

# WRESTLING WITH GOD

One of the modern Greek playwrights wrote of the novice who went to stay on an island with an elderly priest. One afternoon the young cleric, eager to learn, walked with the venerable man along the craggy shore. As their robes swirled in the wind, he finally asked his big question.

"Father, do you still wrestle with the devil?"

"No, my son," the elderly man answered, stroking his white beard. "I have grown old, and the devil has grown old with me. He does not bother me as before. Now I wrestle with God."

"Wrestle with God? Do you hope to win?"

The wrinkled old man looked his young consort in the eye. "Oh no! I hope to lose."

Unfortunately, most of us seldom get to that place in life. We spend our years battling with Satan. The devil, however, is not man's real adversary—God is. God's ways are not our ways. His

kingdom is not of this world. His commands run counter to our concepts. Until we are defeated by God, we shall always be miserable.

Last summer, following the diagnosis of cancer in my kidney, I found myself in what I thought was mortal combat with the devil. His voice, so logical and factual, echoed through my mind at night after the house was quiet, striking fear and panic. He would remind me of the doctors' prognosis...chide me for not having bought grave plots...show me the agonized faces

of my children and grandchildren peering into my casket...list, one by one, the sins of my past—and present.

Then I discovered that even minor resistance in the name of Jesus causes him to flee. Of course, he returns—and he did, in the form of another cancer.

Now I am back in the wrestling match. Only this time I am not battling Satan, for I know he is already defeated. Instead, like the old priest, I find myself wrestling with God.

As the radiation treatment gradually shrank the tumor, I had time—a lot of time—to spend on the mat. Our conversations, while gentle, were always pointed.

One quiet afternoon, sitting in the home of my physician in St. Petersburg, Florida, I found myself battling with Jesus' words from Luke 9: "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it" (v. 24, NKJV).

Did this mean I should not take measures to save my life from the cancer? Surely not, for God had told me to resist evil. No, it meant I was not to save my life for my sake—but so I could be at God's disposal, delighting to do His will.

In that same chapter, Jesus says anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Him cannot be His disciple.

For years I had equated the "cross life" with laying down things that were wrong. Last summer, I spent a month taking moral inventory, purging myself of impurities. This time, however, God wanted more. He was asking me to relinquish the things that were right.

That afternoon, like Jacob at Peniel, I wrestled with God. To give up that which is wrong in the face of death is easy. But to surrender just when you see hope for living?

"Do you mean I must nail *everything* to the cross?"

"You are to count yourself as a dead man." (Those identical words were echoed when a friend called from Arizona the next weekend, saying God had spoken them to his wife for me.)

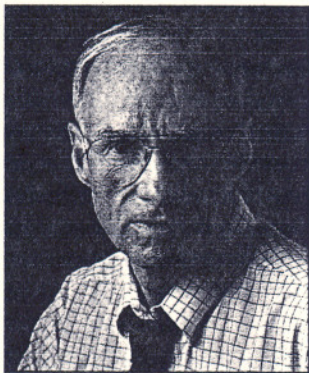
One by one, the list of things "most precious" scrolled across my mind—much longer than last summer's list of sins. It included not only what I liked to do, but also what He Himself had promised. Dreams. Ambitions. Ministry. Family. Health. Even the things I did for God.

Special remembrances were highlighted: playing basketball with my younger friends, climbing mountains in Israel, walking the beach with my wife. All were to be nailed on the cross—with no promise of return.

It's not done yet. Not that I don't want to relinquish those things. I just don't know how to—and stand firm on the word He's given me. Last night He reminded me not to worry about it, bringing to mind 2 Timothy 2:13: "If we are faithless, He remains faithful." That helps!

This I know: While God may be my adversary, He is not my enemy. I'm like a child, wrestling with his dad—knowing that when He finally pins me to the mat, He will then lean down and, laughing, kiss my face. ■

*Jamie Buckingham is editor-in-chief of Ministries Today magazine. He has completed the radiation treatments and his doctor says the tumor is responding well to the radiation treatments.*



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