way, but they were at a loss for what to do. I couldn't find any logic or reason for what I was going through. *If only I could fix myself and be the perfect daughter, sister, aunt, friend, mother, wife, and Christian everyone needs me to be, maybe things will get "back to normal."* But that was the problem. There were no more fixes, and I simply could not try anymore. I had nothing left. And if I couldn't be perfect, why try at all?

My husband parked the car in front of my brother's new house.

The surrounding neighborhood was picturesque on that October afternoon, with fall leaves lining the street and perfectly manicured yards in front of every home. All the tidy order felt like such a stark contrast to the mess that was flailing inside of me, and something in me snapped. I threw open the car door and started running down the street.

My family didn't get it, and I had to get away. I had no idea where I was running, and I could hear angry voices behind me calling me to come back. I knew annoyance and disappointment were waiting for me back there, and I couldn't face it. *How can I explain to them something I can't even put words around myself?*

I hadn't gone very far before I was out of breath. Everyone knows you can't cry and run—well, maybe only those of us who have ever dared to try. Slowing down to catch my breath and wipe away the tears streaming down my face, I noticed a neighborhood park and ended up sitting in a small gazebo. My dad walked down the street after me, upset and angry. He didn't understand this strange behavior any more than I did, and I felt helpless to explain it to him. All I wanted was for him to look me in the eyes and tell me everything was going to be alright, to see past my anger and strange actions, to acknowledge my pain, and to tell me he loved me.

I couldn't help but long for the simplicity of childhood, a time when things seemed to make more sense. When I was in pain, my parents were there to help me feel better, not to tell me to get over it. Now, I believed all I had ever known was lost, and I had to somehow find my way back to reality on my own. *Isn't my family supposed to help make it all better? Why won't they save me?*

I was trapped in frustration. I was frustrated that my parents couldn't help me and even more frustrated that I couldn't help myself. I wanted to be the one who could snap her fingers, read the right verses, or pray the right prayers, and all of this would be better.

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Nothing I tried, nothing I prayed, nothing I conveyed to other people, none of the ways I tried to avoid or escape my problems worked. *Why wasn't anything working?* All the strategies that I'd used in the past led only to dead ends. *Was it something I was doing, not doing, had done? Was this from sin? Was this a punishment? Was God mad at me?* If only I could figure out how to learn the lesson I was supposed to learn from this season, then maybe I could be free of it.

Instead, I felt trapped under the weight of frustration and pain that was largely invisible to everyone around me—and pain that is not acknowledged or understood is pain that crushes the soul. Because my pain was

unseen and others could not understand it, I let myself believe my emotional reactions were illogical, inappropriate, and uncalled for.

Pain that is not acknowledged or understood is pain that crushes the soul.

Your circumstances are no doubt different from mine, but I'm guessing one aspect of it

may feel familiar—the frustration. Maybe you are frustrated that you feel desperate, helpless, hopeless, scared, or enraged. Perhaps you have even reached the point of being just plain done. You're looking for a way out or a way through. Whatever it is, you're sure it needs to happen now.

So why does God allow painful and disorienting seasons like these in our lives? What is their purpose, and how can we recognize when we are entering into one? No matter how desperate we are to escape the frustration, the most important thing we can do at this point is to get to know it better. Why? Because when we can define the frustration, we can better recognize the wrestle. Sometimes, our frustration is what points us to the issue God is asking us to look at and address.

LEARNING FROM JACOB'S FRUSTRATION

Jacob was no stranger to frustration. In fact, it had been building up throughout the nine decades of his life that led up to his wrestle

with God. To understand how this happened, we need to look back to his beginnings.

Things were complicated for Jacob from the start. And by start, I mean in the womb. When Rebekah was pregnant with Jacob and his twin, Esau, Scripture says,

The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the older shall serve the younger."

