

I asked a group of teenagers the other day to write down their main goals in life. I got some answers, but I also got one that surprised me just a little. Two out of the thirteen students put down 'survival' as their main goal. It seemed such a desperate word for young people to use. But I know that they feel that they must 'survive' school, home, and the social scene. So many say, 'If I can just get through high school and get out on my own!' Survival, to them, is simply 'getting through'.

I asked them how many of them had actually ever been in a 'life-or-death' survival type situation, where they really thought that they might not make it through. There wasn't much response, but they still understood the concept. I might ask the same question of each of you. You may never have felt close to death or anything, but you may have been a situation where you didn't think that you could go on, not even one more step. As Scouts, you become involved in many adventures of this type: backpacking across country, cycling 50 miles, swimming a mile, etc. The first day that I was on the Appalachian Trail, I carried 50 pounds for 12 miles. For the last mile or two, I literally had to grit my teeth and force one foot in front of the other. But I 'survived'. I've camped in 10 degree weather, I've camped in 6 inches of snow on a mountain top, I've spent two grueling hours in freezing rain trying to start a fire. And I 'survived'. I faced drowning every day for a week taking Junior Lifesaving, sick at my stomach every morning thinking about the water that I was about to swallow, but I 'survived'. Looking back, I not only survived, but I grew from each of these challenging experiences. {Back Injury}

Well, just how do we survive 'life' with all of its problems? An important part of life is our 'struggle' to survive. 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. [Jude 3 tells us to struggle earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints. With this faith we can meet life head on.] God never said life would be easy, but he promised us the strength to conquer it.

There is really no way around the fact that life itself is a great struggle. From the moment that we are born until the time that we die, we are struggling. If you don't believe it, just let someone hold your head under water for a few seconds and check your reaction. This idea was really brought home to me when I helped our Persian cat deliver kittens for the first time. After the first one had been delivered, our cat nosed it, judged it dead, and moved away. I picked it up to look at it, and had just pronounced it dead myself, when its tiny chest gave one gigantic, unforgettable heave. I knew then that it was struggling to live. I tied its cord, began to massage it with a towel, and began using an eye dropper to try to remove the fluid from its lungs. By working with it in this way, and using a little artificial respiration, I soon had it breathing somewhat normally. It then began to struggle for its mother's milk. Here was the God given 'will to live' shown in a beautiful way.

I would like to illustrate what I think is 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 he did not understand why this was happening to him, and even though towards the break of day his hip was put out of joint, he put his whole heart into the fight. He was aggressive, and he would not give up until he was blessed. I believe that he was named for these qualities. Verse 28 says, 'Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed'. He did not know he was fighting God, but because he inadvertently struggled with him without giving up, he rated a place beside God in his struggle.

I also believe that the name was to have significance as it related to its application to the nation of Israel. 'Israel' was to symbolize the nation's struggle in the world, especially in its aggressive conquest of the land of Canaan. God gave the land of Canaan to Israel, but they had to go and get it. Israel was to strive to be the best, to be a blessing to all of the nations of the world. It was to keep itself pure by fighting the influences of pagan religions. [There is a scripture that I really admire in this regard. Col 1:28-29 reads, 'We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this

end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which he powerfully works in me.' We are to struggle with all of Christ's power and energy, to mature ourselves and others in Christ.]

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 became the perfect example of surpassing just 'survival' and going way beyond it to succeed. Most of us would have been happy just to be able to walk again. But Glen wouldn't give up; he kept fighting until he became the fastest miler in the world in his time.

There is joy today in just being able to complete a marathon race. But there is incomparably more joy in finishing first. The key to success, not just in our physical lives, but in our spiritual lives as well, is to struggle to do more than just survive. Once we break the barrier of 'being saved', or just getting by, we enter the realm of triumphant Christian living. We begin thinking, not, 'What do I have to do to escape hell?', but 'What can I do to please even God's slightest wish?'

We are caught up in a situation somewhat like the Israelite's had in the time of Moses. If you remember this story, the Israelites 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 this freedom: namely victorious living in the promised land of Canaan. They were forced to wander in the wilderness, in this 'twilight zone', for years until they were ready to accept the challenge and struggle which would enable them, through God's help, to conquer the 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. But it is there, nevertheless, for the taking. [We must just let go of worldly things, which only end up worrying us, anyway, and set foot into the land of rest.] The triumphant life is just waiting for us, but we can't hide in the background to get it. If we want the victory, we must be prepared for a struggle. Christ will give you the energy to struggle, survive, and succeed, if only you will let him be your Lord. Now I can't just tell you how it looks in the promised land. That would be like showing you a picture of the Grand Canyon. You must be there and experience it.

Joshua stood at the threshold of Canaan and pleaded with his people, 'Let us go up.' But the people would not go. We stand on the threshold of a better life: Let us not make the same mistake. I can only do as Joshua did, and plead with you to go up and get it.