

I asked a group of teenagers the other day to write down their main goals in life. I got some answers, but a couple of them put down the word 'survival'. It seemed such a desperate word for young people to use, but it is obviously how some of them view their lives. It started me thinking about just how we do survive life. One thing that I think is very important is that we must struggle, or wrestle with our problems. We must be aggressive in our approach to life. There is a force trying to defeat us in everything that we do, to make our life miserable. You can either give up or you can resist it with all of your heart. God never said life would be easy, but he promised us the strength to conquer it.

Let me illustrate the Biblical emphasis on this struggle by discussing the intriguing story of Jacob, who wrestled with a messenger from God just before his reunion with his brother Esau (Gen. 32.22ff). There seems to be no reason given to Jacob for this struggle; a man just comes up to him and begins wrestling with him. Even though Jacob is in great pain, and doesn't really know what is going on, he put his whole heart into the fight. He was aggressive, and he would not give up until he the man blessed him, by changing his name from Jacob, which meant supplanter, to Israel, which meant 'he who strives with God.' I believe that this name change is very important because it symbolizes the quality that God so loved in Jacob: his aggressiveness, or his inability to give up the fight when things were not going his way. I believe that this idea carries on into the nation of Israel, too. 'Israel' was to symbolize the nation's struggle in the world, especially in its aggressive conquest of the land of Canaan. It was to be the best, a blessing to all of the nations of the world. It was to keep itself pure by fighting the influences of pagan religions.

And yet there is more to life than just surviving! We must succeed, too. We must become the master of our situation. Take the example of Glen Cunningham. You've heard, I'm sure, how as a young boy he was badly burned on his legs, and the doctors said that he would never walk again. But by his aggressive approach to his problem, he surpassed just 'survival'; he wouldn't give up, but kept fighting until he became the fastest miler in the world in his time. Most of us would have been satisfied just to be able to walk again.

As Christians we may become caught up in a situation somewhat like the Israelite's had in the time of Moses. They were in slavery in Egypt when God, through Moses, set them free. Having 'been saved' they passed quickly through the wilderness, but because of their inability to commit themselves totally to God's cause, they could not go up and enjoy the blessings of the promised land. They were forced to wander in the wilderness, in this 'twilight zone', for 40 years until they were ready to accept the challenge and struggle of conquering the promised land.

Many of us today in that 'wilderness' land. We have become 'saved', but we do not enjoy the Christian life. We do not see the majesty, the excitement, the glory of it. The triumphant life is there for the taking, but we cannot hide in the background to get it. If we want the victory, we must be prepared for a struggle. It's so hard to describe the glory of this life. Joshua witnessed the splendor of Canaan, told the people about it, and said to them at the edge of Canaan, 'Let us go up.' But the people would not go. We all stand on the threshold of a better life: Let us not make the same mistake. Jesus Christ will give you the energy to struggle, survive, and succeed, if only you will let him be your Lord.