GENESIS 25:22-23

These words are important to remember because Rebekah held them close to her heart. She knew God was proclaiming that Jacob, her younger son, would lead. In the years to come, she would take drastic and misguided measures to make sure this promise was fulfilled.

Shortly after Rebekah received the Lord's words, the twins were delivered. Esau was born first but Jacob came out grasping his brother's heel. As a result, he was given the name Jacob, meaning, "one who follows on another's heels; supplanter."¹ We don't really use the word *supplanter* much today, so if you're wondering what that means, here's how the dictionary defines it: "someone or something taking the place of another, as through force, scheming, strategy, or the like."² In other words, from the moment he was born, Jacob was a schemer and a cheat.

Can you imagine being defined this way from the moment you

TIRED OF TRYING

were born? Perhaps when you've always been defined by a weakness and the shame associated with it, the only real option is to live up to that identity—which Jacob did. Here is perhaps the first indicator we have about the source of Jacob's frustration: "When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Genesis 25:27-28). Did Jacob have resentment toward his father for this lack of love and therefore feel frustrated at being second best to his brother?

With this first frustration in mind, we run right into a second—wondering when God's promise to his mother would be fulfilled. I can imagine Jacob and Rebekah preparing meals together day after day, wondering when and how God would follow through. As the years passed, Jacob and his mother likely felt a growing frustration about when this would take place. When they got tired of waiting, they reasoned that the only way forward was to take matters into their own hands to secure God's promised blessing for Jacob.

The first part of Jacob's plan was to trick his brother, Esau, out of his birthright. One day, when Esau came home exhausted and famished from being in the open country, he begged for a bowl of the stew Jacob was cooking. "First sell me your birthright," Jacob responded (Genesis 25:31, NIV). The birthright was the double portion of the family inheritance, and Esau swore an oath to sell his birthright for the stew. But Jacob also needed the blessing of his father in order to receive what God had promised. That's when he and his mother hatched a scheme to get it. Jacob tricked Isaac, his elderly and blind father, into giving him the blessing by pretending to be Esau (Genesis 27:28-29).

Jacob's actions reveal that he was frustrated with God. He feared God had forgotten His promise, and His apparent inaction only increased Jacob's mounting frustration. So Jacob relied on his

scheming skills to make things happen and get the blessing for himself. Undefined and unaddressed frustration almost always leads us to take misguided actions in order to find relief.

FACING FRUSTRATION

Each of us deals differently with our frustration with God. Perhaps “checking out” is your go-to strategy. If there is no solution and you don't seem to be getting any help, then your frustration unfolds as indifference. You reason that the solution is to ignore God since He appears to be ignoring you.

Or maybe your heart is shattered, and your frustration shows up as anger. God's silence and inaction have hurt your feelings. It no longer feels safe to express your pain, so you are quick to lash out at those around you. If you're honest, you believe God just doesn't love you enough to care whether you react one way or another.

Perhaps you've learned to cope by getting busy and trying even harder. Feeling overwhelmed, stressed out, or anxious is your cue to pray harder, serve harder, read the Bible more faithfully. Surely God will see how hard you're trying and come through at last, right?

Or maybe when you start to feel sad, depressed, or forgotten by God, your default is to find some way to “numb out.” It might be overindulging in junk food, shopping for things you don't need, binge-watching reality television, playing with electronic gadgets, or misusing your substance of choice.

In my five years of feeling let down by God, I cycled through each of these frustration management strategies. My inability to find relief turned to deep depression, my thoughts constantly churning over what an awful person I was for not being the capable individual I had always considered myself to be. But no matter how hard I looked for solutions, I couldn't fix myself and I had no idea why.

TIRED OF TRYING

My frustration led me to question God.

Why are you being so mean?

Are you doing this on purpose?

Where are you? I need you!

I'm guessing you have your own frustrating thoughts and questions as hot tears roll down your cheeks on yet another night you cannot sleep.

This is not how my life is supposed to be.

