

LUKE 18:1-8  
CARRY ON AND KEEP PRAYING

Jacob was on his own. He had sent everyone else on ahead of him. Tomorrow was going to be a big day, a reunion with the brother who the last time they were in the same house had threatened to kill Jacob. He was nervous, anxious about tomorrow. During the night, he had a wrestling match; you might say it was a dream, but he's left with physical scars from this wrestling! Neither is prepared to yield; they both wrestle hard through the night. *"Let me go"* but Jacob says *"I will..."* (Genesis 32:26) With whom is Jacob wrestling? *"Your name..."* (Genesis 32:28) Is he wrestling with God? Is he looking for God's blessing on the day that is to come and is not willing to let go until he has that promise? Jacob has been wrestling with God all of his life: he has cheated when he should be honest, he ran away on his own but discovered that God was still with him, he was himself cheated by others – his life was a mess as Jacob wrestled with God and with the kind of person God wanted him to be. *"It is..."* (Genesis 32:30)

Has your life been a breeze to this point? Everything has just fallen into place for you; your choices in life have all worked out easily; your relationships have all been superb and loving; you have succeeded in everything you have touched; you've never got anything wrong or made any mistakes; life is just a breeze! If that is you, count your blessings; you may be the only person in the room for whom that is true. For the rest of us, we have made mistakes; we've had to make tough choices; we've had to wrestle with what we know to be good and right, while there is part of us that wants to do the exact opposite; we've failed exams, or job interviews; we've had to cope with days when life is hard. Life has not so much been a breeze, more a typhoon! That's why this picture of Jacob wrestling with God says so much about our experience. If faith is part of our lives, faith sometimes makes that wrestling easier, but sometimes makes it harder!

Prayer is God's gift to us. When we pray, we connect with God in all that God is and He promises to listen to us and answer us. Prayer is about connecting with God, sometimes using words, like the Lord's Prayer we said earlier in the service, or sometimes with groans that no words can express, sometimes using the prayers of others, for example the Psalms in the Bible. In connecting with God, we find grace from God to meet us in our needs; we discover that God loves and cares for us; we realise that God is able to help us, no matter what our needs may be. But we also discover that prayer is no magic button to press that suddenly makes everything right; we discover that God doesn't always answer instantly, or even in the way we want. That's why the picture of Jacob wrestling is so evocative of our human experience!

Jesus tells the story of the widow and the judge, *"to show..."* (Luke 18:1) Keep that in mind with this story because we need to do a little work to make sure we get it right. The judge is not the best man to be a judge, something like the town justice of the peace or the like; he has to resolve disputes. The widow has a dispute; the widow has no-one to look after her in the town, nobody to speak up for her, no man to help her! Sorry, but that was the culture. So, she uses what she has, her doggedness, her persistence, her nuisance-value, and she keeps coming to the judge looking for an answer, looking for justice. *"Even though..."* (Luke 18:4f) He gives in, the woman gets what she wants; her persistence pays off. She keeps asking; that's what the disciples are to do with prayer, to keep on praying.

This is a story of contrasts! Don't compare God to the judge; contrast God with the judge and say to yourself, "If the rotten judge answers the requests of this widow in the story, how much

more will the God who loves and cares for His people answer us.” The judge gave in because he wanted a quiet life; he wanted a rest from a pest; he is as unlike God as it is possible to be. So if this is the way he behaves to a woman who keeps pestering him, how much more will God answer the prayers of those who come to Him looking for grace! God is full of grace; His love for us is new every day; His love lasts forever; He is able to do far more than we ask or imagine – that is the testimony of the people who wrote of their experience in the Bible. This is what God is like; He is ready and willing to listen to us and answer our prayers.

There is nothing automatic about this; that’s why Jacob’s wrestling is such a powerful picture; that’s why Jesus told this story! There is no big red button for us to press that guarantees answers to our prayers in the way we ask. There are times when it seems as if God is not listening or has gone off on His holidays; we hear nothing! But then later, we discover that God has answered our prayers in a different way. Here’s a poem that speaks of something of this:

**The Prayer of an Unknown Soldier**

I asked God for strength that I might achieve.  
I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.  
I asked for health that I might do greater things.  
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.  
I asked for riches that I might be happy.  
I was given poverty that I might be wise.  
I asked for power that I might have the praise of men.  
I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.  
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life.  
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.  
I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I hoped for.  
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.  
I am, among all men, most richly blessed.

What do you think?

The last line of Jesus’ story is a challenge: *“however...” (Luke 18:8)* Faith is what underlies prayer. Faith is about believing God and trusting God. Faith is the quality that connects us with God in the first place and changes prayer from a formula of words that we repeat day after day, week after week, to a relationship, to a conversation, and yes, at times to a wrestling match! Faith motivates us to pray and keep praying; faith inspires us to believe that God will answer our prayers! Will Jesus find faith in our hearts? Will faith inspire us to pray? Will faith inspire us to carry on and keep praying? God loves us: God cares for us; God wants the best for us and looks for faith in us.