How can this be God's plan?

When will this end?

And maybe the weightiest question of all: *Why?*

But what if the frustration itself is the answer we seek? What if we could reframe this difficult season so that we see it not as something God is allowing to happen *to* us but *for* us? What if we chose an entirely different way of dealing with our frustration?

When we are tired of trying, there is nothing left to do but to get real with God about where we are and how we are feeling. Allow me to let you in on a little secret: God already knows anyway. God isn't surprised by our indignation. He isn't put off by our pity parties or our shouts to heaven that we're giving up. God cannot be anything but faithful to us. It's okay to admit our weakness and our frustrations. In fact, it's absolutely necessary.

Since the beginning of time, God has been dealing with people just like us who are flawed, insecure, and sinful. That is exactly why He sent Jesus to be for us what we never could be for ourselves.

Friend, maybe you are tired of trying because God wants you to recognize you don't need to keep trying. Instead of trying to fix things by being strong enough, good enough, and smart enough, God wants you to stop relying on yourself and your own efforts. Maybe tired of trying is exactly where God needs you to be because it's the only way to get you to face whatever it is you're trying very hard not to face.

God wants us to trust Him enough to let Him deal with whatever it is we're avoiding. He already knows what it is anyway. But just as Jacob was terrified of having to face Esau, we are scared to death of what the outcome of facing these things with God might be. We are looking for any way out or around, but when God comes to bring true change in our lives, the only way out is through. God has a plan, and it is always for our good. But He must first reveal to us what is buried beneath our fears, and that revelation often comes through times of testing.

Friend, maybe you are tired of trying because God wants you to recognize you don't need to keep trying.

THE HIDDEN BENEFIT OF FRUSTRATION

According to James, the testing of our faith, those moments when frustration is all-consuming, actually produces something good in us: steadfastness. "Count it all joy," he writes, "when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness" (James 1:2-3).

Here's a definition of what it means to be steadfast:

1. a: firmly fixed in place: IMMOVABLE
b: not subject to change
2. firm in belief, determination, or adherence: LOYAL³

When we encounter seasons of frustration or testing, we must remember that it is not for nothing. The struggle has a purpose. It produces something in us that is immovable, firm, determined, and loyal. In a world where we can be knocked off our feet by the wind of every thought and opinion—y'all, we need this!

James goes on to write, "Let steadfastness have its *full effect*, that you may be perfect and complete, *lacking in nothing*" (James 1:4,

emphasis added). To understand the full effect, we need to understand what James means by *lacking in nothing*.

Many of us believe God allows only the good, the blessed, and the best in our lives. And by that, we mean the easy, the happy, and the preferred. But even if that were true, let's be clear about what constitutes the good, the blessed, and the best from God's perspective. I would argue that the best things for us aren't necessarily the easiest things, but instead the deep internal work that often goes beyond our immediate understanding. God uses seasons of frustration to produce something good in us: making us more like Christ. That is what it means to be "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Why is it so important to know what is fueling your frustration and to be able to define your disappointments with God? Two reasons—for your own sake and for the sake of others.

Defining Frustration for Your Own Sake

When you define your frustration, you take your first step toward the wrestle—the issue God wants you to face with Him. The dictionary defines frustration as "a deep chronic sense or state of insecurity and dissatisfaction arising from unresolved problems or unfulfilled needs."⁴ Let's unpack that.

When you slow down and really dig into the emotions you're walking through now, it may hit you right between the eyes—it's not a shallow irritation but a deep sense of insecurity or dissatisfaction in the pit of your soul. It's an unfulfilled need that makes you question your core beliefs and rocks your trust in a good God. And it's not just any passing feeling but a chronic one.

If you had to put words to it, what is it you feel most insecure about or dissatisfied with right now? Sit with that insecurity or dissatisfaction for a moment. This is likely the core issue that is making you tired

of trying. It's probably the reason you feel exposed, your deepest fears naked for all to gawk at, and why you're quickly losing the control you've tried so hard to maintain, perhaps for years. What are the unresolved problems in your life at the moment? What about unfulfilled needs?

There is such a temptation to rush past questions like these to get to the "answers," but I think any good counselor or therapist would agree with me that the answers may not end up being as important as the questions we need to ask ourselves about why we feel frustrated to begin with. The world is so fast paced, and we are desperate for quick solutions to make our problems disappear; but that is not how wrestling works. We have to be brave enough to hold on to God and look at the things we have been running from.

Feeling tired of trying doesn't come from a lack of potential solutions, but a lack of allowing ourselves to face the roots of our frustration and the roots of the pain that cause our exhaustion. To recognize the wrestling seasons in our lives, we have to be willing to look beyond the symptoms—our frustrations—to the cause. If we skip this step, we won't understand why the wrestle is necessary in the first place. Plus, our willingness to do that—to be honest about our struggles—is the testimony we can share with the world about what walking with Christ really looks like. With our lives, we demonstrate that it's possible to be both flawed and unconditionally loved.

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Defining Frustration for the Sake of Others

Imagine for a minute a world in which Christians never get to the place where they are willing to face the hardest things that come into

their lives. Instead, they run from anything that smells of hard work or suffering. In addition to refusing to walk the same path that our Savior walked, we would have nothing to offer the world. What kind of faith is a faith we preach about and yet refuse to live ourselves? What kind of message would we be sending to the world if we call ourselves disciples and yet refuse to live up to the name?

The reason we must face the cause of our frustration, must recognize it, must engage in what God is inviting us to, no matter how bad it hurts, isn't just for you or me; it's also for a world that desperately needs to know that what we believe is not only our theology but our reality—that it is in fact possible to be “more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37). People who are watching how we live for Christ and follow Him need to see how the words we read in Scripture are the power for life in all circumstances, especially the hard ones. We are called to be living testimonies for others, even when we crawl through the most painful seasons of our lives. Others see us struggling, just as they do, but not without hope.

God is not asking us to walk through hard seasons merely for this purpose, but we must remember that our comfort is not the point. We must believe, by faith, that even when God says no or delays answers, He is still loving us best.

Does it make hard seasons any easier? No.

Does it mean they hurt less? No.

Does it mean we understand? No.

But it can help us discover a purpose in the pain, to learn how to wait on and trust in God, and to be steadfast, as the apostle James wrote, until we have a story of His faithfulness to tell. And friend, I am confident your life is already filled with stories of God's faithfulness. This is simply your next story being written.

FRUSTRATION THAT LEADS TO FREEDOM

Our chronic frustration is an indicator that something is wrong, that something needs to be addressed, and that somewhere along the way, we have shifted our focus from God to our own efforts. And so, God allows us to get to the end of ourselves, to become so tired of trying that we finally acknowledge we can get only so far with our own plans and our own strength. He does this not as punishment but to lead us to freedom that comes from letting go.

I didn't want to be broken or not okay. I wanted my life to look exactly as it always had, allowing me to feel comfortable and in control. It wasn't until I defined my frustration that I was finally able to admit I felt let down by God. And once I was willing to face that, God and I slowly began to move forward.

I leapt out of the car on that cold October day because I wanted to run and cry. People in the movies do things like that all the time, right? Perhaps my idealistic, slightly overdramatic self imagined a romantic scene in which I could bawl while my hair elegantly flowed behind me as I exited the car in a ballerina-esque, slow-motion leap. But let's be honest, the reality was much less romantic.

Just as I couldn't physically run and cry, we can't run and cry in our spiritual and emotional lives. And maybe that's part of why we're so frustrated—because we want to keep running but we can't. The wrestle God invites us to requires slowing down to face some things—and that takes time. We can't keep going because this isn't a time for running; it's a time to process our tears with God as we wrestle.

